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Separation and Reflection

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About the Editors

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Melissa Risser is an Editor of the *Rock Creek Review* for its May 2021 edition. She is an Honors English Literature major from Findlay, Ohio. Her focus is mainly on Psychoanalytic criticism and women's studies. She is also a part of Alpha Lambda Delta and Sigma Tau Delta. She is involved with Greek Life, where she was just elected Parliamentarian, which highlights her peers' faith in her devout attention to detail and potential as a leader.

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Shaadia Flint is an Editor of the *Rock Creek Review* for its May 2021 edition. She is a senior English Literature & Psychology double major from Columbus, Ohio. Shaadia's involvement on the *Rock Creek Review* team was invited by her experiences at Heidelberg including literature seminar discussions and professional conference presentations, as well as studying abroad in Glasgow, Scotland. She also serves as current President of the first-generation national honor society, Alpha Alpha Alpha, displaying her communication skills in her position as leader.

Dr. Barry Devine is the Editor-in-Chief and a Founding Editor of the *Rock Creek Review*. He is an Assistant Professor of English at Heidelberg University and teaches British literature, Irish literature, and Literary Theory.

A Note from the Managing Editor:

Dear Reader,

I'm feeling a lot of pressure, because although you don't see it, right now what I see is a page of virtual paper with only thirty-or-so words on it. This is the inaugural issue of the *Rock Creek Review*, and I am the inaugural Managing Editor, and this is my inaugural editing position of any kind, so I am (hopefully, understandably) a little nervous to address you.

The *Rock Creek Review* has been in the making for about two years now. I was happily picked from a slew of other applicants by Heidelberg alumna Danielle Lester, and our advisor Dr. Barry Devine, to be the first Managing Editor. I couldn't be more proud to have been selected. When I was selected for the position, Danielle and Dr. Devine had already created a timeline for the project, and had left it up to me and my team to finish what they had set in place. That was before the world came to a roaring halt due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and then skyrocketed ahead with deadlines and coursework and whatever else we could handle. I picked my editing team, Chayenne, Melissa, and Shaadia with the understanding that they were feeling the same stress I felt, and were more than capable of working towards our shared goal in spite of it.

When the deadline came, and we selected our eight authors, we knew that our original theme no longer fit. The world and their writing were trying to exist, not with the pandemic, but in spite of it. A theme highlighting it did not seem fitting anymore. Upon re-reading our selections, we decided on the theme, "House of Mirrors." Each of the pieces reflects an aspect of literature that reflects, magnifies, and distorts what we assume to be reality. While I am of the opinion that truth can be stranger than fiction, our eight authors all picked parts of fiction that exemplify the strangeness of the world. Fiction has always been a Funhouse Mirror.

In the shared reflection of our team, we decided on some keywords that connect our understanding of the pieces with our theme of "House of Mirrors." These key phrases are:

Distortion Clarification Magnification Self
Perspective Reflection Monster Separation

It is my sincerest hope that you'll see something akin to what we've seen in these pieces. Thank you for reading the *Rock Creek Review*.

-Em Swain

Michelle Hollington is a continuing education student pursuing a BA in English Literature at Le Moyne College. Michelle is a process manager for a health insurance company. She resides in Syracuse, New York.

Fairy Tales: Feisty Female Adventure Stories

Michelle Hollington

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As fairy tale audiences shifted from listening to fairy tales orally to reading them in print, periodic focus began to be placed on "gendered readerships" (Reynolds 47). Distinct opinions began to form regarding the type of content or narrative form that is appropriate for male or female readers. Publishers began to develop marketing strategies that promoted specific books based on the sex of their target audience. Reynolds shares a common nineteenth century tactic which focused on creating "parallel stories" (18). These stories may have shared a setting, but the content differed. Girls were offered stories that were "domestic or family stories" while boys were offered "adventure stories" (18). Similar marketing strategies are used in the twenty-first century, too. Publishers market books for girls that make liberal use of "pink," "fairy stories" or "fashion accessories," while boys are marketed books about "soldiers or spies" (47). Associating a genre such as adventure stories with one sex is antiquated and this approach is a disservice to readers. I contend that a significant number of fairy tales may be considered female adventure stories as they share key elements of male adventure stories such as the protagonist venturing into the unknown, embarking on a journey, acting on their desire for exploration, becoming enmeshed in dangerous

situations often resulting in a struggle for survival against an evil villain. The Bluebeard tales exemplify the aptness of this claim.

One key element of an adventure story is venturing into the unknown. Each of the Bluebeard tales centers around a young girl who either marries or is soon to marry the Bluebeard character. For a young innocent girl, entering into marriage is the epitome of the unknown which can trigger various emotions or reactions such as anxiety, fear, excitement, or reluctance. In Charles Perrault's "Bluebeard," the two daughters are described as being from a respectable family which suggests they have a good name, but they may not be well off making a marriage offer desirable to the mother. Neither of the two daughters want to marry Bluebeard because of his beard. The fact that he had already been married several times "added to their sense of disgust," coupled with the fact that "no one knew what had become of them" (Tater 189), adding another layer to the unknown entity of marriage to this peculiar stranger. Bluebeard manages to entice the youngest daughter into marriage after a week-long country house-party, giving her a taste of the material benefits marriage can bring. She agrees to the marriage willingly. In "Mr. Fox" by Joseph Jacobs, Lady Mary wants to marry Mr. Fox. Lady Mary is not put off by the air of mystery around her fiancé because "no one knew who Mr. Fox was; but he was certainly brave, and surely rich, and of all her lovers [she] cared for him alone" (199). One female protagonist who does not agree to marriage willingly is the youngest daughter from the Brothers Grimm's "Fitcher's Bird." The youngest daughter is kidnapped like her two older sisters by a disguised sorcerer. Kidnapping further enhances the sense of the unknown in this tale.

In adventure stories, the hero or, in this case, heroine typically embarks on a journey. The heroines' journeys in this tale type are to the homes of the villains. These homes are isolated and remote located in the country or deep in the forest. The journey to the villain's home is specifically narrated in only two of the tales, the Brothers Grimm's "The Robber Bridegroom" and Jacobs' "Mr. Fox." Although the journeys are taken for separate reasons, both journeys function to heighten the eerie atmosphere of the tale with their forbidding descriptions of the abodes The miller's daughter in "The Robber Bridegroom" is manipulated into visiting the house as her bridegroom claims "you have to come to my place" because "I've already invited the guests" (196). The "dark and spooky" house even has a caged bird that repeatedly tells her to "turn back" as

she is in a "house of murderers" (196). In contrast, Lady Mary in "Mr. Fox" decides to seek out Mr. Fox's remote castle surrounded by "high walls and a deep moat" on her own because she wants to see the castle she is to live in (199). The castle does not have a bird to warn her, but it does have signs warning Lady Mary to "be bold, but not too bold" (200).

The arrival of the brides and would-be brides at the villains' homes leads to another component of adventure:the desire to explore with an open and curious mind. Acting on this desire may lead to good or bad discoveries. Perrault claims in "Bluebeard" that female curiosity "always proves very, very costly" (192). In actuality, the opposite is true in an adventure story; curiosity and exploration are a way to gain knowledge. For these heroines, the results of their exploration are horrifying, but the true natures of their husbands or husbands-to-be are revealed. In "Fitcher's Bird", the youngest daughter secretly enters the sorcerer's forbidden chamber to find the chopped-up corpses of her missing sisters along with the bodies of others in a basin. Lady Mary is witness to Mr. Fox chopping off a young girl's hand for her ring. Similarly, in "The Robber Bridegroom," the miller's daughter sees the bridegroom and his cronies torture a young girl then "put her on a table, [chop] her beautiful body into pieces, and [sprinkle] them with salt" intending to eat her (197). The girls' adventurous natures save them from falling victim to similar fates.

An offshoot of indulging one's desire to explore in an adventure story is the placement of one into dangerous situations which drives the protagonist to confront the villain and take action. The actions may vary, but ultimately the heroine skillfully resolves the problem while narrowly escaping doom with her ability to outwit, outplay, and outlast the villain to borrow from the television show *Survivor's* slogan. The Bluebeard tales do not disappoint in this area. In "Mr. Fox," Lady Mary not only avoids being caught at the castle, she has the presence of mind to steal the chopped off hand of Mr. Fox's victim. Next, Lady Mary implements a plan to trap Mr. Fox by regaling him with her dream visit to his house. Mr. Fox denies it repeatedly until Lady Mary unleashes her unassailable evidence; the victim's hand with the ring Mr. Fox wanted, crying "but it is so, and it was so. Here's hand and ring" (201). Lady Mary's cleverness outwitted Mr. Fox leading to his execution. Lady Mary used her cleverness to escape a potentially deadly situation and to outwit Mr. Fox leading to his execution.

Perhaps the most impressive heroine of the Bluebeard tale type is the youngest daughter in "Fitcher's Bird." Seeming to be always one step ahead of the sorcerer, she hides the enchanted egg before entering the forbidden chamber with the bodies in the basin. Rather than panicking, the youngest daughter pieced together the body parts of her sisters, successfully bringing them back to life. Next, she proceeds to hide her sisters while confronting the sorcerer and finding out that she passed his test which effectively eliminates his control over her. Assuming her new power, the youngest daughter orders him to carry gold to her parents, but in actuality both of her sisters are in the basket. While the sorcerer is in transit, she disguises herself as a bird, directing both the sorcerer's friends and the sorcerer himself to the house advising "and from the attic window, she's looking at right at you" which in reality is a dressed up skull of one of the sorcerer's previous victims (195). The sorcerer is clearly outplayed by this heroine who saved her sisters, herself, and tricked both the guests and sorcerer into gathering at the house allowing her brothers and relatives to trap and burn them. Her bold actions are comparable to the actions one sees heroes undertake in male adventure stories.

In "Bluebeard," the youngest daughter is in a precarious situation after the bloody enchanted key alerts Bluebeard to her disobedience. Bluebeard swears to kill her immediately. The heroine negotiates for time and arranges for her Sister Anne to go to the tower to watch for the arrival of their brothers. As with other adventure stories, the pace and tension pick up which is seen with the repetitive checking with Sister Anne on the status of the brothers' arrival. The youngest daughter manages to stall Bluebeard even further by "[begging] for one last moment to prepare herself for death" (192). This tactic provides her with just enough time for her brothers to arrive and kill Bluebeard. Her ability to outlast Bluebeard with her stalling techniques saved her life allowing her to live on in the pages of the story.

In children's literature, fairy tales have outstanding longevity. Considering alternate narrative forms that fairy tales may fulfill such as female adventure stories provides an opportunity to continue their longevity. In Maria Tatar's *The Classic Fairy Tales,* she indicates that "historical evidence points to multigenerational audiences, both male and female as the driving force for oral storytelling cultures" (xvi). Society's transition to print or other media forms of storytelling should attempt to equal or broaden that driving force to multigenerational audiences today regardless of gender.

Imposing the idea of gendered readership in children's literature as part of short-sighted marketing strategy limits the ability to maximize a work's audience or its potential longevity and fails to embrace diversity.

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An Ecocritical Look at the Long Eighteenth Century's Presentation of Wild Spaces

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> I have come to recognize that the challenges that climate change poses for the contemporary writer, although specific in some respects, are also products of something broader and older; that they derive ultimately from the grid of literary forms and conventions that came to shape the narrative imagination in precisely that period when the accumulation of carbon in the atmosphere was rewriting the destiny of the earth.
>
> – Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement*

It is near impossible to imagine the scale and interconnectivity of the natural environment. Take the sublime oceans and cliffs in Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark,* and then attempt to

connect them to the cosy "green woodland" (1) of Clare's poem "The Nightingale's Nest," despite both these texts describing natural landscapes and occurrences, they feel like different worlds. Within literature, we are connected to these natural scenes through the speaker or narrator's perspective, their limited view, is our limited view. In this sense, natural spaces become easily isolated and detached from one and other. This is unlike the actual characteristics of nature that the naturalist Alexander von Humboldt identified: "everything is interconnected and interdependent" (qtd in. Doherr 49). Nature is now at the center of modern discourse due to the climate crisis, which changes how art holistically views natural spaces. For instance, Hawkins' data generated art *Warming Stripes*, see Fig. 1, presents an all-encompassing representation of global warming. However, as Ghosh points out, our descriptions of these natural and wild spaces within a literary realm are still governed by traditional modes of viewing; we at once imagine wild spaces far and

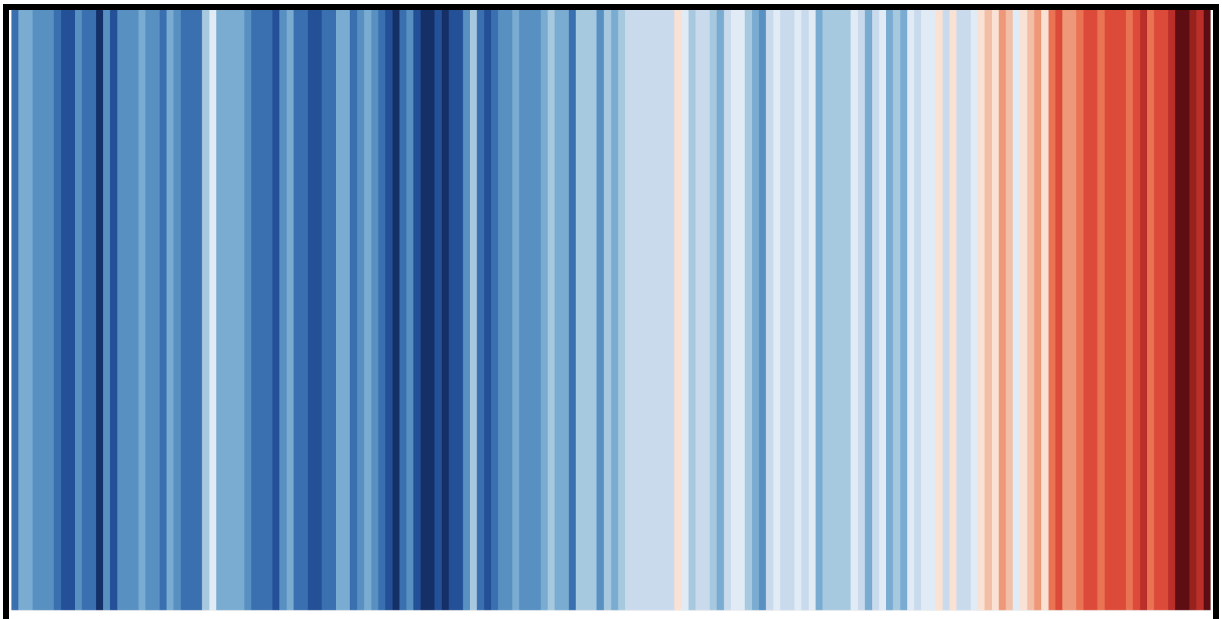

Fig. 1. Hawkins, Ed. *Warming Stripes for GLOBE from 1850-2019.* 2019. ShowYourStripes, https://showyourstripes.info .

unconnected to our lives and habitats, as well as idealise them in sublime and metaphorical imagery. We have yet to break from these traditional forms and conventions that guide our imaginative view of the natural environment. I will thus

argue that literature and art of the long eighteenth century contributed to the inherited modes of viewing that make discussing nature so "challenging" (Ghosh 7).

I will be looking at nature's presentation within both Clare's and Wollstonecraft's texts stated above; I feel this will serve as an interesting comparison between the tropes employed from both a sublime viewing, Wollstonecraft, to a romantic one, Clare. What is shared among both these texts is their idealising and elevating of wild spaces. To look at Clare first, his description of the nightingale and "her" nest is indeed a typical romantic imagining. He describes the bird "as though she lived on song" (7) where, within "her home of love" (4), "her joys are evergreen" (41). Immediately, through the use of abstract nouns, the bird is anthropomorphised into a maternal and sentient creature. In Clare's imagining of the bird, we see "her" elevated beyond the ties of creaturely functions, like hunting or eating, instead she survives on song alone. Immortalising the nightingale here, is symptomatic of the dangerous way nature is treated within eighteenth century texts. More problematically however, if we look closer at the speaker's impact on the landscape, we can see destructive abuse of power: "There! Put that bramble by – /Nay, trample on its branches and get near" (56); "where that child its blue-bell flowers hath got" (10); "in man's haunts she seemeth nought to win" (82). These three subtle instances hint at the damaging presence humans have in wild spaces. However, when paired with the excitement and idealisation of the nightingale, these instances of micro-destructions seem relatively harmless. They are subverted as child's play or presented as necessary to observe the creature in the first place. It is within the speaker's deliberation to destroy the bramble that the true danger of man is revealed; rather than putting it "by" or to the side, the speaker changes his mind, deciding to trample on it instead. Clare, in this shift in temperament, exposes the ease and capacity man has to destroy and kill the natural environment. Further, advocating for the destruction of the brambles strongly opposes the initial treatment of the nightingale and demonstrates the speaker's lack of concern for nature as a whole. This contradictory prizing of one form of nature over another, creates a hierarchical mode of viewing the natural environment that completely disregards the ideas of interconnectivity and dependency. For the speaker, it is the nightingale that matters above all other life; even the thrush, with its "inferior songs" (35), is levelled to the same position as a "hazel bush" (30) as, within the rhyme scheme alone, both are ostracised to

the end of the lines. The positionality here furthers the idea these are non-important features of nature that merely block and enclose the nightingale. Ironically, the speaker advocates at the end of the poem to leave the eggs to continue the "woodland's legacy of song" (94). Despite this attempt at preservation, the poem is still problematic in its protection and validation of one form of nature over another. If we take Ghosh's idea, then this idealising and hierarchical view of nature and wild animals is indeed worrying. Here we can see a lack of understanding around this idea that "everything" within nature "hangs together" and that, "if one thread is pulled, the whole tapestry may unravel" (Humbolt qtd. in Popova); the brambles serve to protect the bird's nest but for the speaker, they are merely in the way. If this is the case, then we can see that Humboldt's teachings during the eighteenth century about nature's "interconnection and interdependence" is a sentiment disregarded or lost within literary descriptions of nature. Perhaps Clare, in planting these micro instances of cruelty, is hinting at something larger about humanity's own ignorance at the damage we cause to the nature around us.

Wollstonecraft demonstrates similarly subtle moments where industry and human presence begin to intrude negatively upon nature. Within letter XXIV she displays her abhorrence to the intrusion of industry upon the wild landscapes in Altona; "the smell of glue, hanging to dry, an extensive manufactory of which is carried close to the beach, I found extremely disagreeable. But to commerce everything must give way" (128). Here, we see the colliding of the two burgeoning, but separate, worlds during the Anthropocene – the appreciation for wild nature, versus the increase in commercial spaces. The tension created by these two powers is evident throughout Wollstonecraft's travel writing. She sensitively recognises the need for industry, whilst also showing the threat it poses to natural spaces and the individuals that occupy them.

After her failed attempt to be within nature, Wollstonecraft turns her discourse inwards by describing an imagined mountainous scene where sorrow is shut out:

> In fancy I return to a favourite spot, where I seemed to have retired from man and wretchedness; but the din of trade drags me back to all the care I left behind, when lost in sublime emotions. Rocks aspiring towards the heavens, and, as it were, shutting out sorrow, surrounded me. (129)

In this moment, Wollstonecraft takes herself beyond the space full of the troubles of "man" and "trade" and escapes to a sublime imagining all her own. Her descriptions are tangled with her tumultuous emotions as she becomes lost in this rocky landscape that towers towards heaven. Though we have previously witnessed her account of the mountainous cliffs within her visit to Norway, we can see how they have transformed into an intangible space within her thoughts. As Kant points out, "those in whom both feelings are united will find that they are more powerfully moved by the sublime" but it "is tiring and cannot be enjoyed as long" (18). Wollstonecraft is moved by her sublime encounters, so much so, they have become a "favourite spot" for her mind to escape too.

This tumultuous and wild depiction of nature is evident in the art of the long eighteenth century, as we can see from Martin's painting *The Great Day of His Wrath*, see Fig. 2.

Fig. 2. Martin, John. *The Great Day of His Wrath*. 1851-3. *The Tate*, Dec. 2000, Tate Britain, London, www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/martin-the-great-day-of-his-wrath-n05613.

Nature's sublime qualities are elevated to this imaginative space that Wollstonecraft also demonstrates. Although elements of the natural are recognisable, such as the rocks and

storm clouds, the landscape is exaggerated and imbued with this idea of biblical destruction. This "process of framing and composing constitutes an exercise of power," that according to Bohls, is "a non-reciprocal mode of vision whose effect is to display and reinforce mastery" (87). Martin and Wollstonecraft indeed exercise a power over nature by transforming sublime landscapes into emotionally charged spaces. Nature within both these representations becomes an extension of the subject viewing, with its descriptions grounded in emotional connections instead of realism.

Furthering this, within Clare's romantic "woodland" we can see a similar removal of nature from the ordinary into the symbolic and metaphysical. Even from the opening line, "Hush! let the wood-gate softly clap" (3), we enter a space detached from the ordinary. This space is described as sacred to the speaker who confesses to having spent "many hours" (15) there: "here have I hunted like a very boy/ Creeping on hands and knees through matted thorns / To find her nest" (12-14). Clare's woodland is coloured with nostalgia and childlike wonder as the speaker is both physically and emotionally transformed. The speaker indeed regresses to a childlike state of wonder, however he undergoes a zoomorphic change as well by being hunched over on hands and knees. This comes back to this idea of escapism from the ordinary that Wollstonecraft, in her envisioning of the sublime, is also guilty of. Both landscapes here become emotional spaces, however, if we further look at the positioning of these natural spaces there is this sentiment that wild or uncultivated spaces are rooted in the past. As Barrell notes when it comes to viewing nature the common assumption is that "what is uncultivated is uncivilised - that is its attraction - and thus also mysteriousness" (qtd. in Hitt 130). For Clare, the mysteries of the nightingale drive his curiosity and narrative of the forest. By entering this natural space to observe this wild animal, Clare's speaker metaphorically travels back to his youth. For Wollstonecraft, however, in letter IX, we can see how being within nature also detach us from the modern and civilised:

> My thoughts fly from this wilderness to the polished circles of the world, till recollecting its vices and follies, I bury myself in the woods, but find it necessary to emerge again, that I may not lose sight of the wisdom and virtue which exalts my nature. (61)

Wild nature is represented as a space that belongs to the uncivilised past and not the future. Wollstonecraft's text, even in its epistolary form, is a piece of literature that looks

to the future. Wollstonecraft secretly hoped travelling around north Europe would help her find Gilbert Imlay's lost ship, and in turn, he would reciprocate her love. Her epistolary form extends this forward looking and motivated perspective even further, as a letter in itself is a form of writing addressed to a future reader. Continually, Wollstonecraft makes allusions to the importance of progression and innovation, she sees "deeply of the advantages obtained by human industry [having been in Norway]" and describes the world as requiring the "hand of man to perfect it" (60). Her drive towards the new and modern is both a personal position as well as a politically motivated one. Whilst she admires her sublime encounters with the wilderness, "gazing on the tremendous cliffs, sublime emotions absorb my soul" (39), she non the less describes these spaces as belonging to the past.

Nature within both these texts is a space that belongs to a distant past, whilst this may help in inducing feelings of nostalgia or even escapism, it is nonetheless a problematic trope to be associated with the wild. We are detached further from the natural environment through this convention to historicise nature. Furthering this, the natural spaces of both Clare's "woodland" and Wollstonecraft's imagined sublime landscape come to offer emotional releases that cannot be found in normal life. Interestingly, Foucault's idea of utopias spaces can be seen here as both descriptions of nature are presented as "fundamentally unreal spaces" (24).

Given this literary tradition in which the wild aspects of nature are segregated to the past, as well as the complex idealisation of nature as utopic, we can see how modern writers have struggled, as Ghosh claims, to encapsulate the climate crisis within literature. The holistic approach modern discourse is attempting to take, as we can see from Hawkins' *Warming Stripes,* is in opposition to such "literary forms and conventions" that surround the depiction of nature. Modern writers are now attempting to create a space where nature is part of the future and interconnected to the world around it. The division of nature from the growing industrial presences at the beginning of the Anthropocene is evident in how both writers treat the natural environment. For both writers, nature is valued as a space that is beyond the ordinary and the industrialised society we occupy more frequently. However, if we continue to isolate nature from the presence of industry it will be impossible to see the negative impact we are having on the environment. Crucially, we need to bridge the gap we have created

between nature and human presence in order to regain some connection to the natural world.

Following on from this, the narratives of both texts demonstrate a return journey away from nature, or back to the "polished circles of the world," as Wollstonecraft puts it. Even in the title of Wollstonecraft's letters, "a short residence," we see a time constraint and anticipated return at the end of the text. Clare demonstrates a similar temporality to his walk through the woodland, by setting up this idea of enclosure at the start where we are already constrained to a path and made to feel unwelcome. Clare and Wollstonecraft already demonstrate the changes to humanity's relationship to nature during the beginning of the Anthropocene through their travel narratives as in order to observe nature, both narrators have to journey to find it. This further suggests that neither individual experiences nature as a daily occurrence and, thus have to detach themselves from the ordinary to be among it.

For both writers, whether it is Wollstonecraft's sublime cliff face or Clare's woodland, nature is a space that becomes detached from any other. Nature is shown at once something to be conquered, as well as admired during the long eighteenth century. Writings on the sublime and the romantic set up this complex relationship we have to nature even to this day, where we need to control it for commercial purposes, as Wollstonecraft describes, but also desire to be within it for spiritual and emotional reasons. As these contradicting forces grow stronger due to the influx of commerce and the increased interest in natural sublimity, our disconnect from nature also grows and we have to travel further to see it. It is this distance that, according to Ghosh, has become seemingly unbridgeable today. We are no longer trying to control nature and contain its sublime qualities to art or enclosed spaces, instead, we are trying to control ourselves from encroaching upon it further.

If we come back to this idea at the beginning of interconnectivity, we can see the problematic ways nature is depicted within literature during the long eighteenth century. Crucially, at the beginning of the Anthropocene we see a great divide from humanity and the natural world. Wild and natural spaces are symbolised and presented as unconnected to each other, as well as to us and our daily lives. Not only this, we can see hierarchies within the way nature is valued and symbolised which negate this modern notion of value among all creatures. According to Ghosh, the way we have

displayed nature within the past, be it from a sublime or romantic perspective, has shaped our narrative imagination even today. He expresses the difficulty within modern literature to escape these conventions and discuss nature as an interconnected and equal space. Advancements in scientific discourse, as we see in Hawkins' model on climate change, have indeed brought back this sentiment of a holistic approach to natural spaces that Humboldt advocated for in the eighteenth century. Literature, however, does have something to add to environmental discourse that science does not, as Buell points out: "acts of environmental imagination … may affect one's caring for the physical world: make it feel more or less precious or endangered or disposable" (2). This emotional power art has to display the climate crisis is indeed a power that Ghosh identifies as needing to be explored. To do this we need to address the problematic ways we have traditionally depicted nature, as unconnected and apart from man.

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The Ultimate Purpose of Literary Theory

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INTRODUCTION

In my credo, I will bridge the connection between fine art and literature, as they both have similar purposes in their craftsmanship. I will articulate what makes art and literature good. The definition of literature I am using embodies anything that has a purposeful formulation of words and is not exclusive to the literary canon. I will expand on how a good writer effectively carries out their purpose through the meaning found in their text, and I will explain the process of how that meaning is found by anyone who encounters the text, whether a reader or a literary critic. Because the literary critic is more deeply engaged with the literature than the average reader, I will show more emphasis on the etiquette of a literary critic in their discovery of meaning. Finally, I will conclude by drawing a relation among these main points in order to demonstrate how literary theory functions in society.

THE PURPOSE OF ART: THE PURPOSELESS, USEFUL, AND GOOD

All art has purpose, even if its purpose is to be purposeless. The distinction between art that was created to exist and art that was made to be pondered lies within its purpose. If the art was created purely to be seen for aesthetic pleasure, then decoration is its purpose; decoration could be seen as a form of purposelessness, which is still satisfactory art. If the art was created to serve a function in some way that assists human capabilities, it is useful art. Though it still is in the tangible world, it serves a purpose of more than just to be seen to perform a practical function. For example, a lamp is more there for ornament, but with the purpose of utility. If the art was created to bring the beholder from the tangible world and into the realm of rumination, where they find meaning, it is good art. In the realm of rumination, the beholder is taken from the art itself and is transported into an experience of emotions or ideas. The meaning that comes from these ideas or emotions can only be translated back to the tangible world in its base form, but Friedrich Nietzsche writes that humans have "this ability to sublimate sensuous metaphors into a schema, in other words, to dissolve an image into a concept," (756) so humans convey meaning through language (754-756).

Good art is not derived solely from the comprehension of thematic content, but also emotions elicited by aesthetics. Thereby, art that is satisfactory in decoration, its purpose for just being art, has the capacity to be elevated to art which is good. The aesthetic capability of moving the beholder from spectatorship and into the realm of rumination, where feelings and emotions take place, is a psychological process called catharsis. In a cathartic experience, the emotions manifested in the art itself are transmitted onto the beholder, thereby suggesting that it is a response elicited by the maker of the art. Aristotle uses the cathartic example of Tragedy which imitates "an action that is serious, complete, and possessing magnitude" to demonstrate the process of catharsis as "effecting…pity and fear" onto the beholder (103-104). Catharsis can be applied to all areas of art insofar as "such emotions" are being effectively transmitted from the art and onto the beholder (Aristotle 104). Paintings serve as a visual aid for explication, since they are still images that can be directly encountered instead of indirectly depicted through words, similar to Nietzsche's advocacy that language can only express the base form of an idea (755). Thus, the explication of good art achieved through aesthetic experience will be continued with the accompaniment of a painting that exemplifies an execution of cathartic effect (see fig. 1).

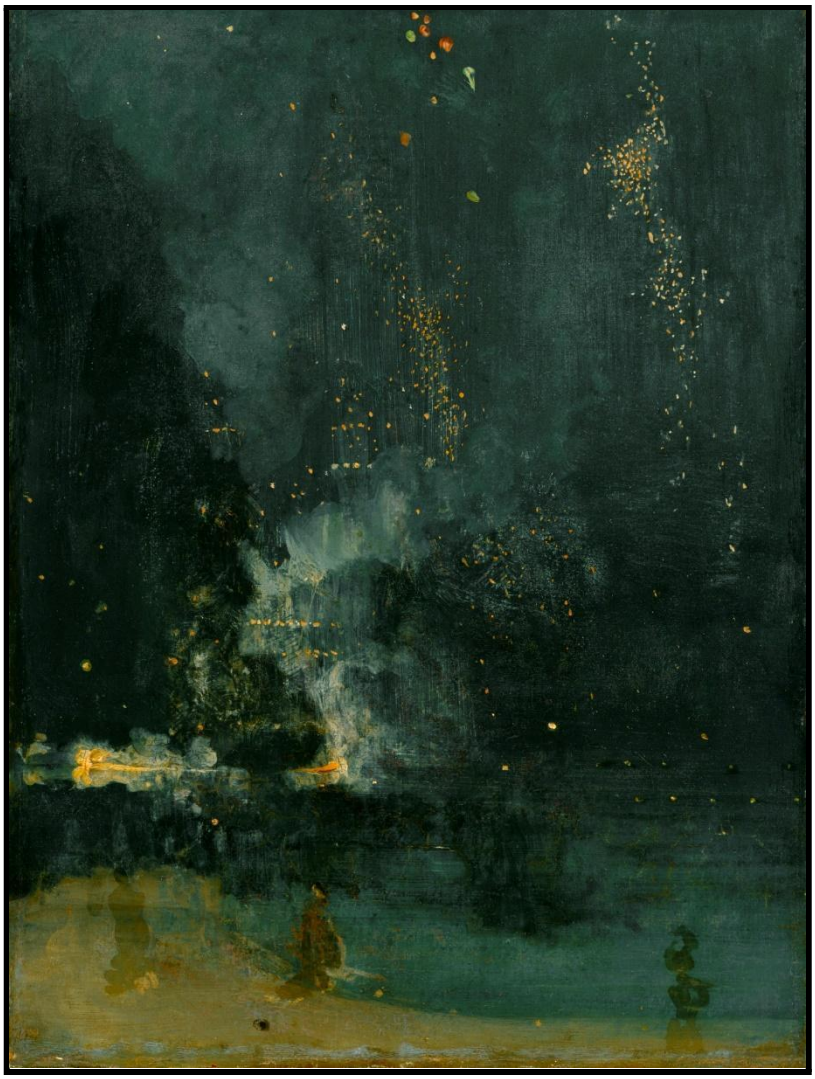

Fig 1. Whistler, James Abbott McNeill. *Nocturne in Black and Gold, the Falling Rocket*. 1875.

In James Abbott McNeill Whistler's avant-garde painting, *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket,* black hues overtake the background which emphasize the contrast of the gold splashes scattered about the canvas in sinuous formations (Floryan). As an abstract painting, its content is indistinguishable, which made it a brewing controversy among art critics accustomed to the academic works before its time. Art critic John Ruskin criticized Whistler for "flinging a pot of paint in the public's face," thereby infuriating the artist, so Whistler sued Ruskin for libel and won a farthing in damages (Floryan). Ruskin's claim sought after content that was distinguishable, but in doing so,

he ignored the aesthetic evidence that was trying to express something to the viewer. He pinned his immediate reaction of dislike of the style to a critical claim on the art itself, thereby mistaking criticism for agreeability. Immanuel Kant describes agreeability as "what the senses like in sensation" and something that "requires no judgement at all about the character of the object" (432). Because he disliked the style, Ruskin disregarded analysis of how that style was utilized. An expressive abstract style was executed in creating a cathartic effect that plays with the mood of the beholder (Floryan). The twinkles of gold about the canvas elicit whimsy, and several of them sinuously curve upward, projecting a hopeful sense of awe and wonder out of the darkness and out of the picture plane, all the while serving a practical purpose of visually elongating the canvas. Curves attract and please the eye more than straight lines, so where there is alignment, it is mostly in a curved formation, such as the contrasting areas like the black and the white smoky brushstrokes forming an interlocking s-curve. Or, onceover, the apparent water and land contrast formed by the yellow and blue-green, forming a curved juxtaposition with one another; not to forget the fluttering dots of gold into the sky. Where there is a straight line, however, it serves a contrast in definition, such as the short widths of horizontal gold dots along the tall feint brushstrokes in the darkness, suggesting a possibility of tall buildings in the background which contrasts to the perceived nature in the foreground. The questions are then formed by the focal point of gold blotches along the perceived water, smoke and gold dots ascending from it in the air. Is this falling rocket a metaphor? Is it an act of nature or an urbanized mechanism? Is the middle ground where nature and the urban environment collide to create beauty? Abstract art predominantly generates more questions than answers, which brings the beholder from the realm of the tangible into the realm of rumination through catharsis in so how the use of aesthetics are effectively demonstrating purpose.

Literature is an art form in which the writer supplements words for paints and a blank page for canvas. Like other art forms, the writer composes a purpose in their mind, whether to be seen, or useful, or ruminated, and births purpose onto the page through words. Any page can be full of words to be seen, as any canvas can be full of paint to be ornamented, and that is satisfactory literature. If it is strictly didactic to the performance of a function, it is useful. It becomes good literature when it brings the

reader from the world of the usefulness and into the realm of rumination. Useful literature can become good if the usefulness transcends the practical into the realm of rumination. An example of useful literature is a camera manual which reads, “These [automatic] modes are excellent for capturing a picture on the spur of a moment when you don’t have time to evaluate camera settings and lighting” (Roullard and Matsumoto 91). It teaches when the automatic modes are best used. They are not recommended for a controlled environment like professional sessions where there is time to set up equipment and lighting, but rather an uncontrolled environment where something happens suddenly and the photographer just wants to capture it. The whole essence of that quote is practical by its informing the reader how to perform a tangible function— operating a camera. Nothing is particularly commendable in the phrasing of the literature except it fulfilled its purpose of usefulness; however, when useful literature transcends the realm of practicality and into the realm of the intangible, it becomes good literature. For example, another piece of didactic literature is a book titled *Get Out of Your Head*. It purports to teach and is useful, but as implied by the title, it brings the reader from the tangible world and into the realm of rumination, and it does so with a theological lens which even further extends the work beyond the tangible world. A quote from the book is “We may not choose the situations and the people in our lives, but we can choose how we react. We get to choose how our minds, and therefore our lives, will go” (Allen 125). This quote suggests that in order to see evidenced change in the tangible world, an intangible change must take place. As is being elocuted through the base form of language, situations in the tangible world may not be changed by an inward response, but an inward response signals how one reacts to the tangible world. When one makes a choice of reaction, they influence the tangible world. In rumination of this text, the reader is drawn from the tangible world to find a solution that may improve their life intangibly. Though this might seem like a useless means to seek intangible improvement, what occurs in the realm of rumination might be evidenced through one’s action in the tangible world.

THE REFINEMENT OF PURPOSE: TRADITION AND THE GOOD WRITER

Anyone with ink and paper can create purposeful literature by putting words on a page, as anyone with paint and a canvas can create a painting. This is displayed by the 2018 statistic of there being nearly 1.4 million books self-published into the United

States book market (“Print and Ebooks”). In the age of self-publishing it is becoming easier for anyone to become a published writer, but a higher quantity of writers does not equate to a higher production of good literature. A hobby writer who decides to self-publish a book for a certain purpose might not have skill in effectively carrying out their purpose. Skill is not built on talent alone but is grown and harvested with an understanding of tradition. Good writers are those who effectively carry out their purpose by understanding commonalities—thematic content and grammatical composition—within their mode of expression. Unlike the novice who might break tradition unknowingly, the good writer adheres to or departs from tradition with intentionality in order to effectively carry out their purpose.

When the good writer is seasoned in tradition, they can break it intentionally to create a desired effect through their writing. Having graduated from Harvard with a Master’s degree, E. E. Cummings learned the standard grammatical rules of spaces in between words; he understood the value of the space and honored it by departing from punctuation conventions (“E.E. Cummings”). In his poem “[in Just-],” for instance, he uses spacing that parallels his storytelling. He elongates the line “whistles far and wee” by adding significant spacing (Cummings). Specifically, he isolates the word “far” which echoes its definition as being, quite literally, distant from the other words in the line (Cummings). He also removes conventional spacing from separate words when he writes, “and eddieandbill come / running from marbles and / piracies and it's /spring” (Cummings). Combining the names of Eddie and Bill creates a thematic playfulness in the line that reflects the playfulness of childhood, while demonstrating that rush of youthful energy found in their running (Cummings). They were not just running for leisure, but they were running from their childhood activities of “marbles” and “piracies” in order to grab a balloon. (Cummings). These activities exhibit a playfulness in the poem’s content as well as its form. By understanding the traditional utilization of space between words, Cummings intentionally departed from tradition in order to create a desired effect that could be not only visualized internally by the content words, but externally, seen by the composition of them. He was a good writer who knew how to better create cathartic delight through the departure of tradition.

In any moment of time, the good writer proceeds tradition. Whether or not they follow in tradition’s footsteps, the writer must determine, and the good writer

determines with skill. T.S Eliot claims the good writer must have "an awareness of the past" (887). And though this awareness of the past is fed by knowledge, the good writer should not feel obligated to consume every book in their niche. By reading a few works that have acclaimed praise for setting an example of tradition or received for departing from it in their niche the writer will accumulate a sense of tradition as it has been used in his field. The writer must decide, however, when they have reached enough "awareness of the past" (887) in order to pursue their own creation of good literature. Otherwise, they will have spent their days preparing their good literature to enter the world, and it will have never left the private sphere of conception. After its birth, it is in the public sphere where the literature might receive the acclaim of "good literature," and the writer who effectively achieved his purpose might receive the title of "good writer." The good writer is not produced by knowledge alone, rather, by how they use their refined skill in effectively transmitting their purpose onto the reader.

THE MEANING MAKERS: THE WRITER, READER AND LITERARY CRITIC

All literature is written for a purpose, and that purpose is evidenced through meaning which is made from the text. Barbara Christian considers literature to be inherently political, or in other words, literature is created by someone who holds their own perspective on the world, and that perspective infuses into their writing (54). The writer's perspective is an embodiment, or an exploration at the least, of ideas, questions, or values which give the writing its meaning. In good literature, meaning is drawn from what is present in the text. William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley emphasize this by asking a question in order to make a claim, "How is [the critic] to find out what the poet tried to do? If the poet succeeded in doing it, then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do." (1198-99) Their proposed question introduces the search for meaning in a text. Their answer makes the claim that the good writer achieves their purpose if what they intended to be the meaning can be drawn from the text itself. This implies that meaning should be analyzed from that which is present in the text. An example of a good writer who puts purpose directly into her meaning is Queen Elizabeth I in her "Speech to the Troops at Tilbury." Her purpose for the speech is evident in the meaning derived directly from her text. The section that will be analyzed for its meaning is when she writes, "I know I have the body but of weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too" (407). She begins with a

good rhetorical technique that builds her credibility when she conforms to her physical limitations but then subverts it by describing her inner strength. She does this by replacing the "weak and feeble woman" with metaphors of masculine qualities that signify strength, such as the heart for loyalty and determination, and the stomach for valor (Elizabeth 407). Such a rhetorical move connects her with her male audience through pathos and builds her leadership credibility through ethos. Though she is a queen, she reaffirms her masculine strength to lead by attributing her organs to those "of a king" (Elizabeth 407). Then, she seeks their reciprocation of loyalty to her by bridging the connection between her and her troops through the motive of their country, for which she metaphorically stands and she likewise empowers them to defend; she does this when she finishes with, "and of a king of England too." Her purpose is revealed through the meaning made in her speech: it is quite literally a political appeal to the troops in building their loyalty to her as queen so that they may perform the duties she wants them to accomplish– that is, defending their country.

Purpose, when carried out effectively, instills meaning into the text, but the question about researching outside of the text to find meaning arises. Wimsatt and Beardsley again state, "And if the poet did not succeed [in what he tried to do], then the poem is not adequate evidence, and the critic must go outside the poem—for evidence of an intention did not become effective in the poem" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1199). Indeed, the reader has access to the literary work, so they should not need to scour for information about the author or about the text itself in order to find meaning in the text. If they must consult outside sources to make meaning of the text, then the writer did not fulfill their purpose. The body of the text is there in full, so any meaning that remains purely in the consciousness of the writer is not a part of the text itself. Here, I make a departure from the wise words of Wimsatt and Beardsley. Although sources outside the text, like background on the author, is unnecessary to identify the essential meaning of the text, it serves an interest in the text's birth story, and an exploration can enhance one's appreciation of the literature. A text that has been birthed into the public realm stands for itself, a character of individuality, but there was intentional craftsmanship in the decisions starting from the conception into how it was formed into being.

For instance, one might explore the societal conditions during when Elizabeth I's composed the speech to better appreciate the significance of its creation. A woman in

leadership was uncommon at the time, and she was the first woman solo monarch. Though it was encouraged that she marry to share the throne and birth an heir, her power as a woman monarch would be compromised if she did, so Queen Elizabeth I never married ("Elizabeth I" 403). Her subversion of societal expectations echoes through her speech when she rejects the societal norm of womanhood and assumes the role of kingship. Though this background is unessential to the textual meaning-making process, it deepens appreciation of the text in relation to the societal context during which it was written and serves as potential food for the literary critic who is particularly skilled at making meaning from the text.

The literary critic has three areas of discovery they might use in the meaning-making process. The first is (1) primary, or the text that is being analyzed, which is essential. The second is (2) background; this includes any contextual background information about the text, writer, or societal conditions. The third is (3) criticism, and this is a scholarly interpretation of the original text. All three can be used by the literary critic, but (1) is essential, (2) is optional, and (3) is the byproduct of the critic's analysis of (1), whether it included the complementary study of (2) or without. (1) is directly related to the writer, as well as (2), for the writer is directly involved with the circumstances surrounding their work's creation. Once the literature has entered the public realm, the writer has no direct correlation with (3) that might result from the analysis of their text. To a reader, (1) is essential and (2) is complementary, and (3) is unlikely unless he or she aspires to be a literary critic. The reader makes meaning from the text but is not seasoned in discourse as is the literary critic.

A reader might prefer a work of literature judging by their taste of agreeability, but the literary critic must judge a work by its effectiveness. As previously introduced by the Whistler versus Ruskin art case, any critic must see the work for the presence of what it is, not what kind of work he or she would prefer it to be. In order to create (3), they must first engage with a text in objective observation, putting agreeability aside. Objective observation is the only credible way to determine whether the work meets or fails in its effectiveness of carrying out purpose through the tradition of its niche. Literary critic Annette Kolodny demonstrates this through a personal example:

> I learned to take great pleasure in *Paradise Lost,* even though as both a Jew and a feminist, I can subscribe neither to its theology nor to its hierarchy of sexual

> valuation. If, within its own terms (as I have been taught to understand them), the text manipulates my sensibilities and moves me to pleasure—as I will affirm it does—then, at least in part, that must be because, in spite of my real-world alienation from many of its basic tenets, I have been able to enter that text through interpretive strategies which allow me to displace less comfortable observations with others to which I have been taught pleasurably to attend. (11-12)

Once the credible literary critic makes objective observations, they can formulate their literary critique, which is subjective in its art. The critic's analytical lens is comprised of two components: (1) his or her chosen area of theory, and (2) his or her own credo. (1) is selected out of dispositional interest, which is thereby subjective, and since (2) branches from (1), it is inherently subjective. Furthermore, (2) is a statement of values that the literary critic claims to subscribe to in the performance of their analysis. Literary criticism is a subjective art, but it is also a strategic science in the way that argumentation follows a formula. First, the literary critic chooses the information to include in their discourse that best supports their argument. Second, the literary critic uses skilled rhetoric evidenced through the tradition of their discourse in presenting their argument to the highest capability of irrefutability. After the literary critic has drawn meaning from a text to analyze and formulate an argument, and has birthed that argument into the public sphere, they have produced their own body of literature which becomes another literary critic's goal to respond to, potentially refuting the argument with their own, thus making their own meaning and birthing it into the public sphere.

THE FINAL PURPOSE OF THEORY: UNTYING IT ALL TOGETHER

Purpose is what gives art its meaning. When its purpose is to bring the beholder into the realm of rumination, which is what good art does, meaning can be made. Good literature is a form of art that exemplifies the meaning-making process, and good literature is produced by good writers who use their understanding of tradition to effectively convey their purpose through meaning. Their own perspective of how they see the world is infused into the meaning that surfaces from the text. Although good literature should not require research outside the text itself for meaning to be made of the text, the literary critic has the endeavor of creating their own meaning-making work which stems from analysis of an original work. In this academic pursuit, they could

encounter three areas of discovery: text itself, relevant contextual background information, and scholarly interpretation. All three are plausibly relevant to the literary critic in their studies; however, they must engage with the original text in order to be credible in their objective observations of the literature's effectiveness in conveying meaning. It is then that a literary critic formulates a critique which is founded in their own definition of good art and good literature, which ties a bow of continuity from where I began my credo to where I finished. And it is because of this seamless conclusion that my ribbon has unraveled. My finish undermines the start; my credo to which I subscribe to as the definition of good in art and literature are of my own formulation and not a hard-set of rules which other critics might embrace. But it is not all at a loss, for the structure of my credo echoes a validation of the ultimate purpose of literary theory, and that is, to subvert without validation or disproof. It is an open discourse that allows room for one perspective to branch off from or attempt to uproot another perspective, all the while one can never be deemed superior. Literary theory is a circuitous pattern of perspectives. So, as long as there are differing perspectives in the world, it is a field that will never grow tired.

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Weapons and Armor for Children

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The development of the printing press made literature and literacy more common among everyone, including children. Literature was able to be produced faster and cheaper than ever before. With cheaper books, parents could afford to buy literature for their children without the worry that they may damage it. The main goal of children's literature is education. From literacy to teaching children morals, and giving lessons in religion, the goal of education is common among all children's literature. These lessons can be found in some of the earliest books of children's literature written by the Puritans, such as the *Orbus Pictus* and *A Token for Children*, and fairy tales like "Little Red Riding Hood."

The *Orbus Pictus*, written by John Amos Comenius in the seventeenth century, is a great example of a book with the primary goal of educating children. The book begins with the alphabet so children at the earliest ages can begin to learn to put together letters and understand words. Following that, the *Orbus Pictus* presents images along

with the words that correspond to them. This teaches the children what the meaning is of the word they are reading. These combinations of pictures and words "seeks to represent everything in the world, from creatures and plants to abstract concepts such as the Holy Trinity" (Reynolds 6). For many children in the seventeenth century, the *Orbus Pictus* is their first didactic book.

Other than just enabling children to be literate, this book for many children is their first educational book on religion. With *Orbus Pictus*, children can begin to read about subjects like the Holy Trinity. Each book was written in the child's native language; however, the same book also contained Latin, thus educating the children to be bi-lingual. For children under six years of age, they read the book in their native tongue. The Latin in the book is meant for children six or older. In a way, this is comparable to many children's books of the modern era in America where books may be written in English, but teach children Spanish words and phrases. The *Orbus Pictus* was originally written in 1658 and was translated into English only a year later. This version stayed in circulation until some time in the 19th century.

The speed of translation and how long the book was in circulation speaks volumes about how many families desired the book for their children. The *Orbus Pictus* was "intended as a teaching tool, and a strong dialogue between educational theories and writing for children runs throughout the history of children's literature"(Reynolds 8). While the *Orbus Pictus* can be considered the first widespread didactic book for children, the history of children's literature is rife with lessons.

During the seventeenth century, children's literature contained many lessons about religion. Many of the writers of children's literature in the seventeenth century were religious dissenters, or Puritans. The goal of the Puritans was to "teach them how to live godly lives, seek grace, and avoid the torments of hell" (Reynolds 8). One example of this kind of book is James Janeway's *A Token for Children*. For 200 years, this book has remained popular in England and America. During this time, it was often reprinted, along with including additions and even being retold. While this book may have entertained children, the main purpose of this book was to educate children on how they should behave and what their beliefs should be. These types of books have a strict didactic approach, it can actually be compared with fairy tales for children.

Fairy tales are more than just fantastical stories meant to please kids. They can also be used to educate children. As Neil Gaiman explained, fairy tales offer the reader "knowledge about the real world and your predicament … weapons … armor: real things you can take back into your prison. Skills and knowledge and tools you can use to escape for real" (Reynolds XI). The morals and lessons learned in fairy tales can be the child's "weapons" and their "armor." They can help a child deal with real world situations that might be comparable to what they have read in a fairy tale, such as dealing with strangers. Fairy tales are important in teaching children how to stay safe in the real world.

Like the books of the Puritans, fairy tales also attempt to educate children on how they should behave. Fairy tales almost always have children as the main characters. This allows the readers, presumably children, to be able to connect and relate to the characters. While the morals in fairy tales have changed over time to reflect the time period, the fact remains that they are intended to educate the reader in one way or another. The "Little Red Riding Hood" stories are a fantastic example of this. In the Brothers Grimm version, "Little Red Cap," the little girl is instructed by her mother to bring her grandmother some cake and wine, and is told "when you're out in the woods, walk properly and don't stray from the path" (Grimm 18). Shortly after the girl leaves her mother's house, she meets a wolf who convinces her to stray from the path. This results in the wolf arriving at the grandmother's house before the girl does, and the wolf eats the grandmother. Had the little girl listened to her mother, she would have arrived on time and her grandmother would not have been eaten by the wolf. This is a way to educate the reader to follow what your parents say, a lesson that is the same throughout many centuries, if not all of time. It also includes a lesson about talking to strangers. The wolf is a stranger that the little girl should not have spoken to in the first place, and this story educates children that they should avoid speaking to strangers because they may have evil intentions. This lesson is also comparable to Charles Perrault's version in regards to strangers:

> From this story one learns that children, / Especially young girls, / Pretty, well-bred, and Genteel, / Are wrong to listen to just anyone, / … not all wolves / Are exactly the same. / Some are perfectly charming, / … Following young ladies / Right into their homes, into their chambers, /

> But watch out if you haven't learned that tame wolves / Are the most dangerous of all. (Perrault 17-18)

The wolves really represent evil strangers who may seem nice, but wish to do harm. In this passage, Perrault is directly referencing the work that fairy tales do to warm against groomers and peodphiles. Reading fairy tales like these educates children on the dangers of speaking with strangers without directly introducing them to the idea of a pedophile, and gives them the "weapons" and "armor" that they may need in these situations. Children can be more well suited to deal with real world problems when educated by fairy tales such as this.

In "The Story of Grandmother", the story educates children how they can use cleverness as a "weapon" to get themselves out of trouble. The little girl finds herself sharing a bed with what she thinks to be her grandmother. When she finds out it is a wolf, she is able to outsmart the wolf by being clever and claiming she needs to go to the bathroom outside. The wolf ties rope to her leg and she goes outside. The girl then removes the rope and ties it to a tree, thus being able to escape. It is the cleverness of the little girl that allowed her to escape the wolf, and that is what the story imparts on the reader. It helps differentiate, to the child, the difference between being clever and being naughty, as disobeying a trustworthy adult is inappropriate, but by learning to observe their surroundings, gauge their safety, and be creative, "naughtiness" can help save a child's life. It teaches a lesson that is still taught today: if you're not safe, do whatever a "bad kid" would do to the person who's dangerous. The child learns that if they are clever, it can help get themselves out of bad situations.

With books being more common because of the invention of the printing press, access to children's literature rapidly grew. Children's literature continues to educate children worldwide. While the types of children's literature may have changed since its rise in the seventeenth century, the main goal of children's literature remains the same: to educate children. This is important to understand because it is imperative to the education of children to offer them literature. As well as ensuring literacy at a young age, it will provide the children with the

“weapons” and “armor” they may need to handle real life situations they may be put in.

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The Artistry of *Hamilton* and Our World Today

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The human race has created art for centuries because it has been our way to communicate our feelings and understandings of the world around us. If you look at how art has evolved, you can follow our world's history quite closely to the accurate time frame. For example, the cave paintings of the nomadic period or the artwork created during the Renaissance reflect the views of our world and surroundings, be it a reflection on our way of life or our shift in ideas. Music produced today also shows the ways musicians want to share their voices with the problems at hand, such as the protest songs surrounding the rise of Black Lives Matter protests. Even in the theater business, the release of the musical *Hamilton* created a mirror reflecting the world around us. The expectation of actors and actresses to portray our founding fathers as closely as possible was not Lin-Manual Miranda's focus, Instead, he wanted to portray our country's history with our world today, no matter the inaccuracies. These inaccuracies in the Broadway show have fueled conversations about the division of art and history, specifically the choice of using a diverse cast when the historical figures fictionalized through Hamilton were primarily white This musical has given the creators the ability to

express their worldly views. This, in turn, exposes the audience to one man's belief on the importance of our world's diversity today, the importance being that diversity shows the beauty of including everyone's thoughts, ideas, and expressions.

In 2015, Broadway opened its doors to the musical *Hamilton*. Lin-Manual Miranda chose to follow the story of our founding fathers, primarily, Alexander Hamilton. Hamilton was born in the mid 1700s and later became one of the founding fathers, meaning that he made significant contributions to the Constitution. In the Broadway musical, these points were addressed but not in the manner some may expect. Hamilton was a white male, but in the musical, he was portrayed by Miranda himself, who is Puerto Rican The entire casting of *Hamilton* was a creative choice done by Miranda. He chose actors and actresses of any race, color, descent, or ethnicity.

At first glance, this may seem as a huge inaccuracy to our country's history, but Miranda believes that, "This is a story about America then, told by America now" (Keller). Although controversy may loom around the idea of portraying Hamilton with a Puerto Rican man, having that demonstrates the length our world has come and the artistic values this musical holds. This musical is more than just a depiction of our history books, but an embodiment of our world today. The importance of choosing a diverse cast is that it shows that our world should no longer see only white people succeeding in life, but people from every color and descent. Miranda was interviewed by the *New York Times* and states that "[*Hamilton*] is a way of pulling you into the story and allowing you to leave whatever cultural baggage you have about the founding fathers at the door" (Weller). This musical is exposing viewers to what our society is today as many artists in the past have done. For instance, when you look at a painting by Claude Monet, you see the blurry vision of a beautiful scene. Monet demonstrates his view of the world through pastel colors and impressionism just as Miranda is demonstrating his view of the world through the cast of *Hamilton*. This musical is telling history through someone else's eyes, in this case the creator of the show, Miranda. Art is the way of communication for many, and in this musical, the importance of diversity is communicated throughout, but primarily through the casting.

If we view *Hamilton* as just a piece of art, we see the beauty of diversity and cultural pop dominate. But some view this musical as a history lesson, not seeing the separation of truth and expression. In the school system, we are taught a certain form of

our history, and in some ways, these lessons are told through a narrow lens. For example, many people "grew up learning about the George Washington who could not tell a lie" (Murphy). Where in *Hamilton*, we see "the George Washington who owned slaves" (Murphy). In the musical, there were exagerations on the beliefs Hamilton had towards slavery. He was portrayed as someone who wanted all slaves to be emancipated, where in realty, he only had progressive views towards slavery (Keller). Some may argue that this inaccuracy is tainting the history lessons we should be teaching, but if we separate the musical *Hamilton* from our history books, we see the musical as just a form of expression about our country's history and the world today. Art has been controversial because of the effect it may have on viewers, but when we educate ourselves about the surrounding circumstances of a particular art piece, we see the meaning more clearly. If we teach our history accurately, we can accept *Hamilton* as a piece of art rather than trying to portray our history as closely as possible. The artistic interpretation of the founding fathers seen in the musical demonstrates one view of our history. Resources for historical depictions of Alexander Hamilton are available. Use the painting of Hamilton by John Turnball for an accurate portrayal, then use the musical as a building block of our world today. Many artists have views on diversity, and *Hamilton* is just one.

Since 2015, the fluency of *Hamilton*'s message is even clearer. Our world has evolved in those five years. Our presidency switched from the first black president, Barack Obama, to Donald Trump. This switch shows that every person involved in politics has different views and opinions, just as artists have different interpretations. In past years, there has been debate over the rights of immigrants in our country and in the last year, we have experienced the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of Black Lives Matter Protests. *Hamilton* has stayed in the conversation because, in many ways, the musical corresponds with everyday events in our world. This piece of art is relatable because of the music choice, rap, and the casting: despite being a historical play, the audience finally sees the diversity of the 21st century, and the goal of the colonies, represented on stage.

Dave Murphy, for the San Francisco Chronicle writes, "When a white friend took his preteen daughter to see *Hamilton*, he realized how little she noticed the skin color of the actors. She knew, of course, that most of the historical figures were white and most

of the actors were people of color. It just didn't matter" (Murphy). Miranda's choice of a diverse cast is the mirror of our society, and those who view it are viewing what's around them. *Hamilton* is a monument in this way because of the power it holds as our time evolves. As we move from year to year, we see new stories and new ideas emerge, and we see diversity rise. The United States was called the melting pot because of the inclusion of all religions and races, and if we can remember that, we can see the true beauty of *Hamilton* on stage. We can see the increase of the success of everyone in our country. Miranda chose the cast purposely and this decision shows viewers what our society is today and the importance of diversity. Even during a pandemic, those messages being brought to life on stage didn't have to stop because of the introduction of *Hamilton* on Disney+. Now, the accessibility of this musical is brought home to everyone, bringing with it, Miranda's artistic views of our world today, and in many ways tomorrow.

The artistic choices made by Miranda make this musical dominate the stage. The historical inaccuracies of this show shouldn't overshadow the beauty of this artform because the demonstrations we see on stage are what we see around us. The expressions and feelings of Miranda should be what is captured on stage, and that is what the musical does. We all have opinions on what is happening in our world today, and art is one way to express that. The accessibility of *Hamilton* has changed since its release in 2015. Now, you are no longer confined to a seat in the theater, but you can view this in your living room If we can remember that *Hamilton* is a piece of art meant to entertain and express rather than be as precise as possible to our history books, we can see the values Miranda put into the show. He didn't create it to be a history lesson, but to be a societal lesson, that our world has shifted from the 1700s, as it should. Time moves forward, and our expression of history has shifted, too. Diversity is so important to our culture today because it brings people together and each person brings new ideas, and *Hamilton* is one way to experience that.

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It is Found Deplorable That She Cannot Fly: *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and the Question of Blame

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To hold to our ideas of progress and improvement, we like to classify the past as a barbarous place that has since been deserted. We look at past literature and texts to support the idea that we have progressed in our society. One such text is *Tess of the D'Urbervilles,* a novel written by Thomas Hardy in 1891. The novel follows the life of

Tess, on whom the subtitle of the book places the label "A Pure Woman," as she moves through her life. However, the novel is no typical *bildungsroman*. Early on in the plot, there is an interaction between Tess and Alec that defines Tess for the rest of the book and challenges the idea of her purity. From the point of this interaction, which indisputably is a form of forced intercourse, onward, Tess is belittled and ridiculed by the society around her. Not only is she mentally tormented as a result of her guilt and society's agenda, but she is also abandoned by the ones she lovesand arguably driven mad, to the point that she resorts to murder.

Hardy, writing in a very conservative time, never directly labels this fateful interaction as rape. Instead, he dances around that label, having his narrator drop hints, but avoiding any incriminating words that would cause his novel to be labeled as obscene. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy's ambiguity surrounding what happens between Tess and Alec leaves things up to the interpretation of the reader. However, because of the time he was writing in, Hardy's decision to never directly call it rape is calculated Instead of calling it rape, the text uses details, such as Tess's naivety, and the power disparity between the two characters, labeling Tess as Alec's property, and Tess being unconsciousness at the time of the event, shows that Alec did, in fact, rape Tess. This distinction is important because it forces the modern-day reader to recognize the parallels between Tess's story and how we treat victims and survivors of rape, today. We have not progressed from the Victorian Era. Instead, we have remained stagnant in a culture that protects the rapist, shames the victim, and removes a woman's autonomy over her body.

Given the one hundred-plus year gap between today and the time the novel was written, it is easily assumed that a Victorian definition of rape is different than a current definition of rape. Because we like to think ourselves more informed and advanced now, we assume that the Victorians, who were locked in a rigid patriarchy, lacked laws to protect women from rape. William Davis counters this argument in his article, "The Rape of Tess: Hardy, English Law, and the Case for Sexual Assault," by giving the Victorian definition of rape: "English law in the nineteenth century defined rape as 'the offense of having unlawful and carnal knowledge of a woman by force, and against her will,'" (William Davis 223). In other words, rape was defined then as it is now; the act of forcing a person to have sex without their consent. Davis also notes that having sex with

a sleeping woman was rape, even in the Victorian Era. He explains in the same article that, "A review of Victorian case-law shows that the courts held firmly to the idea that a sleeping woman was incapable of consenting to a sexual relationship. R. vs. Ryan (1846), for example, affirmed that 'where a girl is in a state of utter unconsciousness, whether occasioned by the act of the prisoner, or otherwise, a person having connection with her during that time is guilty of rape,'" (William Davis 224). A woman who was unconscious, whether from exhaustion or passed out drunk, was unable to consent to sex. Therefore, Victorians' definition of rape was not as primeval or undetailed as we sometimes attribute to them.

It is important to understand that rape is a crime of power, not passion. This power is rooted in patriarchal beliefs and practices, which confine women to limited definitions of what it means to be a "real" woman. In *The Second Sex,* Simone de Beauvoir, a French feminist writer, examines what it means to be a woman in a patriarchal society. She claims,

> All agree in recognizing the fact that females exist in the human species…And yet we are told that femininity is dangerous; we are exhorted to be women, remain women, become women. It would appear then, that every female human being is not necessarily a woman; to be considered so she must share in that mysterious threatened reality known as femininity. (xix)

This complex definition of a woman is where Tess fits in. Her appearance is highly praised and sought after, even by the narrator who repeatedly brings attention to her eyes, lips, and hair. According to Hardy's narrator, "She was a fine and handsome girl—not handsomer than some others, possibly—but her mobile peony mouth and innocent eyes added eloquence to color and shape," (Hardy 7). A peony is a shrubby plant that, when in bloom, boasts large pink flowers, and the narrator's comparison of a flower to Tess suggests that she has large, pink, and in this case, desirable, lips. This feature, along with her innocent eyes, fit Tess into the idea of a feminine woman; one who is both physically appealing, but also pure. Because she fulfills that idea, it grants her with male praise and desire, but also with a criticizing gaze upon her every move.

Her identity as a complex feminine woman causes Tess to be more seen by her society. Her beauty makes her the type of girl that men, particularly Alec, want to have in many different ways. Not only does Alec lust after her, but he "owns" her because of

his status as a wealthy man in a patriarchal society, in addition to being her employer. She is *his* worker. While this idea seems barbaric, the idea that a woman was a man's property was the basis of the first rape laws. According to Susan Brownmiller in her book, *Against Our Will*, even before laws were written down, women were seen as weaker beings, primarily due to physical differences in strength, and their weakness was used against them. She explains, "Man's discovery that his genitalia could serve as a weapon to generate fear must rank as one of the most important discoveries of prehistoric times" (Brownmiller 14). She continues, "When men discovered they could rape, they proceeded to do it. Later, much later, under certain circumstances they even began to consider rape a crime," (14-15). The earliest instances of rape were used to keep prehistoric women in a place of inferiority, but as men started to realize that a woman he desired could also be subject to assaults by other men, he began to try and protect her. However, "the price of woman's protection by some men against the abuse of other was steep," and this price began the establishment of a patriarchal society (Brownmiller 17). In exchange for safety against a man seeking to rape her, woman was forced to trade in her autonomy, and therefore, her identity as an independent, thinking person. The woman a man protected was his property. Any crime committed against her body was not a crime against her, but a crime against his property, making it an insult to him. Thus, the earliest laws against rape were not created with women in mind.

The belief that a woman's body belonged to her protector is reflected in *Tess of the D'Ubervilles* through many of the relationships. The most obvious, as mentioned earlier, is the dynamic between Tess and Alec. When Alec takes an interest in her and realizes her family needs economic support, he offers Tess employment at his estate. By taking Tess on as an employee, Alec added her to his estate and property. In relying on him to protect not only her, but her family as well, Tess relinquishes any bodily autonomy, according to the practices rooted in prehistoric ideas of power. This idea would have been understood by a Victorian reader. However, these ideas are less obvious to a contemporary reader, and because of the lack of clarity, debate arises about whether or not Tess was raped by Alec. Others argue she was simply seduced by him and later regretted her decision.

The main source of this debate about whether Tess was raped or seduced stems from a scene found in "Phase the First," Chapter 11. The scene, appropriately referred to

as “The Chase,”is when everything falls apart for our “pure woman,” Tess. Alec’s actions towards Tess and her body set into motion the downfall of our tragic heroine, despite her innocence in the situation. While there is wide debate about whether there was consent or not, Eugene Davis claims it was seduction in his article, “Tess of the D'Urbervilles: Some Ambiguities About a Pure Woman.” Davis states that because Hardy never directly uses the term rape, or says that Alec took Tess’s virginity without consent, that we as readers cannot infer it to be rape. He relies on Hardy’s ambiguity and Tess’s actions later in the book, like returning to Alec as his mistress and later murdering him, as evidence for this claim. In his article, Davis states, “It is, of course, perfectly clear that she had intercourse with him, bore his child, and later felt guilty about her indiscretion” (397). His opinion that Tess consented to sex is shown by his choice to refer to the action as “her indiscretion,” as if sleeping with Alec was just a mistake that Tess chose to make (397). In Davis’ mind, Tess feels guilt about the situation, because she consented and then later regrets that choice, which is a common fallacy when it comes to defending a rapist.

However, oftentimes, as in the case of Davis’ argument, the scene of the rape itself is overlooked as evidence for the case of rape or seduction. Davis then argues, “Since Hardy chose, for whatever reasons, not to describe as the events happened either the night in The Chase or the period that followed, one is forced to infer what happened from information given later,” (398). Davis relies on Tess’s actions *after* the actual scene to find the basis for his argument. However, what Davis, and other critics who argue that Tess was seduced, fail to realize, or choose not to recognize, is that perhaps the largest amount of evidence is actually given before Alec rapes Tess. While her actions after the event also coincided with the fact that she was raped, such as her extreme mental turmoil, obvious trust issues, and depression, it is the actions of Tess, Alec, and other supporting characters before the event that are the most telltale evidence. More than once, Tess turns down Alec. More than once Alec uses his power and status to guilt Tess into staying with him. More than once Tess’s family is complicit with the situation. All of this happens before Alec rapes her, not after. If read carefully, these defenses are clearly laid out and infallible, and yet, still ignored as evidence. Therefore, contrary to what Eugene Davis believes, given Hardy’s ambiguity about the event itself, one is

forced to infer what happened from information provided before, as well as after, the scene of The Chase.

The scene itself follows Tess and Alec as they ride on horseback back to Trantridge, Alec's estate, after Tess and some of the other workers of the estate get into an argument. Alec, who had tried his luck many times before The Chase, tries to get Tess to confess why she will not let him kiss her. Tess, who is of a much lower class than Alec, declares that he makes her angry by always trying to kiss her. Alec inquires why she hates his advances by saying, "'Why haven't you told me when I make you angry?'" to which Tess responds, "'You know very well why. Because I cannot help myself here,'" (Hardy 42). Unlike Alec, Tess's status as a poor woman in a society made for rich white men prevents her from pushing Alec away. He is her source of income and her family's well-being, so she is trapped between her dignity and the parameters of society. She alludes to her situation simply by saying, "'Because I cannot help myself here,'" and though it is a simple statement, it holds a small amount of power coming from Tess (42). While Alec talks to Tess as if she is unintelligent, likely because she is much poorer than him, Tess recognizes and points out the power disparity. In saying this simple phrase, Tess is letting Alec know that she knows she owes him for his help and the gifts, but also recognizes she cannot risk losing Alec's favor because it will cost her employment and safety.

The clear difference in power, and Alec's obvious manipulation of it, is a form of sexual exploitation and is a prime example of Susan Brownmiller's idea that, historically, the price of a woman's protection was accepted to be her body. Melanie Williams examines this clear power dynamic and the expected price in-depth in her article, "'Is Alec a rapist?' - Cultural Connotations of 'Rape' and 'Seduction' - A Reply to Professor John Sutherland." Unlike Eugene Davis, Williams argues that The Chase is a scene of rape, not seduction. She cites the obvious power dynamic as strong evidence to support this fact. Williams points out that, "Alec informs Tess that he has made gifts to her impoverished family, a statement which may be intended to increase Tess's sense of indebtedness to her rescuer" (302). This "sense of indebtedness" traps Tess in a power dynamic she cannot get out of (Williams 302). As Williams suggests, Alec intentionally uses his status to try and manipulate a poor and weary Tess into "loving" him. He feels as if Tess owes him but knows she cannot pay him in money, so he takes what he deems

fit payment. Who is to say what she owes? If she cannot afford to pay money, what choice is she left with? Alec, intelligent despite his evil intentions, recognizes Tess knows the answers to such questions. Therefore, he marshalled her to his desires. Before he takes her innocence, he took her freedom and traps her in debt.

Despite Alec's clear attempts to use his power to convince Tess to willingly sleep with him, Tess continuously rejects him throughout the scene of The Chase, and these rejections to function to confirm Tess inherent purity. After he is rejected by Tess on their ride home from the party, Alec, knowing Tess does not know the area well and that she "was inexplicably weary" from her taxing days on his farm, decides to ride into "a faint luminous fog, which had hung in the hallows all evening," (Hardy 42). The environment makes it hard for Alec to determine their whereabouts, or so the reader is led to think, and it also only makes Tess more exhausted. Suddenly, Alec stops the horse, which "immediately put her on the defensive" and causes her to push him away from her (43). Her gut response angers him, and she apologizes by stating her intention to leave his employment. This response only angers Alec more and he exclaims, "'No, you will not leave me to-morrow! Will you, I asked once more, show your belief in me by letting me clasp you in my arm? Come, between us two and nobody else, now. We know each other well; and you know that I love you, and think you are the prettiest girl in the world, which you are. Mayn't I treat you as a lover?" (43). Tess objects, claiming, rightly so, that she does not know what that means or what it entails, so she cannot accept him. To this claim of naivety, Alec offers no answer, and he guides their horse deeper and deeper into the woods. When Tess realizes he is intentionally leading the horse far from their destination, she exclaims, "How could you be so treacherous!" (43). Her reaction, unfiltered and accusing, shows just how uncomfortable Tess was being alone with Alec and how she expected the worst from him. Tess denies Alec at each of his offers, and her constant rejection confirms Tess's innate purity.

To avoid being with Alec any longer, Tess states that she will walk home, to which he takes offense. But she insists, and Alec, in the guise of being a gentleman, explains how she must rest for a while so that she can walk home without getting weary, and so that he has the time to map out a trail for her. Tess reluctantly agrees, understanding that she will not win the argument. While he is preparing a place for her to rest, Alec again tries to get Tess to say that she loves him. And again, Tess denies any

affection for him, which as noted above, keeps her pure of blame. Alec, who pretends not to be offended by her denial, gives her his jacket to keep warm and sets off to find a path. While he is gone, Tess "became invisible as she fell into reverie upon the leaves," (44). With the aid of the dark fog and dreary atmosphere, Tess makes herself impossible to see, as if she were hiding from something. Based on the previous exchanges between her and Alec in the scene, it is clear that she is not hiding from the creatures in the woods, but from Alec, the real monster. Whether she welcomed his advances does not change her later lack of consent, but her rejections cover any track of possible blame that could fall onto this tragic heroine.

Even still, Tess's efforts to hide are in vain, and when Alec reappears, she is sound asleep on the leaves. Alec sees her small frame against the leaves and calls out her name, to which "There was no answer," (Hardy 45). To assure himself that she is unconscious, "He knelt down and bent lower, till her breath warmed his face, and in a moment his cheek was in contact with hers," (45). The narrator, to make it even more clear that Tess was not awake, states, "She was sleeping soundly, and upon her eyelashes, there lingered tears," (45). In his article, "The Rape of Tess: Hardy, English Law, and the Case for Sexual Assault," William Davis clarifies Tess's consciousness so that it cannot be mistaken, in order to prove that there was no seduction involved. He explains, "We may assume then that Tess does not communicate with Alec because she is asleep. We may further assume that Alec knows that Tess is sleeping for he hears her "gentle regular breathing" and receives no response to his direct address," (Davis, W. 223). If Tess were awake, her breathing would be more irregular. If Tess were awake, she would have made some kind of response to Alec's call. There can be no question about Tess's consciousness at the moment Alec decides to take advantage of her. His awareness of Tess's unconscious state underlines the gravity of Alec's actions.

That narrator's assessment of the situation confirms the fact that Alec's actions were not consented to in a way a Victorian audience would understand. As mentioned before, the narrator never directly uses the word rape to describe the event, but instead poses the questions:

> But, some might say, where was Tess's guardian angel? where was the providence of her simple faith? [...]

> Why it was that upon this beautiful feminine tissue sensitive as gossamer and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a course pattern as it was doomed to receive (Hardy 45).

Here, the narrator brings in religious ideas to explain that Tess did not consent to Alec's actions. To start, her guardian angel is questioned. In theory, this angel would be responsible not only to guide Tess's actions but also to protect her. However, as the narrator points out, Tess's angel was absent when Alec attacked her. Surely a guardian angel would have protected her, but in their absence, Alec can have his way with Tess as she is powerless to protect herself. Perhaps more telling than the lack of protection Tess has, is the narrator's labeling of Alec's actions. Instead of giving Tess the agency through diction, the narrator claims that "a coarse pattern" had been "traced" on Tess's body (Hardy 45). The pattern is traced on her, and she is not given any action in the situation. The narrator also uses the word "received" when describing what was done (45). Again, this takes away any agency that Tess had in the situation. She did not do the thing it was done to her, and it was a "coarse" and "doomed" thing (45). By not only invoking religion but also using telling diction to condemn Alec's actions, Hardy's narrator confirms that Alec acted without consent from Tess.

Given this evidence before The Chase and the details the narrator provides at the end of the scene, we can be certain that Alec acted against Tess's body in a malicious way that she did not consent to. However, it is not until after The Chase that it becomes apparent that action was rape and not a different kind of sexual assault. Again, Hardy does not actually describe what happens to Tess's body at Alec's hand, but he does offer evidence that points to unwanted sexual intercourse. The second phase of the novel sees Tess working in the fields. The narrator shifts to describing the workers on break and we see "the young mother sit [an infant] upright in her lap, and looking far into the distance, dandled it with a gloomy indifference…" (Hardy 55). This young mother is none other than Tess, who is described by the narrator as "the same but not the same" (54). This baby, later referred to as Sorrow, is Tess's child, and is the key to establishing that Alec did, in fact, have unwanted intercourse with Tess while she was asleep, going so far as impregnating her.

There is also evidence to confirm that Alec raped Tess provided later in the story. Be as it may that Tess gave birth to a child as a result of the event at The Chase, the text

also hints that it was not consensual through Tess's interactions with other characters. Perhaps the clearest example of this takes place while Tess is on the way back from Trantridge after finally leaving Alec. While walking, Tess runs into a man, presumably a wandering pastor, who is painting ominous scripture on barns, fences, and any other suitable surface he could find. He begins to walk with Tess, and she asks about the scriptures he stops to paint. "'Do you believe what you paint?' she asked in low tones" (Hardy 49). The man responds by saying, "'Believe that text? Do I believe my own existence!'" which prompts Tess to ask 'But,' said she tremulously, 'suppose your sin was not of your own seeking?'" (49). That final question is a clear cry of innocence. What the world considers her sin (losing her virginity before marriage) was not of her own choice, and so she almost begs this man to ease her conscience. Tess did not seek premarital sex with Alec, but she is, nonetheless, seen as sinful through the Victorians' strict interpretation of Christianity. This unwarranted guilt is bestowed on the tragic heroine to show that she feels the wrath of society. Despite her innocence, she is blamed.

Although critics like William Davis and Melanie Williams provide proof enough that Tess was raped, not seduced, in their works, the conversation cannot end there. We must reexamine it and continue beyond just the establishment of rape, because although we would like to think that our society has progressed since Hardy wrote Tess of the D'Urbervilles in 1891 or even since Williams and Davis argued rape in 1999 and 1997 respectively, we are still trapped in the same assumptions and beliefs surrounding rape, which is today referred to as rape culture.

Lindy West speaks about the idea of rape culture in her work *Shrill*. West examines the interaction between the public eye and victims of sexual assault in the writing:

> We live in a culture that actively strives to shrink the definition of sexual assault; that casts stalking behaviors as romance; blames victims for wearing the wrong clothes, walking through the wrong neighborhood, or flirting with the wrong person; bends over backwards to excuse boys-will-be-boys misogyny; makes the emotional and social costs of reporting a rape prohibitively high; pretends that false accusations are a more dire problem than actual assaults; elects officials who tell rape victims that their sexual violation was 'god's plan'; and convicts in

> less than 5 percent of cases that go to trial. (172) (qtd. in Dalley and Holzer par. 9).

West's definition provides detailed examples of how rape culture presents itself today. We try to limit what is classified as sexual assault in order to limit the number of accusations. Obsession is deemed flattering instead of predatorial. Victims are blamed through accusations of incorrect clothes or a body that is too sensual. Men are not held accountable for their actions. Those who are victims or survivors of sexual assault and rape are discouraged from speaking out by the psychological, physical, or financial costs of doing so. Religious leaders may dismiss the violence in the name of "God's plan." All of these aspects combined solidify a culture that does not protect the survivor, but instead protects the perpetrator, which is precisely what is being done when people claim that Tess was simply seduced. Critics that pursue and support such a claim shift the blame of Alec's actions onto Tess. Like those who use clothes or flirtation as a means to justify sexual assault of any kind in the real world, critics who ignore the obvious evidence of rape protect Alec in his fictional world. The parallelism between the public defense of rapists in the real world and critics' defense of Alec shows that we are no better than some characters in the novel, such as Angel, who shame Tess for a crime that was committed against her.

The tendency to debate about whether Tess was raped or not, during any time, but especially in the late 20th century and into the 21st century, hangs the flaws that are still embedded in our society out for all to see. We take pride in our modern ideas and movements, but still are hesitant to convict a fictional character, who assaulted a fictional sleeping woman, of a crime that we supposedly hold to be among the foulest crimes. Instead, there are still readers and critics who suggest that she flirted with him, which they claim is reason enough to suggest that she might have consented. There are still readers and critics who suggest her eventual return to her rapist, an act of desperation for money so that her family may survive, signals that she actually consented to the first interaction. There are still readers and critics that make excuse after excuse to defend a rapist who exists in the parameters of a novel.

We are not so different, then, from the Victorian men, or the men before them, who viewed rape only as a crime against a man's property. While women are not necessarily men's property in today's world, the fact that we justify light punishment by

worrying about a rapist's future suggests that a woman's value is still much less than a man. Upwards of one hundred years after it was written, Tess's situation continues to parallel the stories of countless victims and survivors. We fail by shifting the blame of someone else's heinous actions onto the victim. Simone de Beauvoir encapsulates this beautifully and tragically in *The Second Sex,* "Her wings are clipped, and it is found deplorable that she cannot fly," (605). Tess and countless other rape survivors were forced to have their wings clipped, and yet, somehow, we blame them for their inability to fly.

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Duty Towards Ailing Elders in Austen's *Emma*

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Humans in modern times have become capable of living longer lives and, due to this, younger individuals are more increasingly expected to care for their aging parents. Although society understands the difficulties that arise due to caring for aging individuals, especially when these elders may be struggling with both mental and physical ailments, individuals are still expected to care for their elderly family members, and are seen as cruel if they do not. In fact, as Edmund Burke explains this, "we are

taught to look with horror on those children of their country who are prompt rashly to hack that aged parent in pieces" (96). Societal expectations require the care of elders, no matter the toil on the caring individuals. Part of this expectation to care for an older generation may be due to the debt and duty humans feel is owed these individuals. For instance, if two individuals work together to raise and support their child, that child, in turn, is indebted to these parents for the care which they provided. Therefore, this child feels responsible for caring for his or her ailing parents no matter the struggle. Jane Austen was not only influenced by these Burkean ideas of debt and societal expectations of elder care, but was also able to explore them, particularly in her novel *Emma* with her characters of Mr. Woodhouse and his daughter Emma. Specifically, Jane Austen's *Emma* allows for an exploration of the debt and duty which is owed to elderly individuals suffering with mental and physical ailments; through an investigation of Mr. Woodhouse's obsession with health, Emma's dutiful care for her father, and Emma's eventual marriage in the culmination of the novel, the politics of both duty and the care of elders with mental and physical illnesses are able to be examined.

Austen's *Emma* tells the story of Emma, a self-proclaimed matchmaker who vows to never marry. She lives alone with her father, Mr. Woodhouse, in a wealthy estate titled Hartfield. As the novel opens, Emma's mother has formerly passed away, her sister Isabella has previously married, and Mr. Woodhouse has since succumbed to a static life, where his pleasure comes from staying healthy and at home—in fact, one of his closest friends is his physician, Mr. Perry. Emma lives a life of freedom, able to go and do as she pleases, due to the fact that she holds incredible wealth, and her father believes she can do nothing wrong. However, Emma is not free in one specific sense; as the only woman left to the care of her father, Emma is expected to constantly attend to Mr. Woodhouse due to the debt and duty she owes him. This duty heavily influences Emma's life, which is especially seen in the culmination of the novel, when Emma eventually marries Mr. Knightley (a long-standing friend of the family, and brother to Isabella's husband). Emma fears that she will have to put off their wedding until after Mr. Woodhouse's death, however Mr. Knightley comes up with the clever plan to instead move into Mr. Woodhouse and Emma's home, thus allowing Emma to continue fulfilling her duty to her father.

Duty and debt tend to be owed to all elderly individuals, yet often those with visible or understood ailments—like Mr. Woodhouse—receive even closer care. It is important to recognize Mr. Woodhouse's living state in order to understand the care which Emma dutifully shows him. Mr. Woodhouse's failing mind and declining physical well-being can especially be seen through his obsession with health, and through his interactions with the individuals around him. Particularly, Mr. Woodhouse's declining physical health is revealed to readers through his constant comments surrounding illness and concerns with eating. For instance, in discussing the dangers of having a ball at an inn (titled the "Crown") in winter, Mr. Woodhouse describes, "A room at an inn was always damp and dangerous; never properly aired, or fit to be inhabited…they would catch worse colds at the Crown than any where" (Austen 197). With this statement, Mr. Woodhouse's failing physical health is revealed; he holds an intense fear of not only himself, but also his companions, becoming sick simply due to being exposed to cold air.

The fear of elderly individuals with ailing health becoming sick due to cold weather was nothing new. Approximately 65 years before Austen published *Emma*, John Hill published his book, *The Old Man's Guide to Health & Longer Life*. One specific passage in this text states, "winter is the season when old men are least healthy; therefore they must then be most careful. They are colder than young persons, therefore cold more affects them. The weakness of their circulation makes them cold…" (8). Like other elderly individuals, staying warm and healthy is a constant concern, and it has been throughout history; however, Mr. Woodhouse seems to take this concern one step further, and this fear prevents him from experiencing various opportunities (like attending a delightful ball).

Mr. Woodhouse's physical decline also manifests into a fear of eating items that will negatively impact his health, and this is seen both through Mr. Woodhouse's thoughts on his own eating, and on the eating of others. Austen writes, "Mr. Woodhouse's feelings were in sad warfare…his conviction of suppers being very unwholesome made him rather sorry…and while his hospitality would have welcomed his visitors to every thing, his care for their health made him grieve that they would eat" (20). Mr. Woodhouse shows genuine concern of the possible ill effects of eating rich foods, as he has become more conscious of the effects of food with age. This has caused

him to lament the eating of rich, delicious meals by those close to him. Austen goes on to comment specifically on Mr. Woodhouse's eating habits, stating "such another small basin of thin gruel as his own, was all that he could, with thorough self-approbation, recommend, though he might constrain himself" (20). Although Mr. Woodhouse serves to correct the eating habits of his companions from devouring fatty foods to instead eating simple meals—like gruel—through this comment, it also allows readers to gain insight into the eating habits of Mr. Woodhouse himself. He has entered an age where he is consciously concerned about his physical health and how his ingestion of rich foods may lessen this health. Unfortunately, the decline in Mr. Woodhouse's physical health, seen through its negative effects on his eating habits and his ability to avoid sickness, is only responsible for half of his elderly ailments.

Mr. Woodhouse does not only require Emma's constant care due to his declining physical health, but also due to his deteriorating mental wellbeing. Mr. Woodhouse has come to rely on Emma's constant support and care, specifically when experiencing fear and possible discomfort. Mr. Woodhouse has lost both his confidence and his ability to reason for himself; Austen is able to accurately capture this mental decline during a scene in which Mr. Woodhouse fears returning home during a snowstorm. The text states,

> "What is to be done, my dear Emma?—what is to be done?" was Mr. Woodhouse's first exclamation, and all that he could say for some time. To her he looked for comfort; and her assurances of safety, her representation of the excellence of the horses, and of James, and of their having so many friends about them, revived him a little. (Austen 101)

In this scene, Mr. Woodhouse's mental decline is further accentuated by his physical health fears of becoming sick or injured during this excursion. His knowledge of his increasing physical ailment results in increased mental strain, as he considers each and every negative possible outcome. However, Emma is there and is able to fulfill her duty of care to her father by assuring safety and exhibiting confidence. It is this confidence on Emma's part, along with the presence of other friends, which serves to reconcile some of Mr. Woodhouse's mental anguish. Additionally, it is Mr. Woodhouse's constant turning towards—and reliance on—Emma which allows her great freedom, even through her

never-ending duty towards her father; the fact that Mr. Woodhouse relies on Emma's advice allows for this increased independence she holds.

One other area in which Mr. Woodhouse's deteriorating mental health is made evident is through his inability to recover past memories. Nowhere is this memory loss more evident than when Emma and another character are creating and writing down clever riddles in a journal; Mr. Woodhouse attempts to remember a riddle he used to know, yet he cannot fully remember it. During this encounter with his daughter, Mr. Woodhouse exclaims, "'Ah! it is no difficulty to see who you take after! Your dear mother was so clever at all those things! If I had but her memory! But I can remember nothing'" (Austen 63). Mr. Woodhouse verbally recognizes his mental decline, and it is almost as if Emma's presence alone is able to comfort him through this understanding. In fact, Austen highlights the importance of the ability Emma has in comforting her father with his declining memory, through a contrast of this. Austen writes, "her father was growing nervous, and could not understand *her*" (219). The italicization of "*her*" is a visible proof for readers that not only is Mr. Woodhouse's memory failing, but that his overall mental health is ailing, as he cannot even understand "*her*", his own daughter. Constantly throughout the novel, Emma is repeating things to her father, and her patience in doing so, despite his continuous difficulty with remembrance, is further proof of the debt she feels is owed to her father.

Through these various outbursts of Mr. Woodhouse surrounding health, and through his reliance on Emma for constant mental support, Emma is able to successfully and continually fulfill her Burkean debt to her father. By offering Mr. Woodhouse her constant presence and support, Mr. Woodhouse has come to rely on Emma, and this has provided her with new freedoms. Burke positions, "never, never more, shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in the servitude itself, the spirit of exalted freedom" (76). Burke fears the loss of one's sense of duty towards one's parents, yet Emma serves as an example that not all hope is lost; Emma continually cares for her father, and this intense sense of duty towards him even causes her to redefine and postpone her own happiness. For instance, for much of Austen's text, Emma is adamant that she will not marry, and one could surmise that Emma's duty to her father may have something to do with this.

Throughout the novel, Mr. Woodhouse continually remarks on his dislike for marriage, especially because marriage takes people from him (as individuals move away with their spouses). Early in the text, Mr. Woodhouse comments on the marriage of Miss Taylor—now Mrs. Weston—who had previously lived in Hartfield with the Woodhouses and who had cared for Emma. Some of Mr. Woodhouse's comments include, "Poor Miss Taylor—I wish she were here again. What a pity it is that Mr. Weston ever thought of her!" and "Ah! Poor Miss Taylor! 'tis a sad business" (Austen 7, 9). Mr. Woodhouse's constant remarks on the ill effects of marriage may serve to influence Emma's thoughts on the matter. Later in the novel, when Emma's feelings on marriage are revealed, readers are privy to how Mr. Woodhouse's verbal comments, Emma's internalization of these comments, and Emma's understanding of her duty have influenced her views on marriage. Emma ponders, "still they were to part. When she became sensible of this, it struck her that she could not be very much in love; for in spite of her previous and fixed determination never to quit her father, never to marry, a strong attachment certainly must produce more of a struggle" (Austen 207). Through these thoughts, which occur in response to a character—whom Emma believes herself attached to—leaving, Emma reiterates to herself her reasons for not desiring to marry. She then reasons that she is not truly in love with this character, and readers are left to wonder whether she truly did not romantically care for this character, or if her inner feelings of duty pressed her into rejecting all possible feelings of affection—this is the effect that being indebted to an ailing person can cause.

Nowhere in the course of the novel, however, is Emma's sense of duty felt stronger than it is when she finally recognizes that she is in love with one of her oldest friends (Mr. Knightley), and that he is in love with her. They plan to get married, yet Emma attempts to postpone this event, as her debt forces her to recognize the ill effects it will have on her already-ailing father. Nevertheless, Mr. Knightley—who is also a close friend of Mr. Woodhouse—recognizes Emma's sense of duty, and comes up with a solution:

> The subject followed; it was in plain, unaffected, gentleman-like English, such as Mr. Knightley used even to the woman he was in love with, how to be able to ask her to marry him, without attacking the happiness of her father. Emma's answer was ready at the first word. 'While her dear father lived, any change of condition

> must be impossible for her. She could never quit him.' Part only of this answer, however, was admitted. The impossibility of her quitting her father, Mr. Knightley felt as strongly as herself; but the inadmissibility of any other change, he could not agree to…that so long as her father's happiness—in other words his life—required Hartfield to continue her home, it should be his likewise. (Austen 352)

After accepting Mr. Knightley's marriage proposal, she immediately reveals that they must not marry until after Mr. Woodhouse's passing. This simple exclamation on Emma's part reveals how ingrained her sense of duty has become; even though she is in love, and desires to be with Mr. Knightley, she remembers her duty as a daughter. She understands the physical and mental ailments her father experiences, and recognizes that, if she were to leave him—therefore leaving Hartfield—and move in with Mr. Knightley, he may fall into absolute despair, causing her to fail in her duties to him. Fortunately, Mr. Knightley recognizes the importance of preventing Emma's removal from Hartfield and proposes the idea that he will move in with Mr. Woodhouse and herself. Mr. Knightley understands the enormous duty, and feelings of debt, which Emma feels towards her father, and in quitting his estate to move into the Woodhouse's, he takes a share in the duty which Emma feels towards Mr. Woodhouse. As Joel Weinsheimer puts it, "recognizing Emma's duty to and affection for her father, Mr. Knightley assumes on himself the same filial duty and affection for his father-in-law" (92). Only through Mr. Knightley's submission to Emma's duty towards her father is Emma able to gain the happiness of an immediate marriage to her love, as well as an ability to continue serving her duty to her father.

In the culmination of the novel, Emma's happiness can be felt; she has found a way to both care for her father, with his various physical and mental ailments, and to marry the man she loves. In doing this, she has achieved a way of life which Burke would be proud of. The novel closes with Emma continuing to fulfill societal expectations of the duty owed to her father, and Burke commends this. He states:

> "I hope we shall never be so totally lost to all sense of the duties imposed upon us by the lay of social union, as, upon any pretext of public service, to confiscate the goods of a single unoffending citizen. Who but a tyrant (a name expressive of every thing which can vitiate and degrade human nature) could think of casting

> down men of exalted rank and sacred function, some of them of an age to call at once for reverence and compassion, of casting them down from the highest situation in the commonwealth, wherein they were maintained by their own landed property, to a state of indigence, depression and contempt?" (Burke 105).

In Burke's eyes, Emma has accepted the duty imposed upon her—that of caring for her ailing father—and has not confiscated his well-being by leaving him behind to move in with Mr. Knightley. She has avoided becoming what Burke describes as a "tyrant," and has protected what little is left of Mr. Woodhouse's mental and physical health, saving it from delving deeper into suffering, "indigence, depression and contempt". Furthermore, her care and compassion towards her father has served to preserve his social rank. Austen leaves readers with a sense of composure as Emma, who was able to navigate her duty and debt towards her father, gives hope to others who are struggling to do the same.

Through her novel *Emma*, Austen allows readers to explore the debt and duty owed to parental figures, especially those suffering from mental and physical ailments. Emma, who is able to navigate her social life and to find happiness in an eventual marriage, all while fulfilling her role as Mr. Woodhouse's daughter, gives hope to various other individuals attempting to fulfill similar roles and expectations. Through a recognition of Mr. Woodhouse's physical frailties (including those seen through his fear of sickness and overconsumption of food) and his mental ones (including his heightened fear and memory incapacities), the politics of one's debt towards ailing elders are fully understood by even an unfamiliar reader. Through the overcoming of her father's dislike of marriage, as well as the acceptance of Mr. Knightley's love, Austen reveals to readers the Burkean ideal of the ability to both fulfill one's societal duty towards ailing parents; she also reveals how finding happiness in one's own life is not only possible in the most perfect of circumstances, but is also possible amidst difficulties. Furthermore, Mr. Knightley's willingness to share in Emma's debt in caring for her father shows that care for ailing elders is still a societal expectation. Through the exploration of Mr. Woodhouse's thoughts and health, Emma's changing views towards marriage, and an overarching theme of Burkean duty and debt, the finding of happiness amidst difficulties can be seen. Although it continues to be difficult to care for aging parents in modern times—especially with the added burden of children and other duties—Austen's

character Emma shows that it is possible; it may not always be easy, but it is definitely possible.

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The Erotic, The Body Politic, and the AIDS Epidemic: The Literary and Lived Erotic as Queer Solidarity

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"I know it when I see it." Referred to by legal scholars as "one of the most famous phrases in the entire history of Supreme Court opinions" (Gewirtz 1023), this remark captures one Justice's inability to define the obscene. For millennia, humans have created and admired art that centers human sexuality and sex. Humans have likewise

attempted to censor such art for centuries, with Catholic leaders making tremendous efforts to desexualize statues and painted figures in the late Renaissance (Bond). In the process, these Cardinals and Popes "actually desecrated statues and had their genitalia removed completely" (Bond). It makes sense, then, that in her 1978 essay, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," Audre Lorde describes society as "racist, patriarchal, *and anti-erotic* [emphasis added]*"* (59). Lorde's essay pronounces that the erotic – but not the pornographic – is a liberatory tool for women, "rooted in the power of [women's] unexpressed or unrecognized feeling" (53). It is precisely this history of nonrecognition and suppression that makes the erotic a pivotal motif in David Wojnarowicz's "In the Shadow of the American Dream." In fact, Wojnarowicz's chapter demonstrates both the manners through which the erotic has been denied to gay men and the use of the erotic as a liberatory tool for those who do not identify as women. Hence, the erotic is a collective source of empowerment available to anyone who has been marginalized for their sexuality, and it offers a point of unity for all queer people.

First, it is important to note that Lorde spoke of the erotic as a woman, for women, *to women.* Her essay was first delivered as a speech at Mount Holyoke College, a women's college, on August 25, 1978. The audience is likewise clear from the very diction of the piece, as Lorde says, "As women, *we* have come to distrust that power which rises from *our* deepest and nonrational knowledge [emphasis added]" (53). Lorde's use of the first person plural through words like "we" and "our" indicates that her essay on the erotic is both a theory and a call to action for women. One must consider Lorde's audience, then, when interpreting "Uses of the Erotic." It would be unfair to claim, for example, that Lorde was necessarily excluding any specific group (such as queer men) in her theory because Lorde was not speaking to queer men. Still, her essay offers powerful insights to people within and without the intended audience.

But first, what *is* Lorde's theory of the erotic? Lorde often defines the erotic by negation – by what is not erotic. Lorde explains that the erotic "has often been misnamed by men," who incorrectly believe that mere sensation, pornography, or obscenity constitutes the erotic (54, 59). Instead, Lorde proposes that the erotic is "the personification of love in all its aspects – born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony" (55). It is a source of power, knowledge, and interpersonal connection. Above all, the erotic is an *action* of "sharing deeply any pursuit with another person" –

whether that is "danc[ing] hard, play[ing], or even [fighting]" (54, 59). A critical assertion by Lorde is that "the erotic cannot be felt secondhand" (59).

To some extent, Lorde's definition of the erotic is incompatible with categorizing "In the Shadow of the American Dream" as erotic art. Not only is "In the Shadow of the American Dream" by a man, but it attempts to convey erotic experiences secondhand. But Lorde's definition need not apply in all times, in all places, and to all people for it to be a valid representation of her reality. In fact, Wojnarowicz complicates Lorde's distinction between the pornographic and the erotic. Because Lorde contends that the erotic cannot be felt secondhand, it would seem that any attempt to capture and re-tell the erotic is a futile exercise in pornography. Yet from the beginning of the chapter, the reader understands that Wojnarowicz's story will center his experience with the erotic, and there is no indication that he seeks to write this experience as pornographic. If Wojnarowicz's text was intended to be pornographic, it would focus on sensation, but not feeling, for the reader. Instead, Wojnarowicz writes, "[d]riving a machine through the days and nights of the empty and pressured landscape eroticizes the whole world" (26). As the story progresses, primarily narrated from the driver's seat of a car, it becomes clear that Wojnarowicz is describing his sexual encounter for non-pornographic purposes, namely: 1) to convey "the suppression of the erotic" by the police state and society at-large (Lorde 53) and 2) to exemplify the erotic as that "most profoundly creative source" (Lorde 59).

Almost one quarter of "In the Shadow of the American Dream" describes a single sexual encounter Wojnarowicz has with "a freak: a circus giant in american bloodlines and genealogies" whom he encounters in a rest stop bathroom (Wojnarowicz 49). Before Wojnarowicz describes the sexual encounter, though, he explains that:

> State police get lots of overtime pay lurking around interstate rest stops hoping to catch some hungry queer kissing another in the loneliness of the tiled bathrooms. Some cops make it a point to step back from urinals and flash their hard dicks at a suspected queer and then arrest him when he makes a move to show he's interested (Wojnarowicz 50).

While much of "In the Shadow of the American Dream" blurs the line between reality and the imagined, this passage is particularly disheartening because it is not imagined. According to a 1990 article in the LA-based LGBT magazine, *The Advocate,* New Jersey

cops “made 540 arrests of men" at one rest stop alone, often using entrapping methods such as “flirting with unaccompanied men…and pretending to masturbate” (Bull). The state’s financial motives are also apparent in the article, which explains that the borough of “Ridgefield collected more than $200,000 in fines from men found guilty of lewdness charges” (Bull). Above all, Wojnarowicz’s claim that the state troopers were actually paid *overtime* by entrapping gay men underscores the particular interest government had in policing non-normative sexual identities. By paying the officers above and beyond what they would normally earn, the police state actually rewarded the suppression of the gay erotic.

The ubiquitous threat of the police is understood by both Wojnarowicz and the man he meets at the rest stop. The two of them “look for a side road…a place away from the trooper patrol cars” (Wojnarowicz 50). Again, it is clear from Wojnarowicz’s description that police do not just punish cruising gay men but seek them out. This proactive (as opposed to reactive) attempt to deny gay men the erotic is precisely what makes the sexual encounter (and the literature produced as a result of it) subversive and powerful, though. Still, this power is constantly interrupted and undermined. At one point, for example, the other man’s “face turned toward [Wojnarowicz] and began the slow swim through space” (51); however, this spiritual moment is interrupted by the man’s fear-laden question, “You ain’t a cop are you?” (Wojnarowicz 51).

As the narration continues, it becomes increasingly graphic. The question of whether or not Wojnarowicz’s writing is pornography or erotic art or something in the middle arises throughout the 10-page narration. Lorde explains that “[p]ornography emphasizes sensation without feeling” (54), but Wojnarowicz puts significant effort into capturing the emotional feeling of his sexual encounter. He explains that “[t]ime had lost its strobic beat and all structures of movement and sensation and taste and sight and sound became fragmented” (Wojnarowicz 54). If sensation itself “became fragmented,” then the narrator is left only with what he is feeling – in a word, the erotic. Regardless, the erotic is again interrupted by the men’s need to scan “the road in front of [them]…looking for any signs of cop or trooper cars that might glide up silently and unannounced” (Wojnarowicz 54). Hence, for Wojnarowicz (and centuries of queer people), the erotic is punctuated by their identity as a “fugitive soul” (54). For every moment of “free-floating space and semiconsciousness and an eventual, small,

momentary death," there is the threat of a car "in the distance" – an indiscernible but still real potential for persecution (Wojnarowicz 55). Each "tourist's camper or a small sedan" is, unintentionally, a derision of the erotic for the two men and a source of "fear and apprehension–mixed with pleasure and frustration" (Wojnarowicz 55). Notably, the fact that civilian cars also interrupt Wojnarowicz's sexual encounter symbolizes the way that the public at large also suppresses the queer erotic. Cultural norms, such as pervasive homophobia, play an equally important role in suppressing the queer erotic because the public polices same-sex eroticism in a way that they do not police heterosexual eroticism (such as two opposite-sex teenagers making out on a bus). Hence, it is not merely the police state but also the unknowing civilian in her small sedan or camper that threatens Wojnarowicz's experience.

Admittedly, there are passages within "In the Shadow of the American Dream" that are clearly intended to be obscene, or, at the very least, particularly lewd. On page 56, for example, Wojnarowicz describes an act of fellatio in a degree of detail that some readers might find offensive or anti-literary. Such passages are critical, though, in complicating the distinction between "erotic art" and "pornography" as Lorde defines them. Specifically, it is clear that phrases like "I see the hallucinogenic way his pores are magnified, and each hair is discernible from the other" stems from the "profoundly creative" inspiration that Wojnarowicz draws from the act of fellating (Wojnarowicz 56, Lorde 59). The spiritual nature of this fellatio is clear to the reader, and Wojnarowicz offers the reader the opportunity to at least *try* to understand "those physical, emotional, and psychic" components of fellating a random man from a rest stop (Lorde 56). While bordering on pornographic, the scene effectively "lessens the threat of [Wojnarowicz's] difference" – which is precisely the goal of the erotic according to Lorde (Lorde 56).

The particular difference which Wojnarowicz's erotic writing addresses is two-fold: first, queerness and second, his status as a Person Living with AIDS (PWA). Just as the repeated focus on police encourages the reader to sympathize with Wojnarowicz as a queer person, the lewd descriptions of his sexual encounter dismantle the difference between PWAs and readers who are not HIV/AIDS positive. Specifically, the reader knows that Wojnarowicz, at the time of publication, was living with HIV. With this background knowledge, the reader recalls passages like:

> I remembered a friend of mine dying from AIDS, and while he was visiting his family on the coast for the last time, he was seated in the grass during a picnic to which dozens of family members were invited. He looked up from his fried chicken and said, "I just want to die with a big dick in my mouth" (Wojnarowicz 44).

One of the most basic human desires – the desire to freely and safely experience the erotic – is fundamentally and juridically denied to PWAs. Wojnarowicz's lewd narrations remind the reader that PWAs crave the "replenishing and proactive force" that is the erotic in the same way that HIV-negative people do (Lorde 54). Yet despite this sameness, many "state laws criminalize behaviors that cannot transmit HIV and apply regardless of actual transmission" ("HIV-Specific Criminal Laws"). Hence, "In the Shadow of the American Dream" reminds the reader that PWAs are no different than a reader who might also want "a big dick in [their] mouth," yet only the PWA is criminalized and systematically denied this erotic connection[1].

As both Lorde and Wojnarowicz articulate, the queer community has long been denied the ability to freely experience – let alone artistically express – the erotic. The memory of trans/queer martyrs is ever present in our collective memory, from artists like Federico García Lorca and Oscar Wilde to activists like Marsha P. Johnson. The painful memories of those queer people, like Alan Turing, who were chemically castrated despite his nation "ow[ing him] the greatest possible debt for what he achieved" likewise lingers in collective memory (Currer-Briggs), even as society allegedly progresses and ends its suppression of the queer erotic. This is precisely why the erotic offers a common tool of empowerment to all queer people today.

In 1975, *The Advocate* published a review of a forthcoming "non-sexist erotic journal" called *Ecstasy* (Zellerbach). Although *Ecstasy* wasn't exclusively for or by queer people, the article explained that *Ecstasy* offered "the gay and feminist movements" the opportunity "to realize the potential and political implications of a truly free and non-sexist sexuality" (Zellerbach). In doing so, the article's author was – intentionally or not – envisioning the erotic as a common liberatory tool for people of all genders, across

[1] My point here is not to universalize Wojnarowicz's friend's desire to fellate. I recognize that many readers (for any number of reasons) will not want that at all; rather, my point is that the anecdote dismantles the concept of difference for, at the very least, some readers.

activist movements. It is especially interesting, then, that while the erotic looks entirely different for people of different gender identities, sexualities, individual preferences, etc., *Ecstasy* constructed a platform in which all audiences would access and find joy in the erotic. In fact, an editor for the magazine explained that they would "provide a forum for…[anyone who] can generate non-sexist erotic material" (Zellerbach). Hence, while pornographic magazines cater to audiences with a shared attraction (say, the way that *Playboy* panders to the heterosexual male gaze specifically), true erotic art offers something starkly different – something that transcends an individual's attraction and dismantles difference.

Videographic evidence from the ACT UP movement likewise demonstrates how the erotic is a tool of collective empowerment, offering joint liberatory power to people of different lifestyles and sexual identities. In *United in Anger,* director Jim Hubbard compiles real footage from ACT UP meetings and protests as well as documentary-style interviews with the activists themselves. One such activist, Jim Eigo, explained that "ACT UP was an erotic place. The Monday meetings were…in some ways almost the first place that you could celebrate sexuality again after AIDS hit" (0:46:10). Although "there [was] all kinds of cruising going on on the sides" (0:07:34), this cruising was not peripheral to the movement, and it was not mere pleasure-seeking. The erotic was used as a political tool, with some demonstrations involving public kissing (Hubbard). As a result, such subversive uses of the erotic were "very sexy," and activist Maria Maggenti explained, "that's one reason people wanted to be in on it" (0:45:20). In fact, first-hand descriptions of the "sexy" side of ACT UP meetings closely mirror Lorde's description of the erotic:

> AIDS actually had been a very powerful weapon against a lot of sexual freedom. It was a given that sexual freedom had to be defended in the face of a deadly epidemic, and the whole atmosphere of what ACT UP was was a bubbling cauldron of tremendous political energy and ideas and action *and* flirting and cruising…It was a combination of serious politics and joyful living that was so great in ACT UP…That combination is what you need in order to continue. You need some life. (0:47:26)

Such a description echoes Lorde herself, who wrote many years before the ACT UP movement:

> When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as…that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives…That self-connection shared is a measure of the joy which I know myself to be capable of feeling, a reminder of my capacity for feeling… Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world (55-59)

Just as Lorde proposes that the erotic breaks down "[t]he dichotomy between the spiritual and the political" (56), ACT UP was able to unite members' political activism with their pursuit of fulfillment and meaning. Hence, ACT UP carried on a longer tradition of "erotic attraction and political commitment [that] coexisted and reinforced each other" (Hobson 127). And notably, ACT UP was not a monolithic movement. The erotic space that was ACT UP brought together people of all identities, mobilizing even members of the general public (Hubbard). Many of these people, lesbians in particular, were "on the front lines of the health crisis" even when "they [were] not…in a high risk group" (Byron).

Lorde is clear and uncompromising in her description of the erotic as a tool for women's liberation. But this does not mean that the erotic is *only* a tool for women's liberation. The literature of David Wojnarowicz, publications like *Ecstasy,* and the activist work of ACT UP demonstrate that the erotic offers a point of unity for all queer people even if their practice of the erotic is vastly different. The queer erotic has not merely been suppressed by cultural norms, it has been historically suppressed by juridical institutions like the police and government at large. In fact, the erotic has even been suppressed by queer people themselves. In her monograph about lesbian and gay leftist solidarity in America, Emily Hobson points out that "more openly erotic and widely circulated" queer magazines such as *Drum* were often disfavored by early "homophile" movements which sought neoliberal assimilation into heterosexual America (19). Even though *Drum* was more widely-read than magazines such as the *Mattachine Review*, *The Ladder*, and *One,* it was rejected precisely because erotic art, by definition, does not assimilate into heterosexual, Anglo-Christian America. The fact that the erotic as a tool of empowerment radically rejects assimilation into cisheteronormative America might scare some people. But Lorde is equally

uncompromising on this point. She points out that "male models of power" encourage the suppression of the erotic as an "illusory" strength – one which gives the impression of empowerment all while "distort[ing] those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change" (Lorde 53).

The queer erotic is not merely subversive; even today, in some places, it is criminal. By embracing this criminality, queer people surely undermine our hopes of assimilation into straight society. And that's precisely the point. Through an embrace of true erotic art, we may strive to build a different – perhaps even an *anti*-anti-erotic – society. I do not know what that society will look like, but I like to think I'll know it when I see it.

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