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Symbol to Substance: Reconciling the Divine in Marilynne Robinson's *Lila*

Kathryn Cragun, Brigham Young University

In the novel *Lila*, Marilynne Robinson explores the nature of faith through the unlikely union of Reverend John Ames, a preacher rooted in scriptural tradition, and his wife, Lila, a woman whose belief is grounded in the often-harsh realities of human experience. Despite John Ames's lifelong calling to theology, Robinson clarifies that "I consider Lila to be, in her way, as much a theologian as John Ames is. She's just a natural theologian, as they would say" ("Talking with Marilynne Robinson" 31). Marilynne Robinson contrasts John Ames's abstract, symbol-laden faith with Lila's grounded, experiential spirituality to critique the limitations of a purely doctrinal approach to religion; through Lila's influence, Ames learns to embrace a more immediate, humanized relationship with God, revealing that faith is enriched when it bridges both theological understanding and lived experience. In turn, Ames helps Lila trust in a divine presence that transcends human understanding and gives her words from scripture to interpret her growing faith. Ultimately, Robinson's portrayal of Lila and Ames's relationship reveals a vision of faith that is neither purely doctrinal nor entirely experiential but enriched by the interplay of both. This dynamic spirituality underscores the importance of bridging theological complexity with the realities of human life, presenting faith as a living, transformative force shaped by both sacred tradition and everyday human connection.

Lila's Humanizing Influence on Ames's Abstract Faith

As a preacher by occupation, John Ames is a symbolic figure of faith and man's relationship with God. While that impression of Ames wouldn't be incorrect—he is a deeply spiritual person—his faith is firmly based on scriptural doctrine and theology and so, in many ways, it is a symbolic and abstract faith. In sermons written about "people

dead who knows how long" (Robinson, *Lila* 74), he connects every-day experience with God's higher power, but God is a blurry, albeit holy, figure who exists in a plane higher than human comprehension. Lila exposes gaps in Ames's understanding of faith by suggesting that his faith needs to extend to even the uncomfortable parts of theology and its basis in human experience. For example, Ames shows his spiritual boundaries when he responds to Lila's inquiry about hell: "There are other things I believe in. God loves the world. God is gracious. I can't reconcile, you know, hell and the rest of it to things I do believe. And feel I understand, in a way. So I don't talk about it very much" (Robinson, *Lila* 99). While a spiritual foundation of grace is central to Christian belief, Ames employs its abstraction like a spiritual band-aid to avoid difficult and unanswerable questions about divine justice.

Lila reasons, "Maybe you don't have to think about hell because probly nobody you know going to end up there" (Robinson, *Lila* 102). With Lila, Ames is faced with real-world applications of God's grace that demand that he reconcile his notions of life and religion. Mark Scott writes of Lila, "Her reflections on suffering problematize easy answers. She refuses to accept pious platitudes, testing their plausibility against the touchstone of her experience. In other words, she keeps Ames honest" (212). Lila is not particularly concerned with feeling pleasant feelings from religion; she is more concerned with how religion might help her to make sense of the unpleasant.

Ames's relationship with God is arguably composed of religious symbolism that, by nature, calls for distance and abstraction to interpret spiritual matters generally deemed non-understandable. When Lila inquires if Ames believes that God might be in their house, just as his grandfather claimed, he explains, "Well, my thinking about these things isn't really the same as my grandfather's. I suppose I should say my experience is different from his" (Robinson 142). Ames's experiences with God have been mediated through sacred signifiers, such as the church or the Bible, rather than "ground level" experiences with God, such as his grandfather talking to Jesus in the parlor. Lila challenges Ames's faith by suggesting that our relationship with God need not always be symbolic or mediated.

Ames acknowledges that he married Lila in part because he recognized that she had things to teach him that he would never otherwise learn (Robinson, *Lila* 128). This is proved true: he is exposed to the poverty of his scripture driven sermons, and he states in regard to the Bible that "I guess I'll have to read the whole thing over again"

based on Lila's understanding (132). Lila paves the way for Ames to accept that doctrine is not belief, it is only one way of talking about belief, and that conventional beliefs about concepts like salvation and redemption can create false expectations. Because of Lila, Ames acknowledges his belief in abstractions and occasional inability to reconcile himself to everyday manifestations of God's grace: "You know, there are things I believe, things I could never prove, and I believe them all day, every day. It seems to me that my mind would stop dead without them. And here, when I have tangible proof . . . I can't quite believe it. That I'm here with you" (Robinson, *Lila* 114). As Robinson writes in "Psalm Eight," Lila lives with the belief that "With all respect to heaven, the scene of miracle is here, among us" (243).

Lila is a complement to Ames because her spiritual foundation is built on her ability to connect human beings to religious abstractions. For example, of her first baptism, Lila reflects on the following: "He surely did look like he meant every word he said. The heavens torn asunder. A dove descending. There was no sign of all that except the look on his face and the touch of his hand" (Robinson, *Lila* 100). For Lila, the power of her baptism was not in its religious symbolism but in the fact that it was performed by John Ames, whose awkward desire to bless was able to administer grace more to her than an unseen symbolic power. She reflects Robinson's philosophy that "the brilliance of the human face is the image of God" ("Talking with Marilynne Robinson" 32). Lila's understanding of grace as something inherently human creates more room for human connection and empathy. This is demonstrated by her response to the boy in the shed: Lila humanizes the boy while Ames views him only as a "rough-looking individual" (Robinson, *Lila* 163). Anand and Chatterjee argue that with Lila's belief that God is found in humanity, she brings a sort of prophetic influence to Gilead: "Departing from scriptural absolutisms advocated by her husband . . . Lila prophetically draws upon lived experiences along with familial and kinship bonds to distinctly redefine doctrinal Christianity, making it both inclusive and compassionate" (444). Lila expands Ames's distant and sometimes formal charity to embrace more of God's creations, nudging him to venture into raw and messy compassion.

In simple terms, the primary contrast between Lila and Ames is what they believe the knowability of God to be. Ames writes in a sermon of a "God, who is unknowable" (Robinson, *Lila* 223) and often refers to God by a sacred title such as "Lord." In contrast, Lila often

refers to God on a first-name basis, as "Jesus." Lila's comfortability with God indicates a personal understanding of who God is, not as an abstraction, but as a real being that interacts with His children. For example, she imagines the moment of the blessing of Ames's first child in which "two young men [stood] in that room, one of them Jesus. One of them hardly knowing what to think, the other knowing, leaving it to Boughton to find words if he could" (Robinson, *Lila* 170). After her birth, she imagines again that there will be Boughton and Jesus, "still keeping His thoughts to Himself" (Robinson, *Lila* 172). Lila humanizes Ames's unknowable God with a personality, literally placing him in situations of ordinary human suffering. In doing so, she closes the distance between Jesus as an abstraction and Jesus as a reality. This concretizing of Jesus aligns with Robinson's theology: "In all the varying accounts of his encounters with his followers after the resurrection, Jesus is concealed from them by his ordinariness" ("Psalm Eight" 242). Because the spiritual is not concealed from Lila in the ordinary or secular, she can envision Jesus as a man—even as a friend.

Ultimately, the tension between Ames and Lila's perspectives reflects a universal spiritual struggle: how does one make sense of belief in a world that is so often painful? Ames's abstract, symbolic theology speaks to the comfort many find in religious tradition and scripture, while Lila's grounded, experiential approach insists that faith must grapple with the grittiness of human life. In an age where many grapple with the limits of institutional religion and seek more authentic expressions of faith, Lila's insistence that God can be found in human touch, in suffering, and in ordinary rooms, offers a model for a more compassionate, embodied spirituality—one that is less about answers and more about presence. Robinson demonstrates through *Lila* that divinity is not only above us, but among us, and perhaps even beside us in the most unassuming forms.

Ames's Reverential Influence on Lila's Realistic Faith

Although Lila's faith is located firmly within humanity's difficult reality, her faith is inescapably sparked and nurtured through ritual acts initiated by John Ames. At the beginning of the novel, Lila only has a distant concept of an unknown Lord with which she believes she has no relationship, questioning "If there was a Good Lord. Doll had never mentioned Him" (Robinson, *Lila* 17). Lila's mature faith by the end of the novel is due in part to her ritual and symbolic study of

the Bible Ames gave her. She initially selects texts from the "harder" parts of the Bible, like Ezekiel and Job, to practice her writing, but even as she begins to read the Bible for its spiritual worth, she continues to choose those passages in which "people were a desolation and a reproach. She knew what those words meant without asking. In the sight of all that pass by" (Robinson, *Lila* 125). Robinson writes that everywhere in Hebrew Scripture, including Ezekiel, God's children reaffirm "yes, foolish; yes, guilty; yes, weak; yes, sad and bewildered. Yes, resistant to cherishing and rebellious against expectation" ("Psalm Eight" 240). Lila chooses these sections of the Bible to inform her faith because she is interested in a religion with a depth of grace that can reach beyond the deepest depths of human weakness, thus encompassing figures like herself and Doll.

Kathryn Ludwig argues that Lila first encounters the dividing line between the sacred and the secular when she steps inside the threshold of the church and sees Ames for the first time. In this moment, the cleansing waters of holy baptism are juxtaposed with the earthly rain outside. Lila's reluctance to enter the church in this scene is evidence of Lila's discomfort with the sphere of the sacred. But Ludwig continues,

> When Lila later decides to be baptized, the narrative overturns Lila's assumptions that the religious and the secular are relegated to separate physical spheres. Ames administers the ritual on a hill, as opposed to in the sanctuary of the church, using river water and a fishing bucket. In this scene, the materials available in nature are not more or less miraculous than those kept in the sanctuary for the purpose of blessing. (171)

Ames demonstrates to Lila that the sacred need not be separate from what she already knows and understands about the "real world." Later in the novel, Lila states, "Baptism is a prayer." Ames responds, "Baptism is what I'd call a fact" (Robinson, *Lila* 237). Ames describes his experience with ritualistic, symbolic faith as even more real than family, wife, or marriage. Despite baptism's abstraction as a symbolic act, Ames is empowered by his faith in its symbolic power.

Robinson stated in an interview with *Reform Magazine* that "Religion makes experience meaningful and sacred—or it expresses the fact that these things are true of experience, properly understood. It does indeed add another dimension to experience" ("Marilynne

Robinson Interview"). Ames gives Lila words from his religious tradition to speak of her lived experiences with God; he provides religious context to the suffering and grace she already knows. Although Lila is at first reluctant to gain a baptism and a church, the novel doesn't set out to remedy her "incomplete assimilation . . . neither does its present Lila as an example of 'weak religion'" (Ludwig 163). Lila's rejection of abstractions allows for a unique and humanizing faith, but it is also a faith limited only to what Lila can and cannot see. To quote Sosler, for Lila, the "church can be seen as the training ground of the soul" in a way that extends further than her own power to notice everyday demonstrations of grace (68).

Ames teaches Lila to have faith in those things she cannot see or hardly believe. As she is mentored in her spiritual walk by Ames, who, like Robinson herself, cultivates uncertainty as a form of reverence, Lila discovers that belief requires an acknowledgement of mystery, and that certainty is elusive even to the faithful (Ludwig 165). Mark Scott writes the following comparison: "Lila enjoins us to situate the problem of evil theoretically and experientially, and to interrogate proposed 'solutions' relentlessly against our experiences and moral instincts. Ames invites us to explore the possibilities of divine grace in a spirit of humility, without forcing false resolutions. While it does not solve the problem, it creates space for more productive dialogue" (214). Ames's encouragement of religious humility rather than asserting rigid conclusions to matters of religion gives Lila the space to explore her own spirituality and contribute to Ames's understanding of faith.

Lila's spiritual development offers a compelling example of how ritual can serve not as a barrier but as a bridge between sacred mystery and lived reality. In a world where many feel alienated from traditional religious spaces or skeptical of symbolic acts, *Lila* suggests that practices of faith such as baptism, scripture study, and prayer can still hold deep personal significance, especially when they are introduced with empathy, humility, and a willingness to meet people where they are. Ames's gentle guidance helps Lila see that religious language and ritual need not overwrite her lived experience but can give it new dimension and depth. In turn, Lila's honest grappling with suffering and her resistance to easy answers model a faith that honors doubt and mystery. Robinson's portrayal of their dynamic invites readers today to reconsider the value of religious tradition—not as something rigid

or obsolete, but as a living framework capable of holding real human lives, with all their pain, wonder, and contradiction.

Conclusion

Robinson's synthesis of the values of Christianity and humanism encourages a reconciliation of intellect and intuition, tradition and progress, sacred and secular. Sosler quotes Robinson as saying, "There is a deeply rooted notion that the material exists in opposition to the spiritual," and succinctly adds, "In sum, there is a conflict between the sacred and secular that needs ironing out" (60). But for Robinson, the sacred and secular are a false dichotomy: there is only one existence. Her novels, particularly *Lila*, figure the deconstruction of a religious-secular binary in which both Lila and Ames have valid perspectives of faith, despite vastly different experiences and methods of thinking.

Lila's humanizing perspective challenges Ames to reconcile his symbolic understanding of God with the tangible realities of grace and suffering, while Ames provides Lila with a vocabulary and framework to explore the divine beyond what is immediately visible. This mutual transformation speaks to the broader significance of faith in navigating the tension between the sacred and the secular, the abstract and the concrete, and the unknowable and the familiar. Together, they model a dynamic spirituality that reveals Robinson's vision of a more inclusive and compassionate way of enacting religion—one that finds the divine not solely in sacred symbols but also in the human capacity to give and receive grace in everyday life. In doing so, the novel invites readers to consider faith not as a static creed but as a living, evolving force that finds its fullest expression in relationships, deliberate ritual, and the grace of shared understanding.

KATHRYN CRAGUN recently graduated from Brigham Young University with a degree in English (professional writing emphasis) and a minor in editing. She wrote this paper for an author studies course focused on Marilynne Robinson. Her favorite genre is contemporary realistic fiction, and some of her favorite books include Robinson's *Gilead*, Fredrik Backman's *Anxious People*, and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*.

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Conscious Genre, Conscious Characters: Genre Realization Moments in Shakespeare Plays

Lauren Donahue, University of South Carolina

Introduction

Shakespeare's plays have long been sorted into genres; *Antony and Cleopatra* is one of the most famous tragedies ever written, and *Much Ado About Nothing* is heralded as an approachable Shakespearean comedy. The current use of genre is a way to examine a play, rather than a conversation to be had by the characters within the play's dramatic world. Despite convention, the conversation surrounding genre need not be limited to this outside perspective. When we study genre from within the play, we are privy to a larger and fuller understanding of the play through genre. If the study of character is to be complete, critics must take into account the characters' interactions with their environment and their place in it.

This type of self-referential perspective on character is not new; the discussion of the dramatic self has been active since Erving Goffman's 1950 book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, which uses dramaturgical conventions to explain how human beings interact consciously with their surroundings and adapt to change within those surroundings. While he does not use the term 'genre', some of his arguments create the shape of genre as we use it today, stating:

> Instead of having to maintain a different pattern of expectation and responsive treatment for each slightly different performer and performance, he can place the situation into a broad category around which it is easy for him to mobilize his past experience and stereo-typical thinking. Observers then need only be familiar with a small and hence manageable vo-

> cabulary of fronts and know how to respond to them in order to orient themselves in a wide variety of situations. (16)

The 'vocabulary of fronts' that Goffman suggests conveniently aligns with modern-day ideas of dramaturgical genre; that is, wherein Goffman's perspective an actor may identify different locations or roles as fronts, which can then be categorized for ease of practice by the actor, characters can and do use similar methods to identify genre within a text and present the self accordingly. By thinking of genre not just as a critical lens through which to analyze a play, but instead as a collection of signals that characters then react to, we can expand our potential for analysis of character; this perspective allows characters themselves to recognize, react to, and interact with genre.

Increasingly, Elizabethan literature became concerned with the framing and reframing of situations through rhetoric. Characters in Shakespeare's plays often contemplate the framing of their life, sometimes going as far as outright using generic terms, "The quick comedians Extemporally / will stage us and present / Our Alexandrian revels" (*Antony and Cleopatra* 5. 2. 263). Self-reflective dialogue in these instances is not constrained to these characters' view of their own personalities but goes further to use reflection on personality to reflect on circumstance. Frances Ferguson's "Rape and the Rise of the Novel," in its argument for a novel's construction of inner psyche, states "Identity is forged in the process of the individual's adjusting to make the text of the past event whole" (104). Character and circumstance cannot be separated, and to analyze character must include an analysis of their context. It follows, then, that when a character analyzes themselves, they, too, can critically analyze their context.

I argue that within the world of a Shakespeare play, these moments of generic epiphany can be identified and analyzed in what I will call genre realization moments. For this paper, genre realization moments are defined as a singular moment in which a character interacts critically with their circumstances to come to a new understanding of the overall shape of their narrative. It is important to identify these genre realization moments in order to gain a full understanding of the driving characters of Shakespeare's plays; by identifying where in the play their circumstantial perspective changes, we are able to understand the motive behind critical moments of action or inaction.

For this paper, genre realization moments will be divided into two categories: the realization of true genre, which will be examined

through *Antony and Cleopatra*, and the realization of temporary genre, which will use *Much Ado About Nothing*. Realization of true genre encapsulates the quintessential genre realization moment, in which a character operates under an incorrect assumption of genre, has a generic epiphany, and changes their behavior to accommodate the new generic understanding. Realization of temporary genre extends the use of genre realization moments to compensate for a divided cast, or a sudden dramatic shift in stakes, which is then realized by a character and understood as a new, temporary genre, thereby influencing the character's perspective and actions.

Realization of True Genre

The most straightforward genre realization moments commonly originate in plays which the audience is able to immediately recognize as tragic, such as *Antony and Cleopatra*. This play utilizes the audience's understanding of genres to heighten our horror at a character's actions; until a genre realization moment occurs, it is their misunderstanding of genre that creates tension between plot and character. A realization of true genre occurs most often in tragedy, as tragedies are often built around the loss of hope. In a genre realization moment, this loss of hope occurs alongside a loss of comedy. Cleopatra's genre realization moment in *Antony and Cleopatra* is perhaps the most obvious; this play has the benefit of dividing its understanding of genre geographically, making it easy for the audience to track which group of people believes what story is taking place. Until Cleopatra's genre realization moment, if we are in Egypt, we believe that we are in comedy. If we are in Rome, we know the tragedy that is soon to occur. Not only is Cleopatra's genre realization moment a passionate monologue, but it also occurs as Rome invades Egypt: tragedy invading comedy.

As audiences stare up at Cleopatra on stage, the urge to warn her of what she is so obviously missing becomes almost unbearable. She parades across the stage, secure in her position as ruler of a land untouched by conflict and lover of a powerful and devoted man. "Cleopatra!" we want to cry, "Don't you know there's a war on its way!" Cleopatra, of course, cannot hear us. We have the benefit of knowing ahead of time that this play is a tragedy; she does not. It is hard to blame her for thinking of her story as a comedy, for trusting that her love will conquer all, for believing her position and country are secure. Throughout the beginning of *Antony and Cleopatra*, Cleopatra plays with framing as easily as she plays with her subjects; kind

one minute, harsh the next, her actions depend on circumstance. She is uniquely and constantly aware of the framing of her situations: "If you find him sad, / Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report / That I am sudden sick. Quick, and return" (1, 3, 4). She uses these calculated reactions to her benefit throughout the first four acts of the play, up until, finally, she realizes that circumstance disenfranchises her. When Cleopatra looks at her story, as we look at our own lives, all seems well. Her realization that all is not well allows the audience to witness the unraveling of that false reality.

Antony and Cleopatra does not merely include a genre realization moment; it depends upon one. Cleopatra's monologue in Act 4, Scene 15, which I will here include in full and continue to pull from throughout this section, shifts her character from its comedic role, which was supported in Egypt, to a tragic figure:

> No more but e'en a woman, and commanded
> By such poor passion as the maid that milks
> And does the meanest chares. It were for me
> To throw my scepter at the injurious gods,
> To tell them that this world did equal theirs
> Till they had stolen our jewel. All's but naught.
> Patience is sottish, and impatience does
> Become a dog that's mad. Then is it sin
> To rush into the secret house of death
> Ere death dare come to us? How do you, women?
> What, what, good cheer! Why, how now, Charmian?
> My noble girls! Ah, women, women! Look,
> Our lamp is spent; it's out. Good sirs, take heart.
> We'll bury him; and then, what's brave, what's noble,
> Let's do 't after the high Roman fashion
> And make death proud to take us. Come, away.
> This case of that huge spirit now is cold.
> Ah women, women! Come, we have no friend
> But resolution and the briefest end. (86–105)

As the Roman war closes in on the Mediterranean, so does it close in on the plot of *Antony and Cleopatra*. This monologue marks Cleopatra's realization of the extent to which she has been living in delusion;

while she has been operating under the assumption that she is living a comedy, she has now had the epiphany of the true shape of her tale, and with it, her own fate.

Cleopatra's opening line of her monologue, "No more but e'en a woman," perfectly encapsulates her generic epiphany. Thus far in her story, Cleopatra has been an all-powerful queen, capable of usurping Roman political power and political relationships alike. Cleopatra is a lover, but her queenship defines her self-view more than Antony. Furthermore, her relationship with Antony revolves around her queenship; they love each other as equal powers: "Hear me, queen: / The strong necessity of time commands / Our services awhile, but my full heart / Remains in use with you" (*Antony and Cleopatra* 1.3.52–55). This position of authority lends itself to Egypt's comedic revelry; it is Cleopatra's power that keeps Egypt above Roman wartime.

Now though, the war is close at hand, and Cleopatra has realized that she has no power to keep it out of Egypt. The laughable nature of a foreign war, which up to this point existed as a backdrop to her passionate romance, has suddenly become grave and immediate. As a queen, Cleopatra commanded conflict out of her court, teasing Antony enough that he dismisses his country altogether: Cleopatra's sardonic "You must not stay here longer; your dismission / Is come from Caesar. Therefore hear it, Antony. / Where's Fulvia's process? Caesar's, I would say—both?" (Antony and Cleopatra 1.1.30–32) is answered by Antony with "Let Rome in Tiber melt and the wide arch / Of the ranged empire fall" (Antony and Cleopatra 1.1.38–39). Now though, she sees the level of power that she truly wields, no more than the average woman. Relegated from queen, Cleopatra is recognizing not only her political downfall, but her narrative one. The Egyptian comedy depended on her authority; Roman warfare depends on her lack of it.

Returning to Cleopatra's genre realization moment, her subsequent self-comparison to a maid, "as the maid that milks / And does the meanest chares", reflects her loss of sexual power, which gave her a position of authority over Antony, and, therefore, over Rome. The comparison to a maid elicits virginity and opens Cleopatra up as a person who could be corrupted. Instead of doing the defiling, as she does with Antony, "But stirred by Cleopatra. / Now for the love of Love and her soft hours, / Let's not confound the time with conference harsh. / There's not a minute of our lives should stretch / Without some pleasure now" (*Antony and Cleopatra* 1.1.50–54), Cleopatra is

the one defiled. This realization of loss of sexual power comes hand in hand with yet another reflection on political power, "And does the meanest chares," as Cleopatra compares herself to a working citizen of the lower class. The switch to tragedy is the moment in which she loses her privilege and position of sovereignty and instead becomes a citizen of the Roman empire.

Cleopatra asks, "Then is it sin / To rush into the secret house of death / Ere death dare come to us?" Cleopatra's plea is more than an investigation of the morality of wishing for death but is also a question of the rightness of the rushing of genre. Does her story demand a long death? Does it demand a satisfying one? In *Shakespeare and Cognition*, Neema Parvini states that "Shakespeare creates an internal reality, which, though often fantastical, gives us recognizably human characters who appear to think, feel and act in a way that is at least analogous to what we see in everyday life" (5). Cleopatra's internal reality, which has shifted to finally match her external one, is familiar despite its extremity. She has turned to the audience, hands outstretched, with a terrified, desperate, common question: Is it wrong to rush my story? Is it wrong to wish for a painless end, despite what you may have earned? This is a question Cleopatra is asking you, the audience; she is looking for an escape from the fate that awaits her but that she has only recently become aware of. When Cleopatra grapples with her upcoming fate, she is not just grappling with death, she is grappling with the change of her entire storyline. She has not only realized that she is about to die, but that her life was shaped around her death. "Ah women, women! Come, we have no friend / But resolution and the briefest end". A comedic death is funny, but a dramatic death is definitional. A dead Cleopatra within the comedy of Egypt is not the same body as a dead Cleopatra in Rome. Cleopatra has realized the weight of her death, and it is fear of that weight that leads her to plead with the audience: Look away. Laugh. Let me remain more than a dead girl. Let me die in my court, in my story, in my comedy.

Realization of Temporary Genre

While tragedies commonly support a realization of true genre, comedies often flirt with tragedy to create momentum within the plot before nicely resolving back into comedy. This introduction of tragedy is recognized by some characters as a shift in genre, which can then be identified as a distinct moment of realization. Further tension can be introduced by a failure to identify this shift into tragedy by an-

other set of characters, such as in *Much Ado About Nothing*. If *Antony and Cleopatra* supports a geographic play-within-a-play, with Egypt acting as a comedy, separate from Rome, *Much Ado About Nothing* uses gender as its generic divider. The genre shift in *Much Ado About Nothing*, centered around Beatrice's personal epiphany and internal monologue, marks the realization of tragedy for the women of the tale and the separation between men and women in their experience of genre. This genre realization moment, rather than centering around a character discovering the true genre of their story, investigates how genre can be experienced and conceptualized in different ways by different characters throughout a play.

The beginning of *Much Ado About Nothing* is comedic for all involved. The play opens with the return from war, thereby setting a precedent for a lack of real violence. Instead, the stakes for the protagonists are love, its reciprocation, and the threat of its betrayal: "But when shall we set the savage bull's horns / on the sensible Benedick's head?" (*Much Ado About Nothing* 5. 1. 193–195). A violent shift occurs when Hero is framed as disloyal; suddenly, the women and the men are operating within different worlds. Consequences haunt the women of Messina in a way that the men seem impervious to. At Hero's failed wedding, the men are able to deliver the news of Hero's doom and stroll away, "Come, let us go. These things, come thus to light, / Smother her spirits up" (*Much Ado About Nothing* 4.1.116–17), while the women (and Leonato, who presides over the feminine world) are left to reckon with the disastrous consequences of Hero's alleged indiscretion, "O Fate, take not away thy heavy hand! / Death is the fairest cover for her shame / That may be wished for" (*Much Ado About Nothing* 4.1.121–23). A genre shift has occurred, from comedy to tragedy, and fallen along gendered lines.

Beatrice, in particular, feels the gendered division of genre. Her genre realization moment occurs during her conversation with Benedick after the almost-wedding in Scene 4, Act 1. The two are shown to now be operating in two different worlds, a perspective Beatrice is keenly aware of, but Benedick seems ignorant to. On this scene, Parvini states that: "Beatrice makes it clear that although their romance is developing, her concern for Hero takes precedence" (32). This growing tension between Beatrice's desolation and Benedick's focus on his newfound-love manifests in an exchange with both familiar back-and-forth and unfamiliar anxiety, beginning on line 273.

This exchange will be included below and continued throughout the remainder of this section.

> BENEDICK: Surely I do believe your fair cousin is wronged.
> BEATRICE: Ah, how much might the man deserve of me that would right her!
> BENEDICK: Is there any way to show such friendship?
> BEATRICE: A very even way, but no such friend.
> BENEDICK: May a man do it?
> BEATRICE: It is a man's office, but not yours.
> BENEDICK: I do love nothing in the world so well as you. Is not that strange?
> BEATRICE: As strange as the thing I know not. It were as possible for me to say I loved nothing so well as you, but believe me not, and yet I lie not; I confess nothing, nor I deny nothing. I am sorry for my cousin. (273–87)

Beatrice responds to Benedick's first declaration with "I am sorry for my cousin." Her attention shifts from Benedick to Hero as she steps into her tragic role; Benedick is left behind in comedy. Their conversation therefore ends up disjointed and convoluted, with Beatrice focused on the revenge of her cousin, "Ah, how many might the man deserve of me / that would right her," and Benedick immediately pivoting the conversation towards romance, "I do love nothing in the world so well as you." Benedick has remained in the comedy, which Hero's death shattered for the women, and is therefore concerned with searching out his comedic end: marriage. Meanwhile, Beatrice has perceived her genre shift and is struggling to connect with Benedick all while grappling with the realization that her comedy has become a tragedy before her eyes.

This internal tension is vocalized when she is confronted with Benedick's inability to understand her perspective; whereas much of the play has centered around Benedick and Beatrice thinking and behaving similarly, now they are physically together but cannot have the same conversation. Beatrice realizes that she is more concerned about Hero than Benedick, and therefore more concerned about her tragedy than her comedy: "As strange as the thing I know not. It were as / possible for me to say I loved nothing so well as you, / but believe

me not, and yet I lie not; I confess / nothing, not I deny nothing. I am sorry for my / cousin." Benedick, ignorant of Beatrice's generic epiphany occurring before him, swears by the violent implement of tragedy that what remains important is their romance: "By my sword, Beatrice, thou lovest me!"

Beatrice's struggle with her new genre is seen in her back-and-forth between long, melodic declarations of love, in which she continues to banter with Benedick as she always has, and sharp, cutting declarations of mourning or intent. Their exchange continues to bounce back and forth until Beatrice changes the mood dramatically:

> BEATRICE: I love you with so much of my heart that none is left to protest.
> BENEDICK: Come, bid me do anything for thee.
> BEATRICE: Kill Claudio.
> BENEDICK: Ha! Not for the wide world.
> BEATRICE: You kill me to deny it. Farewell. (299–305)

Parvini argues that the tonal inconsistency furthers the idea of realistic inner worlds for Shakespeare's characters: "Shakespeare's characters exhibit internal conflict in the form of faulty self-knowledge, incontinence, self-deception" (10). Beatrice's struggle to fully accept her changed reality only furthers her apparent personhood, giving the audience more than a mere moment of painful acceptance to relate to, but a process. After their confessions to one another, Beatrice, as if remembering exactly what her circumstances have become and what story she is now in, ends the flowery language she previously used and bids Benedick to simply "Kill Claudio." The change in Beatrice is her internal acceptance of the tragedy of her situation; this straightforward demand is not out of character but is instead Beatrice's new, tragic character. Unlike Mercutio, who maintains his comedic nature even in death, "Ask for / me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man" (*Romeo and Juliet* 3.1.101–02), and who cannot adapt to the real genre of his world, Beatrice has realized and changed, even if her counterpart has not.

Benedick's response, "Ha! Not for the wide world," is more than just hyperbole. He is not just aggrandizing the task of murdering his friend, he is expressing what it would cost for him to conceptualize his story as a tragedy in the same way Beatrice does. Benedick's hyperbole is centered around his world; this is a moment in which he

is deciding which story he wishes to be in, Beatrice's or Claudio's. In this instance, it would literally mean the world for Benedick to kill Claudio; Beatrice is asking him to reshape his narrative and let go of the comedy that he has functioned in thus far. In turn, Beatrice's hyperbole, "You kill me to deny it," is centered around self. Genre has changed only for her and hers. Benedick's question of Claudio's place in Beatrice's story is not just a confirmation of the immediate situation, but a question of Beatrice's understanding of the story's genre:

> BENEDICK: Is Claudio thine enemy?
> BEATRICE: Is he not approved in the height a villain
> that hath slandered, scorned, dishonored my kinswoman?
> O, that I were a man! (314–17)

Beatrice confirms her genre realization and shares this perspective with Benedick through tragic crimes: ". . . slandered, scored, dishonored." Her subsequent line "O, that I were a man," is not just a cry for a man's autonomy, but for a man's genre.

As their conversation continues, Benedick becomes increasingly aware of the shift to tragedy through Beatrice:

> BENEDICK: Think you in your soul the Count Claudio
> hath wronged Hero?
> BEATRICE: Yea, as sure as I have a thought or a soul.
> BENEDICK: Enough, I am engaged. I will challenge
> him. I will kiss your hand, and so I leave you. By
> this hand, Claudio shall render me a dear account.
> As you hear of me, so think of me. Go comfort your
> cousin. I must say she is dead, and so farewell. (343–50)

As he is folded into the plot to save Hero, "I must say she is dead, and so farewell," Benedict begins to straddle the line between tragedy and comedy. He is aware of the female tragedy because of Beatrice, "Think you in your soul the Count Claudio / hath wronged hero?," but is seen by the other men as unchanged. Parvini argues that this line is an acknowledgment of Beatrice's successful rhetoric, with Benedick "attempt[ing] to persuade himself and to justify to himself the course of action he is about to take" (33). She furthers this argument by stating that "The real motivation is to prove his love . . . and so win Beatrice's affections" (33). I argue that, more than a simple check for

assurance or for future reward, Benedick is seeking perspective. As his role in the fake death plot expands with his challenge to Claudio, the audience begins to see his breakaway from the comedy that he thought he was in. While Benedick tries to impress the importance of his challenge, a challenge in which he has threatened his best friend with death, Claudio and the Prince are focused on romance: "I'll tell thee [Benedick] how Beatrice praised thy wit the other day. I said thou hadst a fine wit. 'True,' said she, 'a fine little one'" (*Much Ado About Nothing* 5.1.172–74). Benedick's much more serious response, "Fare you well, boy. You [Claudio] know my mind. I will leave you now to your gossip-like humor" (*Much Ado About Nothing* 5.1.197–98), is met with disbelief. While Claudio and the Prince are firmly entrenched within the male comedy, Benedick rebuffs their attempts at jest; because of the new stakes of Beatrice's courtship, he himself has become the one operating within a different worldview. The conversation between the three men highlights the different stories they see themselves as a part of, a distance only produced by Benedick's entanglement with Beatrice's generic epiphany.

During her genre realization moment, Beatrice is mourning not just her cousin, but the story she thought she would have. "You have stayed me in a happy hour. I was / about to protest I loved you". This shift to tragedy has afflicted only part of the cast. Unlike *Antony and Cleopatra* or *Romeo and Juliet*, whose genre realization moments centered around characters realizing the true genre of their play, *Much Ado About Nothing* uses genre realization moments to isolate part of the cast from another. Beatrice, and by extension her family, are suddenly interacting with genre in a different way than Benedick and the men. This change is used to highlight the division between the two; they aren't just dealing with different stakes; they have begun to function in different worlds.

Conclusion

Characters often think of themselves through a critical lens in works contemporary to Shakespeare. In Baldassare Castiglione's *The Courtier*, characters outright think of themselves as actors, and stratify their experiences depending on audience, location, and intent. Goffman extends this self-consciousness outside of literary narrative and into real life with a dramaturgical approach to sociology, stating:

> If this tendency of the audience to accept signs places the performer in a position to be misunderstood and makes it necessary for him to exercise expressive care regarding everything he does when before the audience, so also this sign-accepting tendency puts the audience in a position to be duped and misled, for there are few signs that cannot be used to attest to the presence of something that is not really there. (37)

Goffman equates the cues that we, as people, receive every day to dramatic signposting that can be found within a play. Awareness of these cues therefore culminates in an understanding of the genre of any given situation. For both characters and people to experience genre in mirroring critical processes, the subsequent identification of these processes becomes paramount within literature.

In real life, we interact with genre all the time; genre is simply an agreed-upon pattern that a story tends to fall into, a category for narrative. As people, we are often able to approach situations with foresight because those situations take a familiar shape. When a parent dies, it is recognized as tragic, and one can turn to a tragedy to learn how to act or to seek solace. This personal recognition of genre influences common, everyday decisions. It is because I identify a new romantic opportunity as comedy that I know to listen to upbeat music and watch romantic-comedies and gossip with my friends; I have learned from watching literary comedies how a comedic character acts. It is because I identify the loss of a parent as a tragedy that I know where I can cry, who I can lean on, who I need to let lean on me; I have learned from watching literary tragedies what my role is in a personal one. When diagnosis begins with the doctor warning you that the odds are low, we are reminded of the prologue before *Romeo and Juliet*, and its grim foresight. Like Romeo, this prologue may go ignored until it becomes unavoidable.

As fallible people, we often interpret the pattern of genre incorrectly or even construct a pattern that is not there. To think of yourself as a character within a romantic comedy, only to be rejected, is to perceive yourself as existing within the wrong genre. A sudden death of a loved one reveals a tragedy that one refused to believe would ever come. In *Narrative Discourse*, Gerard Genette states: “The narrator is present as source, guarantor, and organizer of the narrative, as analyst and commentator” (127). We narrate our own experiences and thus organize them. As we go through life, we categorize it. A genre

realization moment occurs when we realize that we have categorized it incorrectly.

Characters, as they model people, have the same ability to analyze the world around them and seek a pattern. Parvini cites Colin McGinn's review of *Shakespeare and Moral Agency*, stating: "Agents have will, intention, desire, rationality, beliefs, perceptions, emotions, self-conceptions, personalities, and consciousness: all these things affect their decisions and overt acts. ...... Shakespeare creates characters in which the full lurid tapestry of defect and deficiency is made vivid" (3). Shakespeare's characters, with their own rationality, regularly reflect on the world they interact with. They make assumptions about their circumstances, and sometimes those assumptions are wrong. By identifying the moments where they realize these mistakes, the audience is able to learn from the oft-ignored reality of misinterpretation with narrative consequence.

Furthermore, we as people model these characters on purpose. Stories serve as models; characters not only can have the ability to reflect upon their genre, but they must have it. When the audience falls in love with a character onstage, they are not merely imprinting on that character's circumstances, but their actions and reactions. We learn from every part of literature, and it is important to be able to identify what we are learning from. This circularity of character and audience feeding from and learning about each other is vital to literature; it is only by the infusion of humanity in a character that a work becomes impactful, and it is through that impact that we can identify the reality of humanity that was fused into the work. This circularity creates a feedback loop of pedagogy which is infused into the lifeblood of literature. By utilizing literary tools, such as genre, we are able to consciously model yet another aspect of literature, furthering not only our understanding of plays, but of ourselves. A genre realization moment provides a framework for the moments in life in which we must reassess, when it seems like our story is formed differently than those around us, when we realize we did not play the role we believed.

LAUREN DONAHUE is a graduating senior at the University of South Carolina majoring in Political Science and English with a minor in Law and Society. This essay is an abridged version of her thesis. Lauren's favorite works are T. S. Eliot's "The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock" and Norton Juster's *The Phantom Tollbooth*. After gradua-

tion, Lauren is pursuing a masters in comparative literature at Trinity College Dublin.

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Scoping Sonny's Self-Sabotage: Baldwin's Exploration in Suffering, Racism, and Identity

Nicole Fashaw, Pepperdine University

The message behind James Baldwin's short story "Sonny's Blues" is a message that comments on fulfilling passions through adversity and utilizing those adversities to strengthen the power of that passion, using it as a method of escape. "Sonny's Blues" is set in Harlem, and this neighborhood encompasses drugs, death, imprisonment, and darkness. Baldwin's message of escapism deepens through the lenses of the African American journey, incorporating Critical Race Theory.

Though "Sonny's Blues" is a story of triumph and overcoming obstacles through music, Baldwin's text holds a deeper commentary on the reality of African Americans. African Americans continuously tread through segregation, racial injustices, institutionalized racism, and societal expectations. Baldwin's narrative exposes how society is shaped by racism from slavery, and how this shaping contributes to the lived experiences of African Americans well beyond the years in which these foundations of racism began. These institutionalized and systemic foundations of racism are perpetuated in systems of inequality and oppression in all fields and inner workings of the world in which African Americans live, whether it is directly Harlem or elsewhere. Baldwin's characters, Sonny and his brother, serve as representations of African American individuals, illustrating the various methods Black people navigate systemic racism and societal oppression. Through their emotional turmoil, Baldwin reflects the coping mechanisms of African Americans confronting inequality.

Baldwin begins the story of "Sonny's Blues" with an unnamed narrator who uncovers the fact that his younger brother, Sonny, had been arrested and taken into prison for engaging in substance abuse.

The narrator ponders how the news implies that Sonny may be becoming the very stereotype he had worked so hard to avoid. The narrator claims he feels like he has "ice water" in his veins, which serves as a point of angst when it comes to aligning with Harlem's stereotypes regarding African Americans (Baldwin 34). This introduction to the scope of the setting is an imperative part of the story's central problem: adhering to the narrative that encourages racial hatred. This scene explains that in the city of Harlem, the narrator's younger brother had fallen victim to the grasp of a racial stereotype. The severity of the problem suggests that the influence lies heavily in the city of Harlem and the socio-political context of the story itself.

The socio-political context within the story provides broad implications of Critical Race Theory and insight into the period of the text. The Civil Rights Movement, an intellectual and cultural reset throughout the 1950s, hid the art that fueled modern American history. Art and talent flourished but were severely undermined by the racism, economic inequality, and systematic discrepancies that had overshadowed them. The socio-political context included the racial segregation and discrimination that characterized American society. African Americans faced systemic barriers to education, employment, housing, and political participation, enforced through Jim Crow laws and institutionalized racism. In "Sonny's Blues," Baldwin explores the impact of racial oppression on individuals and communities who had to endure these occurrences and cope with social and economic marginalization. "Sonny's Blues" is a reflection of the broader social and political tensions of the time because of the dehumanizing history behind slavery, the limitations of the American Dream, and the search for identity and belonging in a society that systematically marginalizes them. Sonny's struggles with addiction and incarceration represent the cyclical nature of oppression and the challenges faced by African Americans in breaking free from the constraints of systemic racism.

Racism and racial segregation have been pervasive throughout American history, but their full manifestation became especially evident following the abolition of slavery. The impact of segregation during the Jim Crow era had an "immeasurable impact" on the lives of Black Americans, shaping the ways they thought, acted, and coped with their reality (Norman 3). The "Jim Crow" system, which emerged in the late 1870s, was not merely a set of laws but a deeply entrenched racial ideology. While these laws were framed as legitimate regulations to maintain order, they functioned as a tool to legally

disguise the underlying racial hatred that justified the subordination of Black people.

Under Jim Crow, Black Americans were treated as second-class citizens, subjugated by a system that justified their oppression as part of a natural racial order. White Americans, seen as the chosen class, were empowered to normalize anti-Black sentiment and culture. Intellectuals, including craniologists, eugenicists, phrenologists, and social Darwinists, perpetuated the belief that Black people were inherently inferior to white people, both intellectually and culturally (Norman 6). These racist ideologies were reinforced at every level of society, from the media to political leaders who worked to prevent racial integration. The Jim Crow laws sought to cement the idea that Black people were morally, behaviorally, and civically inferior. As a result, violence was seen as necessary to maintain racial hierarchy and prevent the advancement of Black people.

Some of the dehumanizing regulations of the Jim Crow laws included:

1. A Black male could not extend his hand to shake hands with a white male. Furthermore, a Black male could not offer his hand, or any other part of his body, to a white woman.
2. Black and white people were forbidden from eating together, and if they did, white people were to be served first, with some sort of partition placed between them.
3. A Black male was never to offer to light a cigarette for a white female, as this gesture was seen to imply intimacy.
4. White people were not required to use courtesy titles when addressing Black people, who were instead called by their first names. Conversely, Black people were required to address white people with courtesy titles and were forbidden from using their first names. (Kennedy 105)

The Jim Crow South had an immeasurable impact on the lives of Black people, particularly in shaping the perceptions that others held of them. These external perceptions, in turn, became internalized by the oppressed, as seen in the narrator's reflections: "I don't want to see you—die—trying not to suffer" (Baldwin 134).

The weight of these societal expectations infiltrates the minds of the oppressed, influencing how they view themselves and their potential for success.

As "Sonny's Blues" progresses, the narrator's apathy toward his younger brother, Sonny, and his recent incarceration becomes increasingly apparent. The narrator confesses that he had long suspected Sonny's involvement in drug-related activities, yet he never confronted these suspicions: "I had had suspicions, but I didn't name them, I kept putting them away" (Baldwin 4). This admission reveals the complexity of the narrator's character and the conflicting emotions he harbors toward Sonny. His expectations of failure reflect a deeper internalization of the limited possibilities afforded to people like the brothers.

The narrator's profession as an algebra teacher serves as a contrast to Sonny's life, particularly when reflecting on his students' struggles. He suggests that neither his students nor Sonny have much room for success, describing how "these boys, now, were . . . growing up with a rush and their heads bumped abruptly against the low ceiling of their actual possibilities" (Baldwin 9). This observation highlights the limited opportunities that many individuals in Harlem face, reinforcing the stereotypes about the community's fate. The narrator's role as an educator contrasts sharply with Sonny's trajectory, suggesting two different responses to the systemic oppression that characterizes Harlem.

This division between the narrator and Sonny represents a greater internal conflict within the story: a struggle between self-loathing and self-preservation. The narrator's separation from the realities of Harlem and his disdain for Sonny's perceived assimilation to the community's stereotypes exemplify a common response to oppression, what Critical Race Theory refers to as internalized racism. By distancing himself from the community and disassociating from Sonny's experiences, the narrator attempts to elevate himself, yet he is also trapped within a cycle of self-rejection and racial disillusionment.

Critical Race Theory, also known as CRT, serves as an external diagnostic tool for analyzing the pervasive racial issues in America. At its core, CRT posits that racism operates on individual, institutional, and societal levels, perpetuated not only through overt actions but also through microaggressions. Privileged white individuals continue the cycle of subordinating Black people by maintaining structures that privilege whiteness, whether through intentional racial animosity or a desire to preserve societal control and white hegemony (Brooks

92). White hegemony focuses on the distribution of power within social relationships, emphasizing the dominance of white individuals and the broader societal influence of this power. The inherent privilege of whiteness passed down through generations ensures that power, wealth, and influence remain concentrated in the hands of white America. This process of maintaining dominance continues to marginalize Black people, allowing whites to retain control over the social, political, and economic trajectory of society. The historical legacy of slavery, followed by systematic inequality, has led to significant resource and accessibility discrepancies between whites and Black Americans. These disparities are not merely the result of individual actions but are embedded within broader societal structures that perpetuate inequality, often through manipulative and aggressive tactics (Brooks 92). In the context of "Sonny's Blues," these historical foundations deeply impact the lives of African Americans, including the narrator. The internalization of these racial dynamics shapes how Black individuals view themselves, often leading to a distorted sense of self-worth. The oppressive environment of Jim Crow, with its enforced racial segregation and discrimination, further reinforced these damaging societal norms, perpetuating the sense of powerlessness among Black people.

The Jim Crow era entrenched segregation, with significant legal battles reflecting the deep cultural and social divisions of the time. Landmark cases such as *Plessy v. Ferguson* and *Brown v. Board of Education* reinforced and challenged the racial divides that defined the period. In *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1892), Homer Plessy, an African American man, refused to sit in a "black-only" car, arguing that doing so violated his constitutional rights. The Supreme Court, operating within a framework of racist ideologies, ruled that a legal distinction between Black and white individuals did not violate the Constitution, thus upholding the doctrine of "separate but equal" (Norman 5). This ruling codified segregation, reinforcing the notion that Black and White Americans could be treated differently under the law, as long as the treatment was deemed equal in some form.

However, the decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* sparked continued resistance and calls for the dismantling of Jim Crow laws, institutionalized racism, and racially discriminatory practices that were enshrined in the legal system. *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), a pivotal case concerning education, challenged the constitutionality of state-sponsored segregation in public schools. The argument was

that segregated schooling inherently created inequalities, with Black children often feeling inferior to their white counterparts. The Supreme Court, in its historic ruling, declared that "in the field of public education, the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place" (Norman 8). This decision was a monumental step toward dismantling institutional racism in American education.

The history of African Americans' ongoing struggle for equal rights and treatment, amid systemic oppression and racial discrimination, has caused profound, intergenerational trauma. This trauma is reflected in the characters of "Sonny's Blues," where the narrator and Sonny grapple with self-inflicted judgment and unhealthy coping mechanisms. Much like the broader African American experience, their internalized struggles are shaped by a history of racism, contributing to the complex ways they navigate identity and survival in a society that continues to marginalize them.

After hearing about Sonny's arrest for drug abuse, the narrator is thrust into a flashback of his own younger self and Sonny's younger self. These flashbacks serve as a stark reminder of the paths they could have taken, reflecting the profound suffering that permeates Harlem. The narrator contemplates the widespread impact of suffering in Harlem, noting how it becomes contagious, affecting everyone in its path. Reflecting on his students, the narrator describes the grim realities of their lives, comparing them to his own experience growing up. In doing so, the narrator attempts to capture the pain of institutional racism and the limitations it places on Black opportunity (Baldwin 105). Despite his attempts to distance himself from the consequences of institutionalized racism, the narrator is forced to confront the undeniable reality that he, too, is affected by it. The struggles of his childhood in Harlem, intertwined with his current life, serve as a motivating force in his teaching, urging him to protect his students from following the same destructive path as Sonny.

In this realization—that he exists in one world but yearns for another—the narrator subconsciously grapples with racial dissonance. Racial dissonance refers to the internal conflict experienced by minorities within societal structures, education, and their self-perception. Race, as a social construct, has long been used to justify white supremacy and the exploitation of Black bodies, particularly through slavery (Tate 212). This construct shapes how individuals view themselves, especially those subjected to racial discrimination. Skin color becomes intrinsically linked with one's sense of self-worth

and acceptance. This dissociation from one's true self can lead to low self-esteem. A psychological phenomenon that illustrates this is Dr. Kenneth and Mamie Clark's "Doll Test," where children between the ages of three and seven were asked which doll they preferred—the Black or the White doll. The majority of children, including Black children, chose the white doll, highlighting a sense of internalized racial inferiority. This is an example of racial dissonance, a psychological trait that the narrator embodies. Due to the realities of racial discrimination and the harmful stereotypes surrounding Blackness, he is compelled to shift his view of himself and his place in the world. Individuals like the narrator who experience racial dissonance often internalize the notion of white superiority, feeling pressured to assimilate and succeed according to white standards. Baldwin introduces this internal conflict within the narrator, positioning him as a prime example of racial dissonance in action.

After teaching his algebra class, the narrator encounters Sonny's friend, and they discuss Sonny's struggles. Despite the severity of Sonny's addiction, the narrator, having lost faith, refuses to help. The friend, feeling responsible for Sonny's downfall, admits to encouraging his heroin use. The narrator's question about what will happen next is met with a sobering realization: "They'll let him out. And then he'll just start working his way back again" (Baldwin 44). This exchange reveals the cyclical nature of addiction in Harlem, shaped by institutionalized racism and the harsh limitations of their environment.

This interaction adds complexity to the story by highlighting Harlem's dark connotations and its impact on its residents. Harlem is portrayed as a place where suffering is continuous; where young boys smother in cramped living conditions, and its environment is seen as inescapable. The narrator, influenced by the white perspective, feels threatened by the disorder and chaos that define Harlem. This aligns with James Wilson and George Kelling's broken windows theory, which posits that environmental factors like broken windows, poverty, and crime shape the behavior and future of a neighborhood's inhabitants (Kim 162). Wilson's theory suggests that in places like Harlem, where systemic issues are pervasive, negative outcomes such as drug abuse, crime, and social decay are more likely. In this context, Sonny has fallen victim to the cycle of Harlem's harsh realities, while the narrator tries to escape it through self-destructive means.

The narrator's internal conflict reveals his evolving understanding of family and suffering. Initially, he disapproves of Sonny's life choic-

es, seeing him through negative Harlem stereotypes, while he himself seeks "white success." His resentment extends to Sonny's friend but shifts when the friend reassures him that Sonny will write from prison. The narrator's refusal to make a similar commitment signals the beginning of his change, as his resentment transforms into guilt and empathy. The turning point comes after the death of his daughter, Grace, which forces the narrator to confront others' pain. He realizes that his suffering has made Sonny's more real: "My trouble had made his real" (Baldwin 127). Reading Sonny's letters, the narrator feels guilt for his silence and recognizes his role in Sonny's pain. This marks a shift from resentment to compassion. Reflecting on his escape from Harlem's cycle of suffering, he acknowledges, "Those who got out always left something of themselves behind" (Baldwin 112). While he escaped physically, he abandoned his emotional connection to Sonny and the community, marking his growth as he now understands that his survival came at the cost of empathy.

Internalized racism begins with an understanding of how the white imagination views Black people and continues when individuals internalize these perceptions and operate based on them. Speight argues that racism cannot be fully understood unless we consider how it is internalized (Speight 126). Though the term "internalized racism" emerged in the 1980s, its roots trace back to slavery, when the oppression faced by Black people was internalized. While some scholars argue that physical slavery was the most brutal form of oppression, Akbar contends that mental oppression is far worse, stating, "The slavery that captures the mind . . . is more cruel than the shackles on the wrists and ankles" (2). This view is further supported by scholars who characterize internalized racism as an acceptance of the terms of oppression, which perpetuates stereotypes and societal biases (Speight 128). These perceptions reside heavily in the subconscious, influencing how individuals choose to view both themselves and others. As racism takes hold of an individual's psyche, it shapes their actions, self-perception, and interactions with others, reinforcing the negative stereotypes created by the white imagination (Sosoo 570). These stereotypes have deep historical origins, influencing the complex realities of characters like Sonny.

There are numerous stereotypes surrounding the Black experience, many of which are perpetuated by the white imagination. In *Black Beginnings: From Uncle Tom's Cabin to The Birth of a Nation*, Bogle explores how these stereotypes were historically depicted, beginning

with blackface in minstrel shows and later with Black actors in films. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was the first film to feature a Black actor, who portrayed the stereotype of "the Tom"—a loyal Black man who recognizes his "inferiority" to white enslavers. Bogle notes that the re-release of this film during the Civil Rights Movement sought to remind Black Americans of a time when obedience to white authority was seen as the solution to their problems (Bogle 15). Bogle also introduces the stereotype of "the Coon," embodied by the "pickaninny"—a childlike, ragged figure that was portrayed as foolish and lazy. Pickaninnies were among the most degrading depictions of Black people. Another harmful stereotype, the "Brutal Black Buck," emerged in *The Birth of a Nation*, which presented Black men as aggressively sexual threats to white women, using this narrative to glorify the Ku Klux Klan (Bogle 19). This film cemented the "Big Black Buck" stereotype and further entrenched the harmful portrayal of Black Americans. The danger of internalizing such racist ideals lies in the acceptance of these stereotypes, which the narrator in "Sonny's Blues" projects onto the community, contributing to the cycle of internalized racism.

Internalizing stereotypes about one's community breeds mistrust, causing strife even within families. In "Sonny's Blues," the narrator epitomizes this by projecting his own insecurities and self-loathing onto his brother, Sonny. This phenomenon of racialized self-hatred is explored through the "Nigrescence Model," which examines the psychological shifts African Americans experience in their racial identity development (Sosoo 570). One stage of this model, the "Anti-Black" stage, occurs when individuals are unaware of their race's history and cultural achievements, leading them to view their race negatively and separate themselves from it. The narrator exemplifies this stage, seeing his race in a negative light.

In an effort to practice "grace," the narrator and Sonny exchange letters during Sonny's incarceration. After Sonny's release, the narrator admits that the memories of their past have resurfaced, and he begins to wonder about Sonny's inner life (Baldwin 74). Over time, the narrator's heart softens, and he starts to understand Sonny more deeply. Despite his earlier inability to empathize, the narrator's growing emotional awareness leads him to provide Sonny with a place to stay, moving past the racial stereotypes of cyclical suffering that had once clouded his perception.

During a taxi ride home, Sonny is exposed to the stark contrast between the wealthy Manhattan neighborhoods and the harsh streets

of Harlem. This juxtaposition highlights the brothers' differing positions, even though both view their surroundings similarly. The narrator believes he has "escaped" Harlem's grip by becoming a respected algebra teacher, but he still sees the Harlem projects as places where boys are "smothered" and trapped in disaster (Baldwin 84). Sonny, on the other hand, uses music as his escape, distancing himself physically from Harlem, but not from its addictions.

Both brothers are still tied to Harlem's cycle of suffering and addiction, but their reasons for doing so differ. The narrator internalizes stereotypes about African Americans, projecting them onto Sonny and others. He believes that success means breaking free from these stereotypes, which he associates with whiteness and respectability. Sonny, however, acknowledges suffering as part of the human condition, asking, "Why do people suffer? Maybe it's better to do something to give it a reason, any reason" (Baldwin 92). For Sonny, addiction becomes a misguided attempt to find meaning in suffering, rooted in systemic and institutionalized racism.

Sonny tells his brother that he engages in self-punishment and behavioral avoidance as a coping mechanism for their shared suffering. This racialized response is one of many that African Americans face when confronted with the stereotypes imposed upon them. Behavioral avoidance, driven by negative stimuli, is a common reaction to systemic anti-Black bias, which influences emotional regulation from a young age. Grace Jacob highlights how Black people develop unique coping strategies in response to these stresses, noting that racialization impacts how emotions are managed (392). For Sonny, this manifests in drug abuse as a form of self-inflicted punishment shaped by his environment.

As the narrator passes the Harlem projects, he reflects on the suffering his sons will face, which mirrors the hardships he and Sonny endured. He realizes that even though he has seemingly broken the cycle, it's impossible to protect those growing up in Harlem from its inescapable pain. After Sonny stays with the family for a few nights, the narrator becomes paranoid about Sonny's potential relapse, fixating on the cycle of suffering that feels unavoidable. He reflects on his father's death, recognizing how his father's traits mirrored Sonny's, and fears Sonny may suffer the same fate as their uncle, who tragically died after being run over by drunk white men. The narrator recalls childhood memories of his parents warning him about the looming darkness of racial oppression, which he felt protected from as a child.

However, as they grew older, he realized the inevitable suffering that awaited them. At his father's funeral, the narrator's mother urges him to look after Sonny, stressing that their father's bitterness stems from the trauma of his brother's death. She poignantly declares that "the world ain't changed" (Baldwin 136), emphasizing the persistent nature of racial violence and injustice. He promises to support Sonny, recognizing the parallels between his uncle's tragic death and Sonny's reality. His uncle's brutal end represents the narrator's fear for Sonny, and the guilt from his father's death mirrors the remorse the narrator might feel if he neglects his brother. Under systemic racial violence, African Americans must reclaim what's been taken from them. The narrator's pursuit of success, shaped by white ideals, only deepens his connection to suffering and causes him to lose his sense of self. The generational cycle of racial hatred continues, manifesting in destructive coping mechanisms.

This pivotal scene encapsulates the brothers' generational struggle, highlighting the subordination at the heart of their identities. Critical Race Theory distinguishes between discrimination and subordination: discrimination refers to treating similarly situated individuals differently based on characteristics like race, gender, or appearance, whereas subordination involves rendering individuals or groups lesser through practices like racial discrimination, patriarchy, or classism (Brooks 93). Discrimination focuses on individual actions, requiring the identification of a perpetrator, while subordination operates more broadly, regardless of intent. Racial subordination is entrenched in the structures of society, where white individuals hold access to better resources and opportunities. This creates a form of racism that disadvantages victims, regardless of the perpetrator's intentions. The narrator's uncle's death was a direct result of this racial subordination, a fate influenced by the environment of hatred and the cyclical nature of racism that spans generations. This is the fate the narrator desperately tries to avoid, but in doing so, he may be destroying himself.

After returning from the army to attend his mother's funeral, the narrator decides to reach out to Sonny, hoping to break the generational cycle. Sonny expresses his desire to become a jazz pianist, but the narrator, fearing Sonny will repeat their uncle's mistakes, argues about practicality: "'Well, Sonny … you know people can't always do exactly what they want to do—' 'No, I don't know that,' Sonny replies" (Baldwin 140). While the narrator values stability, fearing rejection by white society, Sonny prioritizes passion and creativi-

ty. Their differing perspectives reflect how institutionalized racism, which shapes their lives through societal and economic constraints, influences their coping mechanisms and suffering (330).

The narrator arranges for Sonny to stay with his wife's family, despite their disapproval of the marriage and the underlying racism. "'You got to finish school.' We had already decided that Sonny would have to move in with Isabel and her folks. I knew this wasn't ideal since Isabel's family hadn't wanted her to marry me, but I didn't know what else to do" (Baldwin 137). Sonny, sensing he's a burden, expresses a desire to leave Harlem: "There was something in his eyes I'd never seen before . . . 'It's time I was getting out of here'" (Baldwin 137). His gesture of rubbing his arm suggests his anxiety about his drug addiction, which he believes is linked to the pressures of his environment. Though the narrator tries to sympathize, he fails to truly listen to Sonny, reassuring him that moving in with Isabel's family and attending school would help, yet overlooking Sonny's deeper need for freedom and self-expression.

During this time, Isabel grows increasingly concerned about Sonny's dedication to music, perceiving it in a cautious and negative light. Like the narrator, she worries about the extent of his obsession and starts to question his intentions for his future. "She says she just watched Sonny's face. She could tell, by watching him, what was happening with him. And what was happening was that they penetrated his cloud, they had reached him" (Baldwin 140). Sonny had been skipping school, hiding the absence letters until one was noticed by Isabel's mother. He admits to skipping school to spend time with musicians in Greenwich Village. The narrator's disdain for musicians runs deep, shaped by the stigma surrounding Harlem, his uncle's fate, and the destructive impact music has had on their family's trajectory.

When Sonny lives with the narrator, he tolerates the constant piano playing: "But I thought I'd never hear the end of that piano … he went straight to that piano and stayed there . . . until everybody went to bed. He was at the piano all day Saturday and all day Sunday . . . He'd play one record over and over again, all day long . . . the record. Then back to the piano . . . I really don't know how they stood it" (Baldwin 141). The narrator views Sonny's passion for music as a monstrous obsession, a stark contrast to his own idea of normalcy. He tolerates the piano playing out of a desire to protect Sonny from the cycle of suffering he believes will follow if he succumbs to the stigmas of Harlem. Eventually, the tension reaches a breaking point. The

narrator argues with Sonny, and the idea of Sonny being a burden to the family surfaces. Sonny, internalizing the harsh scolding, realizes that he has only tolerated his presence out of obligation. Disturbed, he leaves for the Navy without saying goodbye.

During his time in service, a war takes place, and the narrator only learns of Sonny's status through a postcard. After returning from the war, Sonny moves back to New York without a word to his brother. "I didn't see him anymore until we were both back in New York and the war had long been over. He was a man . . . but I wasn't willing to see it . . . we fought almost every time we met" (Baldwin 141). The brothers meet once to argue about Sonny's life decisions, but their confrontations become increasingly intense. When Sonny, seemingly exhausted, tells his brother that he considers him dead, the narrator storms off, convinced Sonny will need him one day. His flashback ends.

In the present day, the narrator often reflects on his past and considers searching Sonny's room for drugs. His thoughts are interrupted by a street-corner revival meeting, where he notices Sonny in the crowd, giving change to a singer. This marks the narrator's first shift in perspective, as he begins to see that music could offer relief from their suffering. Sonny soon invites him to a jazz performance, trying to rebuild their fractured relationship. Sonny explains that music gives him control, just like heroin once did: "It makes you feel in control. Sometimes you've got to have that feeling" (Baldwin 144). He tells his brother that without music, he turns to drugs to keep from "shaking to pieces" (Baldwin 144).

The narrator reflects on the singer's suffering, but Sonny responds, "Some people suffer for no reason, but sometimes it's easier to do something to make themselves feel like they have a reason for suffering" (Baldwin 144). The narrator, recalling their mother's warning, fears Sonny may die from his drug use. This fear prompts him to soften and promise to hold himself accountable. In this moment, the narrator's understanding of suffering deepens, revealing that there are different ways to cope beyond mere endurance. His attention shifts to Sonny, who opens up about the darkest moments of his addiction and his destructive impulses. He describes his experience as akin to sleep paralysis—desiring escape, but feeling subconsciously trapped, which only intensifies his suffering. Sonny's struggle reflects a coping mechanism shaped by the enduring effects of racism. He vacillates between seeking tangible consequences for his pain and accepting that, as a Black man, his suffering is imposed by a racist system. For

Sonny, music becomes an escape—a way to dissociate. He admits that after their mother's death, he tried to escape drugs by running away, but returning brought no relief. This realization brings the brothers closer, as they both confront the pain rooted in their circumstances. In the end, the narrator agrees to watch Sonny play.

In the downtown nightclub, the narrator is exposed to the haven Sonny utilizes to escape the reality of his every day. He meets Sonny's friends, including Creole, who deeply care for him. Realizing that Sonny has created a chosen family in the absence of his own, the narrator watches as his brother prepares to perform. Reflecting on the experience, he notes that playing music allows one to express their struggles, making it more emotionally moving than merely listening. Sonny begins to play, but his brother isn't impressed, sensing that Sonny is holding back. However, with newfound empathy, the narrator acknowledges how difficult it must be to make an instrument come alive, so he dismisses his initial judgment (Baldwin 119). During Sonny's second set, his friend Creole shifts the direction of the music, and Sonny immerses himself in it, letting go of reality. The song evokes a struggle, prompting the narrator to reflect on the risk of portraying suffering in a world already filled with it. He realizes that, if done right, it becomes "the only light we've got in all this darkness" (Baldwin 153). The music forces the narrator to confront his own suffering, linking it to his childhood, the pain of his parents, and the suffering of previous generations.

As the narrator recalls his parents' pain, he feels a deeper connection to their struggles, visualizing his mother's bruised feet and his uncle's death (Baldwin 154). This introspection shifts his perspective, and he begins to admire Sonny for confronting his suffering through music. The narrator, moved to tears, realizes that the pain he has suppressed still lingers within him. When the band pauses, he orders drinks, and as Sonny sips his scotch and milk, their eyes lock. The narrator sees his cup shake "like the very cup of trembling" (Baldwin 154), understanding that Sonny's music is not just a talent, but an escape from the cyclical suffering of racism and violence. Sonny's earlier words, "You realize nobody's listening. So you've got to listen" (Baldwin 150), now resonate deeply with him.

James Baldwin's short story "Sonny's Blues" explores the deep impact of African American history, Critical Race Theory, and the effects of institutionalized racism on self-perception. The brothers navigate their suffering, shaped by historical and societal forces, through

self-sabotaging coping mechanisms. These methods of coping ultimately lead to a profound awareness of the need for change. Through introspection, the brothers reevaluate their lives and, by embracing their identities, talents, and each other, they begin to break free from the cycle of suffering.

NICOLE FASHAW is a Literature major on the Pre-Law track with a minor in Social Action and Justice. A member of the Class of 2025, she wrote this piece in Spring 2024 as part of her Senior Thesis. Some of Nicole's favorite literary authors include James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison. A quote by Ellison that deeply resonates with her is: "Perhaps to lose a sense of where you are implies the danger of losing a sense of who you are." After graduation, Nicole plans to continue pursuing her passion for music through production, engineering, performance, and songwriting—both for herself and for other artists under Universal Music Group and beyond.

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"Neither shadow nor ambience": The Art of the Unfamiliar Bibliography in Lew Thomas's *Bibliography 2* and *Bibliography 3*

Chantelle Flores, University of Maine

In the 1970s, Lew Thomas showcased a series of photographs, including *Bibliography 1*, *Bibliography 2*, and *Bibliography 3*, to the public. Each photograph presents a complex situation in its framing of the conventional academic bibliography as an art object. With a literary background in structuralism, the systemic organization of form in Thomas's work becomes the focal point, with his bibliographic photographs emphasizing the idea of the picture inherently sharing the organization and semiotics of literary language. In one interview, Thomas describes structuralism as an act of "[l]etting the object express itself" with the photographer becoming only "a witness" who has "to accept what the object tells [them]" (O'Toole 14). If we view his photographs as objects that subsequently frame the structure of the bibliography as an object, what then are these objects expressing to us as witnesses? In the following essay, I'll argue that, by placing the conventional bibliography into both artistic and structuralist spheres, the bibliography can become a place of further literary analysis. Thomas's artworks, especially his *Bibliography 2* and *Bibliography 3*, usher viewers to unconventionally witness the conventions of form, and thus, by reading the bibliography through his artistic lenses of structuralism, Marxism, and institutional critique, the bibliography becomes a site for discourse, interrogation, and change.

While *Bibliography 1* contains fruitful commentary on the bibliography as an art object, the work doesn't contain visible acts of revision in its conforming to bibliographic conventions and will therefore be excluded from the following analysis. For the purpose of critiquing

the bibliography, I will be specifically analyzing Thomas's *Bibliography 2* and *Bibliography 3* for their direct acts of revision and exclusion. Both *Bibliography 2* and *Bibliography 3* are photographs that resemble the structuring and formatting of a conventional academic bibliography page, each one containing columns of cited works in alphabetical order. In person, the enlarged scale of both prints creates a distinction between the conventional medium of the page and the photographic print, with *Bibliography 2* being 23.5 inches by 20 inches (59.7 centimeters by 50.8 centimeters) and *Bibliography 3* being 30.25 inches by 22.25 inches (76.8 centimeters by 56.5 centimeters). The large size allows for increased legibility of font and form, permitting viewers to analyze and read the bibliographies without closely inspecting his works. Thomas describes his photography as a structuralist attempt "to join the photographic act with the space in a manner that is physical, perceptible and … intelligible" and "to eliminate or neutralize the content depending only on the structure to reveal [his] intent" (Thomas 71). Instead of photographs calling upon viewers to spend time carefully analyzing or attempting to interpret content, Thomas aims to call attention to the act of simply viewing and reading his work as the photographs and bibliographies that they are.

Interestingly, in both *Bibliography 2* and *Bibliography 3,* Thomas explicitly includes semiotic strikethroughs, signifiers toward the intentional and selective act of revision or exclusion. While some citations are entirely crossed out, such as Arakawa's *For Example* and Gregory Batcock's *The New Art*, other citations only have specific titled works excluded. Recalling Thomas's legibility of structure, although multiple citations are distorted by strikethroughs, they are not entirely illegible or obscured. Viewers are not led to decode but, rather, to notice the differences in formatting conventions. Thomas's strikethroughs are not meant to call attention to the citations themselves nor raise citation content questions. Rather, the strikethroughs remain primary signifiers, meant to call attention to their own role in the bibliography's formatting and structure. Within the conventions of bibliographic structure, our gaze is intentionally led to the unconventional and unfamiliar inclusion of revision strikethroughs, forced to contemplate Thomas's work as "an internalization of process" (Thomas 9). In the context of the academic bibliography, the researcher decides what works stand as irrelevant or relevant toward their research, and while the final copy of the bibliography usually showcases only what was deemed relevant, the works removed during research, edit-

ing, or framing processes are normally unknown to viewers. Thomas creates photographs that shed light on the changing state of structure and form throughout the research and artistic processes, or within its unseen reality.

Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer also draws attention to the importance of Thomas's use of color in his photography as a part of his structure and form. *Bibliography 2* follows the conventional starkness of black text printed on a white page, but *Bibliography 3* interestingly reverses these conventions in its placing of white text against a black page. One could argue that the intentional reversal of conventional color relationships between page and text presents further emphasis on the agency of the curator in formatting how information can be shared. On the other hand, a secondary argument can be posed that Thomas's breaking of color conventions creates a sense of unfamiliarity between text and page. Within this newfound unfamiliarity, one can hyper-visualize the structure of the bibliography, acknowledging the created starkness and alienation of the listed authors and works against the empty space of the page. However, Lehrer-Graiwer notes "[h]is structural allegiance to basic black-and-white" as "succinct yet capacious" in its "depicting [of] imagery that resonates metaphorically, often in racial terms." While Thomas may not be creating works of photography specifically for personal interpretation, the signifiers utilized–whether the medium, strikethroughs, or color–present the opportunity for indexing metaphorical and external meaning, which can place his bibliographies within "an intense social dimension" (Lehrer-Graiwer).

While Thomas's photographs focus specifically on the structure of the academic bibliography following a researched work, his interrogation of the overarching systems behind the bibliography requires critical engagement with the bibliographic field as a whole. In *Structural(ism) and Photography*, Thomas writes the following:

> The bibliography passes uncriticized due to its ostensible purpose as a supplementary source of references. The page on which the bibliography is printed evokes neither shadow nor ambience because of the shallow depth of its construction. The strictness of order is justified by an alphabetical composition. One does not read the stacking of authors in columns of type as a disembodied library; the effect of the design produces a neatly closed structure. However, in it, the restric-

> tive act of authorization, of naming, is automatically sent and received in states of mind resembling the mode of production. (7)

Thomas raises awareness of the notion of the uncriticized document in our assumptions that the bibliography is inherently clear in its factual honesty. The "neatly closed" structuring of the bibliography appears straightforward, methodical, and without biased or unnecessary additions (Thomas 7). However, Thomas argues that bibliographic structuring, in the application of authorial agency, alphabetization, and even connecting of works, becomes tied to not just a "mode of production" but overarching sociocultural systems (Thomas 7). Similarly, the bibliography can be viewed as inherently "devoted to many different ends" where "the bibliographer [has] a clear appreciation of the principles of inclusion and exclusion upon which he is working" (Kinloch and Losier 214). The bibliographic document becomes a place in which works are included or excluded, a process performed behind the scenes of the audience and toward a private end known only by the bibliography's curator. The visible manipulation, in this case strikethroughs in *Bibliography 2* and *Bibliography 3*, can then be argued to illuminate and publicize the processes of inclusion, exclusion, and curation often kept private.

Although toward the field of bibliography in general, the recent growth of critical bibliography shares Thomas's ideology of bibliography as a literary structure to be both interrogated and further recognized, especially in its relation to overarching sociocultural systems. For some, critical bibliography becomes a field aimed at "disrupting the methodological categories by which our scholarship operates" while inviting "us to 'critique the existing questions we have automatically asked'" (Maruca and Ozment 231). Instead of approaching the bibliography as a permanent document of truth, critical bibliography encourages viewers to approach such documents with questions toward potential intertext, subtext, manipulations, and boundaries put into place by the contexts of the work, author, or artist. Bridging into the contemporary, the accessibility of the internet as a system, while broadening research horizons, often creates an impossibility for the author and artist to find, research, and credit all possible works of relevance. One can raise questions as to what works may rise to the top of search results, what works are considered most economically accessible to researchers, and even the vast amount of works that

may be missing from discourses sparked by the bibliography. Despite Thomas not outwardly posing these questions, his intentional, visible acts of censorship in *Bibliography 2* and *Bibliography 3* alongside his ideology of simply "[making] a frame with [his] hand" dependent on the reality of structure, opens the space for viewers to pose such questions (Thomas 71).

The framing and centering of *Bibliography 2* and *Bibliography 3* become essential to their positioning toward critique, whether critique of the framing structure of the bibliography itself, the framing of the photograph, or even the museum as a framing institute. Again, agency is showcased in the ways in which bibliographies frame, format, and organize works into a system, and the photographer even holds agency in the privilege of "[making] a frame with [their] hand" (Thomas 71). However, what becomes of the bibliography and photograph when they are framed by the increasingly powerful institution of a gallery or museum space? Similar to the aforementioned notion of the document being permanent and infallible, the museum commonly fabricates an assumption that its framing of artworks and artists is "natural" rather than the reality of being "historical and socially constructed" (Alberro 7). As Alberro notes, the institutional frame of the museum is "a frame that over-determines what it encompasses, a frame that is inherently ideological and made of a myriad of cultural, social, and political elements" (5). How a photograph, art object, or even a relational art experience is relayed to the public (or not to the public) or their proximity to other works can be argued to emphasize or de-emphasize certain readings of a work. What are the consequences of an institution often choosing to showcase Thomas's photography in spaces curated specifically for "Photography and Language" exhibitions? How would *Bibliography 2* and *Bibliography 3* be viewed differently, or their frames be manipulated, if these works were instead showcased directly beside a work such as Glenn Ligon's *Untitled (Four Etchings)*? Similarly, the bibliography may continue its legacy of remaining uncriticized if only viewed as contained and framed in the pages of a book, the bibliography only "sent and received in states of mind resembling the mode of production" (Thomas 7).

Throughout *Structural(ism) and Photography*, Thomas frames his own critique and work within the Marxist lens of labor and production, bringing to light the notion of photography as "reproductions of reproductions" (7). The photograph, although viewed as an authentic

reality, re-frames and re-produces what has already existed, remaining a collection of symbols and signs indexing ideas and meaning from beyond the frame. In the idea of creating "reproductions of reproductions," the framing ideologies, intentions, and signs can be argued to stem from a reproduction of reality in the artist's own translation of lived experience into process (Thomas 7). When the final product of the photograph or bibliography is witnessed only as a true reality rather than a series of reproducing signs, a repetitive cycle forms which further alienates the work from its real contexts, the artist from their artwork, and subsequently the audience from reality. The researcher crafts the conventional bibliography in a repetitive process of reproduction, and the audience members are encouraged to view and read the bibliography repetitively within the conventions of its systematic design. The end pages dedicated to the bibliography are skimmed, turned, and searched, their goal simply to provide recognition and further information for interested readers. Likewise, the audience is encouraged to view and interpret a photograph as a confined moment created by the semiotics of design elements, interpreting only the "inside" of the frame as the "content" (Thomas 88).

Just as critical bibliography seeks to critically engage with the sociocultural contexts surrounding the document or bibliographic field, the contemporary field of cultural materialism seeks to foster sociocultural awareness in literature through both structuralism and Marxism. For one, structuralism at its most basic tends "to locate an event, a relationship or a sign within a whole signifying system" (Williams 61). For *Bibliography 2* and *Bibliography 3*, the elements of font, formatting, letters, and citations are all located within a larger signifying system. Marxism can be found to parallel this structuralist notion as acts of production and products can be found to be affected by or a consequence of overarching systems, primarily economic and sociocultural ones. Cultural materialism then becomes a combination of the two, bridging "the analysis of all forms of signification, including quite centrally writing, within the actual means and conditions of their production" (Williams 63–64). Cultural materialism, despite being coined after the creation of Thomas's bibliographic works, again embraces Thomas's critique of familiar and unquestioned structures. In Thomas's culminating thoughts in *Structural(ism) and Photography*, he emphasizes the need for further discourse and interrogation of structured forms, writing that it is only "[w]hen photographs reveal their originary functions, i.e. the power to conceal alienation,

to transmit 'uncriticized ideology' in forms that are 'familiar, well-know, transparent myths … ' then, and only then, will the mirror and the frame undergo disillusion" (86). Instead of framing being an unquestioned and unseen process, Thomas argues the importance of acknowledging ideological framings, whether of the photograph, bibliography, or other structure, as discourses to enter and be changed.

I now return to Thomas's intentional manipulations of the conventional bibliographic structure in both *Bibliography 2* and *Bibliography 3* as a means of causing "the frame [to] undergo disillusion" (Thomas 86). The conventional structure of the bibliography in its familiarity remains uninterrogated, and thus, Thomas creates a contrasting and unfamiliar bibliography: the bibliography as an art object that includes acts of revision and disruption of color conventions. While the conventional bibliography evokes permanence and certainty, Thomas's unconventional bibliographies evoke questioning, curiosity, and potentially confusion. Thomas describes his work as falling into a newfound realm of "over-loading" photography in which a viewer is overwhelmed with "comparing, contrasting, contradicting—opposing information with information, images with images" (Thomas 104). Framing a bibliography as a photograph within the art world in itself becomes an act of comparison and contradiction. How does a bibliography compare to a photograph? What contradictions or comparisons can be forged between the worlds of art and research? Thomas's photography in its "over-loading" "clarifies, interferes, intercedes, confuses, [and] communicates," presenting a complex reproduction of a discursive reality (Thomas 104). Again, discourse becomes key to Lew Thomas's artistic framing of the bibliography, and he argues that "over-loading" photography highlights the viewer's "[participation] in the process" (Thomas 104). The process can be identified as acts of viewing, reading, conversation, and questioning, or even acts that mirror the work itself, such as researching and framing practices.

In contemporary art, the intersections between art and language have been utilized toward similar kinds of discursive explorations, especially with Thomas's notion of defamiliarizing the uninterrogated. The use of contrasting dichotomies in *Bibliography 2* and *Bibliography 3*, black versus white, text versus space, legibility versus illegibility, can be compared to the textual artworks of Glenn Ligon, Jenny Holzer, and Mel Bochner. For each artist, text becomes a questioning of our notion of truth, leading to questions as to why some documents are viewed as infallible while other methods of information are cri-

tiqued. For Glenn Ligon, text inherits a corporeal quality with words, signs, and a "language lined with flesh" that further seeks to toil with the "hyperfamiliar or familiar" image versus the "unfamiliar or defamiliarized" body (Okwui 60–61). Language and the structure of language becomes a vessel toward raising awareness of familiarities only to bring the known into a state of unfamiliarity, forcing viewers to participate in a process of understanding through re-reading and re-constructing. Again, while *Bibliography 2* and *Bibliography 3* are not explicitly created toward any specific lines of questioning or critique, Thomas's bibliographies are meant to create, at the bare minimum, a defamiliarizing of the conventional bibliography, which opens up the realm of sociocultural and historical questioning found in adjacent artworks, artists, and theorists.

As John Brumfield writes in the introduction to *Structural(ism) and Photography*, "when we understand a painting or a photograph as a data system rather than as an urn of elusive and ineffable truth, then we may confront the piece simply and ask, What is the nature of the evidence?" (6). As Thomas showcases, the data systems and sociocultural contexts surrounding the structure of the photograph, the bibliography, and the artwork rely on an analysis and interrogation beyond the frame. While a first question might explore the nature of the bibliography, a following question may ask what has created and shaped the nature of the bibliography? Additionally, what does the nature and structure of the bibliography present to us, and how should we engage? The bibliography often remains separate from acts of literary—and especially artistic—interpretation, categorized as a collection of pages to be optionally processed and read as paratextual information. Yet, Thomas raises awareness to the fact that the framing of the bibliography in itself has the potential to be framed as an art object, a new categorization that ushers viewers to interrogate, interact, and create change in newfound ways. The bibliography stands as only one of many documents we create, interact with, and leave unquestioned in our daily lives, and thus, Thomas's bibliographic artworks present the opportunity to begin re-understanding and re-constructing our notions of such documents through artistic, literary, and sociocultural lenses.

CHANTELLE FLORES studies English and art history at the University of Maine, where she works as a Writing Center consultant. She has creative and academic work published with *Aisthesis*, *Barzakh*, *Scribendi*, *Spire*, and other platforms. Her academic work primarily

presents interdisciplinary explorations into literary theory and art history. Additionally, she enjoys the fields of documentary poetics, contemporary art, and the medical humanities. She aspires to become both an art history professor and author.

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"*Meshugah*!" Language as Story in Spiegelman's *Maus*

Esther Lay, Brigham Young University

Art Spiegelman's *Maus* inhabits an intercultural and multigenerational space in which the effects of the Holocaust are examined for both their contemporary weight and the lasting scars they left on survivors, their families, and the world at large. Spiegelman uses several languages, such as German, Yiddish, and dialects of English, as a tool to help readers navigate a story situated in layered cultural and generational contexts. The novel centers around two primary narratives: a series of interviews conducted by Spiegelman with his father, Vladek, and first-person depictions of Vladek's experiences as a Jewish fugitive and concentration camp survivor. These two narratives, wartime and postwar, are explored simultaneously. As the child of two Holocaust survivors, Spiegelman inherited a close connection to these historical events, which, despite being born after the war's end, had a profound impact on his identity and life experience. Though *Maus* is most explicitly Vladek's story, it is also the story of Spiegelman himself processing and coming to terms with this chapter of his family history. Of his many tools to deliver a story with integrity, Spiegelman uses language to tease out the layers of narrative that he constructs while navigating both his and his father's trauma. Language and dialect are essential in revealing to the reader elements of character identity, cultural relationships, and temporal and physical setting.

In the graphic novel format, language comes at a premium. Though some comics succeed with using images alone, the narratives of *Maus* are equally as dependent on text as on images in conveying their stories. Unlike the printed word, which can spill across pages

without significant impact on content or meaning, text in a graphic novel must fit within the visual confines of printed illustrations. Both image and text are valuable means of communicating information to the reader. Text within comics functions in four primary ways: as dialogue, narration, graphic image, or as onomatopoeia (Mikkonen). All four of these functions appear in *Maus* and provide compelling insights into the use of language in ways pertinent to the purposes of the graphic novelist in developing character identity, relationships, and setting.

Language as a Source of Identity

Language plays an important role in developing character identity, and the characters of Art and Vladek provide good examples of how this works. Though *Maus* tells the story of Vladek's wartime experiences, it is also the story of Art's exploration of his family history and efforts to understand and connect with his parents. Born in Sweden, Art Spiegelman moved with his family to the United States at age three, where he grew up and continues to live (Spiegelman and Witek 17). His language in the novel, as well as in real life (Gross), exhibits clear markers of American influence, with frequent inclusions of American colloquialisms and slang. In the opening panels of the novel, Art narrates an anecdote from his childhood in Rego Park, NY. The language is distinctly American, as one of his friends shouts, "Last one there is a rotten egg!," a common playground idiom, and Art refers to his father a few pages later as "Poppa," a typical North American appellation (Spiegelman, *Maus* 5, 13; "Poppa, *N.*" *Oxford English Dictionary*). Art is surrounded by American English, and these words and phrases anchor him in his time, place, and culture. Though the child of Polish immigrants, Art has grown up in New York, and that is the culture that he has primarily adopted. Such examples of Spiegelman's facility with different forms of language effectively demonstrate what it means to be an American and the child of immigrants. Spiegelman is grounded in a thoroughly American context yet must learn to navigate ties to other cultures and places that come with his unique heritage. These elements of identity, as revealed by his language, put Art in a unique position as a translator and reteller of Holocaust stories, bridging the gap between the familiar and the foreign.

By contrast, Vladek's irregular speech sets him apart and marks him as not always fitting into American culture the way his son can. Their verbal interactions serve as a barrier between the father and son,

an audiovisual indicator of the gap in their understanding and experience. Spiegelman has been open about the sometimes-troubled relationship between himself and his father and strives for accountability in the ways he depicts real people and events. In a 1987 interview with NPR, he said:

> . . . one of the things that was important to me in "Maus" was to make it all true. And that truth wouldn't be served by retouching the portraits. And on the other hand, I found that by working with the things that are actual, the book becomes far more potent so that my father isn't a caricature of a miserly, old Jew. He's a miserly, old Jew. But he's not a caricature of a miserly, old Jew. (Gross)

One way in which Spiegelman captures his father's identity on paper is in Vladek's unique English idiolect. Having learned English as a second language, the character of Vladek exhibits a distinct foreign influence in his English speech when speaking from the postwar frame narrative in his interviews with Art. This comes from elements of the real Vladek Spiegelman's speech, which Spiegelman recorded and transcribed in their interviews, though it is worth noting that these dialectal idiosyncrasies are frequently exaggerated for effect. This act of adaptation constructs a distinctive dialect for Vladek, helping to reveal his cultural and ethnic background as a Polish Jew and a Holocaust survivor (Urdiales, "Voicing" 28).

Spiegelman marks this dialect not solely through the incorporation of Polish vocabulary, but by including elements of Polish grammatical interference in his dialogue. When we look at Vladek's speech within the context of American English, it becomes clear that this is not his home culture. Vladek's Polish-English speech includes frequent errors in word order, form, and choice. In an altercation with his second wife, Mala, about Art's mother, Vladek exclaims, "'. . . of course I'm thinking always about her, anyway.' 'Yes, you keep photos of her all around your desk—like a shrine!' 'What have I to do, Mala? In the garbage put them? Of you also I have a photo on the desk!'" (Spiegelman, *Maus* 106). In Vladek's first sentence, the adverb "always" appears after the verb that it is modifying instead of before, as it would if his speech followed the rules of standard English, which would transform this phrase into "always thinking." The rest of his dialogue, in this excerpt and elsewhere, is full of other English errors

(Urdiales, "Voicing" 28), which readers of English, though they may not know why, are able to intuitively identify as incorrect. In the American context of his interviews with Art, these quirks of speech make Vladek stand out as foreign, a non-native English speaker, an aspect of his identity which further strengthens his association in the minds of readers with the countries and cultures being discussed in his recollections (Rosen 256).

The decision to retain some of Vladek's idiosyncratic language, though adjusted for clarity and concision, is one marker of integrity to the real person behind the story, but it also establishes Vladek as a credible witness to the events narrated in his memories of the war as even his language grounds him in a Polish-Jewish context (Minich 5). Other characters in the postwar narrative share many identities with Vladek—they are also Holocaust survivors, non-native English-speakers, and American immigrants—but their speech is conspicuously free from the linguistic features that distinguish Vladek's. Rosen writes, "it is for Vladek alone that Spiegelman reserves the distortions of syntax, the malapropisms, the quirky idiom–the stylistic correlates, as it were, of an accent" (257). Spiegelman makes no effort to reckon with the stories of these other individuals; Vladek is *Maus*'s primary witness of the Holocaust, and to him alone falls the task of serving as its narrator.

The dialectal speech that so distinguishes Vladek's character after the war contrasts sharply with his younger version's speech as it appears in the wartime narratives. In these memories, context implies that he is speaking Polish and/or Yiddish, though it is presented in the novel as fluent English. In this way, the type of English used conveys the native fluency of the narrator, regardless of whether that language is English or not, and gives readers insight into the character of Vladek as both a younger and an older man.

Within these wartime memories, Vladek is characterized as being proficient in both English and German in addition to his native Polish. These linguistic abilities serve as an asset for both social advancement and survival, but they are also illustrative of the role the young Vladek occupies within the pre-war and wartime worlds. Prior to the outbreak of war, he worked as a textile salesman and is depicted as being well-educated, hard-working, and ambitious. As he tells Anja, he someday dreams of going to America, a country with a reputation for being a place of opportunity and prosperity (Spiegelman, *Maus* 18). Later on, he uses his language skills as a tool for survival, serving as a teacher to the Polish *kapo* in the camps and as a translator with

the American soldiers. Spiegelman never claims complete fluency on his father's behalf, but makes it clear that he possessed some level of proficiency in these languages, an ability that grants him some level of social cachet and allows him to access spheres that would have otherwise been out of his reach, something that distinguishes him from most other individuals introduced in the wartime narrative.

Early on in the novel, Vladek recounts a story from his experience as a soldier in the early stages of the war in which he was taken captive and beaten by German soldiers. Commenting on the episode, Kruschwitz writes, "he tries to give the impression that he is a German-born or Germanophile Polish soldier, and his bet pays off. The beating stops" (315). In this instance, Vladek's German-language abilities help him position himself in a way that appeases his German captors and facilitates his survival. Vladek's identity as a speaker of many languages helps him to navigate uncertain circumstances and survive.

Language as an Element of Cultural Relationship

Maus takes place among groups with diverse cultural, ethnic, and ideological backgrounds, and as characters navigate that landscape, Spiegelman uses language as a tool to position them amid the relationships between these groups. The novel is primarily written in English, though words and phrases of other languages, including German, Polish, and Yiddish, appear as well. English functions as both an "inside" and an "outside" language in *Maus*; it is foreign to the contexts explored in Vladek's wartime memories, but as Spiegelman's native language, it is both his character's primary language and the language by which the novel explores Holocaust stories. English, as well as the other languages that appear, can function as either foreign or native, both for the reader and the characters, and in doing so help to construct clear relationships between cultural and ideological groups in the text and between the reader and the in-text stories.

Any English treatment of the Holocaust is necessarily at some distance from the events and peoples described. In *Maus,* American English takes an almost objective standpoint, as it is not the language spoken by any of the central players in the Nazi-Jewish-Polish conflicts, thus allowing it a certain degree of objectivity in its exploration of these stories (Rosen 249). This is most clearly seen in the differing treatment of the Englishes of the wartime and postwar narratives. Within the post-war narrative, American English is the standard.

Because Vladek's English is so markedly foreign, it creates a feeling of distance between the English-speaking world of New York and Vladek's Polish-speaking homeland. Rosen writes, "Paradoxically, it is not the representation of the events of the Holocaust itself that is most foreign to the American readers of *Maus*; it is rather the telling about the Holocaust—the testimony—that carries the burden of everything foreign" (258). In *Maus*, Vladek's voice forms a bridge between the familiar and foreign.

By contrast, English becomes foreign within the worlds of Vladek's story. As characters travel from one linguistic setting to another, their speech appears in English, though from context the reader is given to understand that they may not be speaking English at all. Spiegelman subtly points this out to his readers very early on, when Vladek is first introduced to Anja. Vladek narrates, "The next morning we all met together. My cousin and Anja spoke sometimes in English. They couldn't know I understood" (Spiegelman, *Maus* 18). Here, and throughout the novel, the Polish dialogue is written in English, with nothing but context to indicate to readers the distinction between it and native English.

There are a few instances within the wartime story where non-English speaking characters speak English. Here Spiegelman employs language-mixing techniques to create a curious blend of Polish and English that sticks out like a sore thumb from the rest of the fluently written dialogue: "Vhere . . . ist . . . der pen? . . . Der pen ist . . . in . . . der table" (191).

Figure 1. Art Spiegelman. *Maus: A Survivor's Tale,* page 191. Pantheon Books, 2019.

Spiegelman reminds readers that though this story is being told in English, it is not an exclusively Anglophonic story. The effect of English here is the opposite of that in the postwar frame, making non-English spaces feel familiar and English foreign.

In addition to the complex use of English, Spiegelman sporadically incorporates words and phrases from other languages, including German, Yiddish, and Hebrew, into the text. This inclusion of non-English languages in *Maus* provides opportunities for exploration of cultural identities, inviting native English-speaking readers to step more fully into cultural experiences foreign from their own, as well as acting as a sort of shorthand to position characters within the tensions existing between groups such as the Jews and Nazis. Possibly the clearest example of this function of language is a comparison of the relationships conveyed by the use of Yiddish and German.

Compared with other languages, Yiddish and Hebrew appear very little throughout the novel, and when they do, it is in circumstances where the expression of Jewish identity is safe. In these contexts, the use of these languages is a comfort and a source of strength to the Jewish characters. Vladek's speech in postwar scenes is occasionally punctuated by exclamations in colloquial Yiddish and Hebrew: "meshugah!", "nu?" (Spiegelman, *Maus* 98, 118). Though still deep-

ly affected by his experiences in the Holocaust, Vladek has healed sufficiently to be able to embrace this aspect of his Jewish heritage, which is a reflection of his comfort in the world in which he now lives. Having survived the Holocaust, Vladek finds himself in America, in circumstances where he feels free and safe in expressing this linguistic expression of cultural identity. He faces no danger. This remains true for all other appearances of Yiddish and Hebrew in the text, with one notable exception. When Vladek and other mice-in-hiding use Yiddish to negotiate their flight to Hungary, their Polish "helpers," supposedly unable to understand their speech, use fluency in Yiddish to betray the mice to Nazi soldiers, relaying sensitive details about their travel plans and ultimately resulting in their capture and transportation to the prison camps (Spiegelman, *Maus* 153–55). Much of the emotional weight of this scene comes from the betrayal of a space that was supposed to be safe, the emotion of which is heightened by the use of the Yiddish language.

By contrast, German is representative of danger and oppression. Of all the languages included in *Maus*, German is by far the most prolific, being frequently used by both German and non-German characters. Regardless of who says it, the appearance of a German word immediately signals to readers that this is an unsafe space for Vladek and the other mice. It is unsurprising, then, that the German language appears most frequently in the chapters that take place in the prison camps, with Spiegelman including German in a guard's dialogue or Vladek's descriptions of life in the camps. Within these chapters, many of the German words used are part of a unique "Nazi-Deutsch" vocabulary, which Urdiales describes as endemic to the time and place of the concentration camps and not actually reflective of the German language used by the rest of the population ("Between" 26). As described by David Rousset, this German exists within a "self-contained world which both generated its own vocabulary and invested common language with new, sinister meanings" (qtd. in Urdiales, "Between" 26). This hyper-specific choice of dialect further underscores the fact that within the world of *Maus*, this language is a vehicle of violence.

Though the use of German is strongly associated with German characters, it is also used by characters of other nationalities. When being followed down the street in Poland, Vladek and Anja speak German with each other in an attempt to conceal their Jewish identities (Spiegelman, *Maus* 146). When being beaten by a guard in

Auschwitz, Vladek counts the blows out loud in German (Spiegelman, *Maus* 217). In both of these instances, the use of German is prompted by fear and the hope that its use will afford the characters some kind of protection from their German-speaking enemies. That the German language is used exclusively in contexts of oppression is unsurprising; it further serves to underscore the nature of the relationship between the Jews and Nazis.

Most of these non-English words occur in contexts wherein their meaning is relatively clear, but in places where it is not, they are often accompanied by a brief explanation, and their meaning is further clarified by the story's context and the accompanying illustrations. This is one of the unique assets of the graphic novel format. In one of the first introductions to camp life, Vladek describes the daily roll call, or *appel.* He says, "[each] morning and evening they made an appel. They counted the live ones and dead ones to see it wasn't any missing . . . we stood sometimes the whole night while they counted again and again" (Spiegelman, *Maus* 210). This brief description is accompanied by an illustration of rows and rows of emaciated prisoners, standing at rigid attention while German cats patrol up and down their lines. The comic medium's unique blend of word and image means that words like *appel*, foreign to most readers, are relatively self-explanatory and don't require lengthy explanations or definitions.

Language as a Source of Setting

Maus occurs across a broad cultural landscape, with language serving an important role in signaling to the reader where they are situated in time, place, and culture. Spiegelman employs two main narrative voices in *Maus*: Art as the self-reflective son and creator, and Vladek as the rememberer and reteller of wartime stories. *Maus* contains several frame stories, and these dual narrative voices are useful tools for separating their various layers. Art's narrations appear only at the beginning of new sections, where they set the stage for opening scenes. Similarly, Vladek's narrative captions emerge from his conversations with Art, maintaining a connection to the postwar frame story while the images and dialogue illustrate the experiences he is describing. Spiegelman's choice to create such a distinct voice for the elderly version of Vladek helps to create a distinct narrative thread, which becomes especially important when the wartime and postwar narrations overlap. In this way, language functions as an indicator of setting, implicitly communicating to the reader where

they are located in time. As Rosen points out, Vladek's narration is distinguished by the actual shape in which the text appears and the content depicted in the accompanying images, as well as by Vladek's unusual grammar (257–58). Each of these elements works together to orient the reader within time and space. In this regard, Vladek's narrative captions are a useful thread for separating the levels of the frame story, especially as its levels overlap and intertwine (McGlothlin 182). Minic expands on this idea, writing:

> One should also note Vladek's voice within the flashback scenes. Within these panels, there are text boxes that continue Vladek's present-day voice, as well as word balloons that indicate the speech or thought of a character, . . . the text boxes continue Vladek's present-day voice, complete with fractured English, so that it is almost as if Vladek is talking over a picture. Second, the speech and thought balloons in these panels are in fluent English. Third, though the speech and thought bubbles are written in fluent English, the dialogue exchanged between characters is most often Polish, but may also be Yiddish or German depending on with whom Vladek is speaking. (6–7)

As Minic explains, the distinction between text boxes and speech bubbles is a useful mode of visual communication, working in tandem with Vladek's distinctive narrative voice to wordlessly communicate to readers their temporality within the story. Through this distinction in language, it is always clear which character of Vladek is speaking, even when his postwar narrations occur on top of historical scenes.

Text appears infrequently within images themselves, usually as a part of the background. Given the constraints of the comic for-mat, snippets of non-English language serve as signposts for read-ers, quickly orienting them within the diverse historical and cultural contexts. *Maus* is written on a relatively small scale, so when a word appears in an image, it has to pack a punch. Such words usually serve a double purpose, communicating important information simultaneously to both the viewer and the characters within the story.

On page 230, Spiegelman includes a panel depicting an undressing room where prisoners were brought to before moving on to the gas chambers. Spiegelman shows walls plastered with stylized messages in both English and German, reminding prisoners of the virtues

of "cleanliness and good health" and asking them to "please tie your shoes together" and reminding them to "remember your hook number"! The presence of German in this panel automatically indicates that this is a hostile setting.

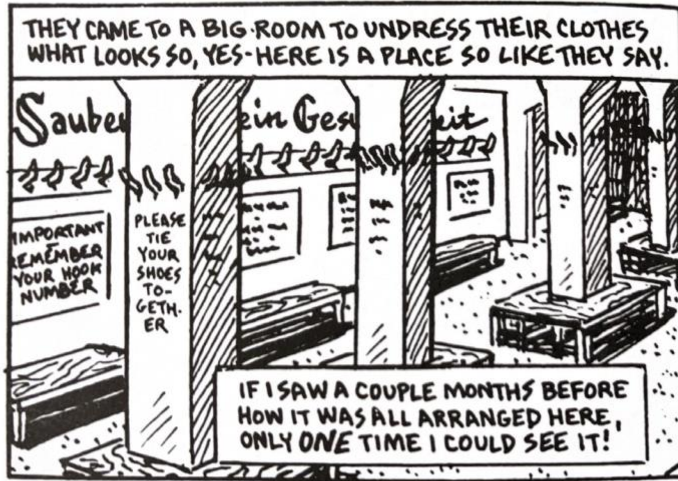

Figure 2. Art Spiegelman. *Maus: A Survivor's Tale,* page 230. Pantheon Books, 2019.

The use of German vocabulary to describe life under Nazi rule contributes to the construction of setting, further evidence of oppression beyond what is explicitly shown on the page. English here serves a purely narrative purpose, making otherwise incomprehensible information comprehensible to readers. This in-image text is effective because it efficiently conveys different messages to both its in-text and extra-textual audiences. For the inmates of the concentration camp, it is simply another set of instructions mandating orderliness. However, for readers, who are already familiar with the fate awaiting the Jewish captives, these panels of text only serve to underscore Nazi cruelty. These seemingly inconsequential inclusions add another layer of detail to an already emotionally charged panel, enriching the story told by both the narration and the art and anchoring the reader in the physical setting.

Conclusion

Spiegelman's word choice, deliberate in its language, dialect, and voice, is essential in his development of character identity, navigation

of cultural relationships, and construction of temporal and geographic setting. The constraints of the comic format mean that words are expensive, requiring each word to carry greater weight and meaning than in other storytelling formats. Considerations of the use of language are a part of the novelist's craft, and when employed effectively are a powerful tool of narrative construction—unsurprising, considering the key role language plays in shaping the worlds which we inhabit. In *Maus*, Spiegelman conveys key features of personality and background through characters' dialogue, compressing extensive exposition into choice dialectal words. Furthermore, the strategic use of languages such as German or Yiddish helps readers place these individuals within the complex web of culture that these languages represent. This careful use of language and dialect in *Maus* constructs settings both familiar and foreign, guiding readers through the layers of the story and allowing them to grapple with the multigenerational impact of the Holocaust. Making meaning is difficult enough in one language, let alone many; yet as members of multicultural communities, investigation of the words we encounter leads us to step back and contemplate perspective-taking and truth. In both historical and present-day contexts, language is a vital means of understanding who others are and the backgrounds from which they come.

ESTHER LAY is a senior majoring in English and minoring in Middle East Studies at Brigham Young University. Studying literature and foreign languages has taught her to appreciate the capacity of language, both written and spoken, in shaping identity, fostering connection, and empowering individual voices. After graduation, she plans to pursue graduate studies in English literature or curatorial studies.

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Toni Morrison and Marilynne Robinson's Ruth: Finding Identity in the Imaginative Realm

Olivia Reardon, Messiah University

From the opening sentence of *Housekeeping*—"My name is Ruth"—Marilynne Robinson establishes the novel as one about identity (3). Throughout *Housekeeping*, the protagonist Ruth narrates her story in first person, starting with her grandfather's settlement in the fictional town of Fingerbone, in an attempt to communicate and understand her life. By beginning her story before her own birth, Ruth implicitly posits that our identities are shaped by the people who come before us. As Ruth communicates her story and the stories of her ancestors, she draws on both real experiences and imagined scenarios; the phrases "imagine" and "say that" appear frequently throughout the novel. Thus, *Housekeeping* draws complex connections between the self, others, and the imagination. Although scholars have written on these individual themes within *Housekeeping*, no one has attempted to discuss the way they interact. In neglecting this intersection, scholars have also overlooked the connections between Marilynne Robinson's writing and the writing of another author contemporary to her time, Toni Morrison. In her essay "The Site of Memory," Morrison examines the way memory plays a role in her fiction writing and claims that joining memory with imagination allows her to access the "interior" lives of her ancestors (92). In this way, Morrison's essay serves as a guidebook for understanding the way imagination and identity interact within *Housekeeping*, and Ruth's writing in *Housekeeping* serves as a case study for Morrison's position on the use of the imagination for understanding others and eventually oneself. Therefore, read through the lens of Toni Morrison's "The Site of Memory," *Housekeeping* demonstrates the importance of using one's imagination to understand one's ancestors in order to form one's own identity.

Interestingly, there are remarkable similarities between the way Toni Morrison talks about writing in "The Site of Memory" and the way Ruth uses writing to tell her story in *Housekeeping*. For example, both Ruth and Morrison seek to discover and understand their ancestors through their writing. Although *Housekeeping* is a fictional story written by Marilynne Robinson, it reads like the autobiography of the protagonist Ruth because of its first-person narration. As a result, one can think about Ruth as a fictional writer and *Housekeeping* as her text. Within this text, Ruth spends a great deal of time considering and communicating the lives of her ancestors, specifically her grandparents, since they are the ones who began her family's legacy in Fingerbone. Thus, in telling her story, Ruth is deeply interested in understanding the people who came before her. In this way, Ruth's writing has the same goal as Morrison's own writing. Although Morrison is a fiction writer, she explains that her "literary heritage is the autobiography" (85). By this, Morrison means that her writing draws on the history of African American writing, including slave narratives, and ultimately seeks "to rip that veil drawn over 'proceedings too terrible to relate'" to reveal the "interior" lives of her ancestors (90–91). In other words, Morrison's goal in writing her fiction is to better understand the people who came before her. Calling her writing autobiographical because it draws on the writing and legacy of her ancestors demonstrates the deep interconnectedness between understanding others and understanding oneself. Neither Ruth nor Morrison can communicate their stories without first understanding and communicating the stories of those who came before them. Therefore, both Ruth and Morrison write with the goal of understanding their ancestors.

This goal establishes Morrison and Ruth's writing firmly in what is real. They are not creating stories arbitrarily about anyone or anything; rather, they are writing to understand real people. Therefore, both Morrison and Ruth must root their creative processes in memory. Morrison acknowledges this when she says, "I must trust my own recollections. I must also depend on the recollections of others. Thus memory weighs heavily in what I write, in how I begin and in what I find to be significant" (91–92). Not only does this reveal that memory plays an important role in Morrison's writing, it also reveals the kinds of memory she employs. In her article "Toni Morrison's 'Site of Memory': Where Memoir and Fiction Embrace," scholar Mail Marques de Azevedo explains that Morrison posits the use of

both "*individual* and *collective* memory" in her writing process (161). Marques de Azevedo clarifies this distinction by saying, "although, strictly speaking, memory is individual, as it involves individual consciousness, anthropologists and sociologists, notably Maurice Halbwachs, insist that all memory is social. Individuals remember as members of groups, and belonging to a group gives a sense of validity to their memories" (161). This sheds light on what Morrison means when she says she draws on both her recollections and the recollections of others: she is writing from both her personal memories and the memories that have been passed down to her from her ancestors via their writing. Ruth also draws on both personal and collective memories to tell her stories. Given the autobiographical nature of *Housekeeping*, most of what Ruth communicates is her own memory, but she also draws on the memories her family orally passed down to her. This is evident when she communicates stories that she was not alive for, such as her family's settlement in Fingerbone, her grandfather's death, and her mother's childhood (Robinson 5–15). This oral tradition is the kind of "collective memory" that influences Ruth's writing. Thus, memory, both personal and collective, is a central part of both Morrison's and Ruth's writing.

However, memory serves as merely the foundation on which Morrison and Ruth build their stories. In order for Morrison and Ruth to accomplish their goal of truly understanding the people who came before them, they must use their imagination. Morrison says, "memories and recollections won't give me total access to the unwritten interior life of these people. Only the act of the imagination can help me" (92). In seeking to understand her ancestors through their interior lives, Morrison is seeking access to something that cannot be gained through memory alone. These people are no longer present for her to ask, and they did not—because they often *could* not due to illiteracy, abuse, and scrutiny—record their interior lives in their writing. Thus, to understand them in the deep way that she wants to, Morrison must use her imagination. Likewise, Ruth seeks to understand people she no longer has access to, such as her grandparents and her mother. Consequently, in an attempt to understand the people who came before her, Ruth frequently tells stories about them that go beyond what memory provides. For example, Ruth narrates a story about her grandmother thinking about picking flowers with her late husband, Edmund (Robinson 16–17). This must be a creation of Ruth's imagination because she has no way of knowing her grandmother's

exact thoughts or feelings at this time. However, by creating this story, Ruth better comprehends her grandmother as she mourns the loss of Edmund. Therefore, both Morrison and Ruth employ imagination alongside memory to understand their ancestors.

Importantly, Morrison and Ruth are not simply using their imagination to create whatever stories they want regarding their ancestors. Rather, they root the imagination in memory to access truth. Morrison acknowledges that "what makes [her writing] fiction is the nature of the imaginative act: my reliance on the image—on the remains—In addition to recollection, to yield up a kind of a truth" (92). At first, this statement seems counterintuitive: what is imagined is inherently not real, so how can it yield truth? Anticipating this concern, Morrison clarifies, saying, "the crucial distinction for me is not the difference between fact and fiction, but the distinction between fact and truth" (93). Here, Morrison is associating fact with that which is concrete and literal. Since fiction communicates something that did not happen, it cannot be considered fact in the way that communicating the actual life of a real historical figure could. All facts are true, but here Morrison posits that not all truths are facts. This broadens the scope of what can communicate truth to include abstract ideas and imagined scenarios. And the way that imagination communicates truth is by using memory as its foundation. Morrison says that when she writes fiction, she goes "from the image to the text" (94). By "image," Morrison means a "'picture' and the feelings that accompany the picture," which is acquired through memory, and by text, she means the written product she creates (92). Thus, the image or memory serves as the basis for the text, which is ultimately created through the imagination. Together, memory and imagination are capable of producing a more holistic and true text.

Ruth offers an example of how memory and imagination work together to communicate truth near the end of *Housekeeping* when she is wrestling with the loss of her mother. Amidst the threat of being taken away from her aunt Sylvie, who has custody of her at the time, Ruth recalls her last memories with her mother: "I remember looking at her from the back seat as we drove toward Fingerbone . . . she never spoke to us once . . . we asked to stop at an ice-cream stand" (Robinson 196). After reflecting on this memory, Ruth realizes that she was "recalled again and again to a sense of her [mother's] calm" (Robinson 196). While Ruth remembers her mother on that last day as having a deep sense of calm, she also knows that was the

same day her mother drove a car into the lake and died. This information leads Ruth to conclude that her mother's "calm was as slight as the skin on water, and her calm sustained her as a coin can float on still water" (Robinson 198). Just as a coin cannot float on still water, Ruth's mother's calm could not, and did not, sustain her. Because of her memories, Ruth knows that the calm she perceived in her mother was a facade that was not bound to last. This is Ruth's "image" of her mother—the picture and its accompanying emotions—and she clearly uses it to construct her "text" (Morrison 92, 94). After recalling this memory, Ruth imagines what her life would have been like if she and her sister Lucille had grown up with their mother, saying "her eccentricities might have irked and embarrassed us when we grew older . . . we would telephone her out of guilt and nostalgia . . . she would soften and shrink in our hands, and become infirm … we would have laughed and felt abandoned and grieved" (Robinson 197–98). Ruth could have imagined any life she wanted; she could have pictured a happy life with a wholesome family and pitied herself all the more because she did not have it. Yet, building off of the memories she has of her mother required Ruth to imagine this bleak, but more accurate, alternative life. Given the knowledge Ruth has about her mother's mental state, their life together could not have been the perfect, or even positive, one she may have hoped for. As Ruth says, even if her mother did not leave her that day, she still would have ended up "abandoned and grieved" (Robinson 198). Thus, together, her memory and imagination "yield up" truth: Ruth realizes that losing her mother did not create all her problems, and that in some ways, she may be better off than if her mother had stayed alive.

Considering the truth of her mother's mental state and the way their life would have been had her mother lived allows Ruth to better understand her mother. Returning to her final memories of her mother with the knowledge that she committed suicide shows Ruth the instability of her mother. And imagining her future with her mother helps Ruth consider what her mother may also have considered: that Ruth and Lucille's lives are not improved by being with their mother. Therefore, it is possible that Ruth's mother abandoned her daughters because of the hopelessness she felt in her own condition and a desire for a better life for Lucille and Ruth than one she felt she could offer. In this way, using her imagination in tandem with memory sheds light on the "interior life" of Ruth's mother (Morrison 92). This knowledge, though it is unfavorable, provides Ruth with the necessary informa-

tion to move away from hurt and confusion and toward empathy and forgiveness. In this way, imagination and memory allow Ruth to better understand her mother.

Ultimately, understanding other people provides one with a better understanding of oneself. Morrison articulates that the process of creating out of memory and imagination in order to understand other people is significant for her own identity. Morrison says, "these people are my access to me; they are my entrance into my own interior life" (95). Here, Morrison makes a powerful statement about identity: she needs to understand the people who came before her to understand herself. And not only does Morrison need to have access to her ancestors' stories in order to understand herself, but she also needs access to their interior lives. Because the imagination is necessary for accessing the interior lives of others, using one's imagination is a crucial element of forming one's own identity.

Understanding her mother is crucial for Ruth's identity because the trauma of Ruth's mother's abandonment negatively impacts Ruth's identity formation. From seeing a woman on a train whom she could not quite catch to making and abandoning a snow lady to expecting Sylvie to leave her at any moment, remnants of her mother's abandonment follow Ruth everywhere (Robinson 54, 60-61, 82–83). This fixation on her mother traps Ruth within the confines of a never-ending spiral of memories, questions, and wishes. Ruth is unable to stop thinking about her mother's calm on their last day together, wondering why her mother abandoned her, and wishing she was still alive. The restrictive nature of this mental spiral deprives Ruth's identity of the space and attention it requires to develop.

However, Ruth's use of her imagination allows her to grapple with her mother's abandonment and break free from this harmful spiral. In their article "Loss, Longing, and the Optative Mode in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*: On the Spiritual Value of Ruth's Wandering Narrative," scholars Paul Tyndall and Fred Ribkoff connect Ruth's use of her imagination with the optative mode. Tyndall and Ribkoff define the optative mode as "an inherently speculative mode of discourse" that generally refers to Ruth's continual imagination and creation of scenarios that do not exist (87–88). They go on to explain that Ruth employs the optative mode "as she attempts not simply to narrate her story, but to understand it, and to come to terms with grief and loneliness, and ultimately to transcend the pain and alienation of everyday life and the fear of death" (Tyndall and

Ribkoff 88). Thus, Tyndall and Ribkoff advocate that Ruth's use of her imagination helps her to understand the loss she has experienced. By helping her better understand her mother's state before she died, Ruth's imagined scenario allows her to forgive her mother and find closure. The different language Ruth employs in this imagined scenario indicates closure, as she trades her common signal words such as "imagine" or "say that" for phrases such as "we might" or "we would have" (Robinson 197). Tyndall and Ribkoff claim that "these conjectural statements indicate an acceptance of the loss of the mother" (99). From here to the end of the novel, Ruth seems to have come to terms with the loss of her mother, as she refers to the abandonment of her mother as "the common experience" with a matter-of-factness that demonstrates closure (Robinson 215). In this way, Ruth's ancestors become her access to herself, the same way they are for Morrison. Thus, using her imagination ultimately frees Ruth from the confines of her traumatic memories and wishful thinking regarding her mother's abandonment.

Finally, finding closure regarding her mother's abandonment allows Ruth to meaningfully form her identity. By employing her imagination alongside memory, Ruth realizes not only that her mother is not coming back, but that maybe she does not want her to. This realization allows Ruth to wholly embrace the life she has been given with Sylvie. From her last imagined scenario of her mother to the end of the novel, and likely beyond, Ruth chooses to follow Sylvie, even to setting their house on fire and leaving Fingerbone by crossing the narrow train tracks over the lake at night (Robinson 208–09, 211–12). Although she is following Sylvie, Ruth freely chooses to do so, and it is one of the first active choices she makes. Ruth could have gone to live with Lucille or run away, as she did once in the novel, but ultimately, she chooses a life with Sylvie (Robinson 202–05). Ruth may have made this choice because Sylvie provides her space to form her own identity, offering Ruth a way of life through her example but not forcing Ruth to follow in her footsteps. The final chapter indicates her embracing all that life with Sylvie implies, as Ruth says that crossing the train tracks "changed [her] finally" into someone "so unlike other people" (Robinson 215, 214). These are not the words of a confused girl wrestling with abandonment; rather, they are the words of a girl who has finally begun to form her own identity. In this way, the imagination not only helps Ruth grapple with the loss of her mother as

Tyndall and Ribkoff suggest, but it also ultimately allows her to begin forming a true sense of self.

Using one's imagination, understanding others, and forming one's identity are just a few of the threads woven into the rich tapestry that is Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*. By placing this novel in conversation with Toni Morrison's writing on the same topics, scholars can better understand how these threads explicitly tie together to present ideas that are true and meaningful for every audience. Ultimately, Morrison and Ruth demonstrate that the imagination is an invaluable tool for accessing the interior lives of one's ancestors, and using the imagination alongside memory produces truths that positively impact one's identity formation. Given the similarities between Morrison and Robinson's writing and the richness they bring to each other's texts, the two should be studied together more often. In a time where understanding one's ancestors is undervalued, using the imagination is underappreciated, and forming one's identity is underprioritized, Morrison's and Robinson's writing are more crucial than ever.

OLIVIA REARDON is an English major with a concentration in literature and a double minor in Education and Dance. She wrote her article "Toni Morrison and Marilynne Robinson's Ruth: Finding Identity in the Imaginative Realm" for American Women's Writing. Olivia is particularly passionate about classic literature, and some of her favorite writers include Jane Austen, C. S. Lewis, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky. After graduation, Olivia hopes to teach literature and writing at a classical, Christian school.

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How do Icelandic Sagas Present Land and People in the East and West?

Ethan Reisler, Messiah University

The Icelandic sagas often depict the histories of peoples and nations within Scandinavia, Iceland, and Greenland. Since saga authors are Christians, these histories frequently share a bias towards providing positive depictions of Christian individuals—or soon-to-be Christian nations—while providing negative depictions of pagans and their religion. Although certainly present, these biases often take moderate steps in swaying the audience's perception in favor of Christianity, as Scandinavia, Iceland, and Greenland were firmly Christian by the time of their writing. The intentions behind these biases are thus recontextualized as Christian authors attempting to present a history that alludes to their nation always being destined to convert to Christianity, cementing their identities as current Christians rather than past pagans. Thus, when writing sagas set in distant nations, a bias in favor of Christianity still appears. However, in the case of the Western lands of Vinland in *The Vinland Sagas* and the Eastern stretches of Russia in *Yngvar's Saga*, the biases favoring Christians and disfavoring non-Norse pagans are extreme rather than moderate. Utilizing the depictions of the land and its inhabitants, saga authors present narratives that argue the presence of humanity and personhood based on one's ability to convert to Christianity. By analyzing the humanizing and dehumanizing strategies employed in the texts, readers can more effectively understand how the authors' biases curated particular narratives of foreign lands and their inhabitants.

Pernille Hermann's essay, "The Horror of Vínland: Topographies and Otherness in the Vínland Sagas," argues that many of the storytelling elements utilized by saga authors of *The Vínland Sagas* can be categorized as horror. These horror elements are used in othering the

depictions of the land and its people within the sagas, including sagas that take place in foreign lands like Russia. Hermann coins this literary technique as "literary topographies": the "… descriptions of places in words . . . They negotiate between real and imagined landscapes, imposing layers of meaning onto the real geography and expanding their frame of reference in the widest sense" (Hermann 6). It is by literary topographies that saga authors tell stories set in distant lands across the world's continents. However, since these landscapes would lack their true depth without incorporating the people and monsters inhabiting them, I will include the native populations in my references to literary topography for this essay.

Traveling East in *Yngvar's Saga*, the saga first depicts Yngvar as he travels into Russia before his untimely death, then depicts his son Svein making a similar journey. The saga's perception of foreign people begins taking shape as Yngvar and his son Svein encounter native humans on their journeys, all of whom are pagans. Both expedition crews are instructed not to interact with the pagans when visiting cities, and the pagans with whom they do interact while traveling lead them to commit violence. Furthermore, the lands these pagans inhabit are depicted using negative literary topography to dehumanize the natives. Arngrímur Vídalín discusses the strategies of dehumanizing non-Norse people groups in sagas in his essay "Alterity and Occidentalism in Fourteenth-Century Icelandic Texts: Narratives of Travel, Conversion, and Dehumanization." Here, Vídalín writes that "The most detailed of related geographical treatises, found in the Icelandic biblical compilation *Stjórn* (ca. 1350), represents Asia and Africa as almost exclusively inhabited by monstrous peoples" (Vídalín 90). By depicting foreign lands as being inhabited by monstrous people, actual foreign groups of peoples are dehumanized by being associated with monsters. The representations of monstrous people are present in *Yngvar's Saga*, set in the lands of Russia. These representations include giants—one of which is thought to be "the Devil himself" (Palsson and Edwards 55)—flame-wielding "human devils," prophesying demons (Palsson and Edwards 56, 57), and a hybrid between a man and bird (Palsson and Edwards 62–63). All these monsters are depicted as violent and are further associated with the demonic—an intentional association that would quickly dehumanize any actual people group in the eyes of the saga's Christian audience. Another telling sign of Russia's literary topography comes when Svein slays the Jakulus (Palsson and Edwards 65). Its death produces a foul smell,

which kills six men, signaling the demonic to medieval audiences, but Vídalín points out the more obvious association: "The primordial guise of Satan was, after all, a serpent" (Vídalín 92). The land is depicted as being full of demons and mythological monsters, and the Jakulus' inclusion makes the subtle connection that Russia is inhabited by Satan himself. This negative literary topography works to dehumanize any actual group of people from the region by degrading their reputations as people who live amongst demons.

Yngvar and Svein are depicted as trying their best to overcome these monsters and "evil" pagans, killing many along their journey but losing many of their own men. Still, the Christian adventurers were not always able to defeat their enemies in traditional combat. Some of the monsters, like the giant in his house (Palsson and Edwards 55), must be overcome with cunning traps rather than direct assaults. Other monsters, like some dragons (Palsson and Edwards 52, 56), are avoided entirely. These unconventional approaches to the typical confrontations employed by saga protagonists highlight how far Yngvar and Svein stray from their Viking ideals to overcome the land's inhabitants. The pagan East is a difficult ordeal for the Christians fighting against fantastical monsters. This larger-than-life literary topography of Russia presents the land as a strange, dangerous, and even demonic land that can kill the strongest of travelers, presenting the locals as extreme pagans who exist alongside demons.

However, the saga's author communicates a hope for the natives of the East, which the negative literary topography does not explicitly depict due to the associations with monsters and demons. Both Yngvar and Svein are Christians, and by traveling East, they bring Christianity's presence along with them. Vídalín discusses this aspect of the text, writing in his essay that the dehumanizing strategies of *Yngvar's Saga* also communicate the trans-saga narrative of Christian Norsemen spreading Christian influence. Vídalín writes, "In sum, the narrative travels of Norsemen to the East share similar Christian quests for salvation and identity within a wider and exotic world . . . Yngvarr, and Sveinn are restless young men without a clear purpose in life; travelling east brings them both spiritually and geographically closer to God" (Vídalín 95). Journeying through Russia shows medieval Christian audiences that Yngvar and Svein are working closer to their faith, depicting those they interact with as being brought closer to the Christian faith as an effect.

The narrative presents Queen Silkisif as an example of how Yngvar and Svein's presence benefits the locals. Queen Silkisif is very intelligent—being cultured and speaking multiple languages—talking for long periods with Yngvar during his stay in her city. She falls in love with Yngvar and wants to convert to Christianity, but Yngvar dies before they can marry and officiate the conversion. Only once Svein arrives many years later does Queen Silkisif convert to Christianity, which leads to the conversion of all her subjects. Vídalín notes the biased presentation of Christianity in the narrative: "The Christian agenda of the entire narrative is emphasized at the saga's closing, when Queen Silkisif orders that a church be raised at Citopolis and sanctified in the name of the holy Yngvarr víðfǫrli . . . the bishop astonishingly agrees and sanctifies the building in the name of Yngvarr" (Vídalín 94). The Christian author's bias in favor of other Christians communicates that Yngvar and Svein are so justified—even righteous—in their quest East that the church's own authority is subverted to commemorate Yngvar. In this, the saga communicates to medieval Christians that some of Russia's natives are human enough to receive the Christian faith. The East is predominantly presented as a strange and deadly land by *Yngvar's Saga*'s author through the negative literary topography of Russia and its people, but some pagan natives receive less dehumanization—seen through Queen Silkisif—for the sole purpose of conversion.

Turning attention West presents a similar story. *The Saga of the Greenlanders* shows Leif Eriksson coming to Vinland from Greenland, finding a land primarily characterized by its material abundance and the gentleness of winter on crops and animals—literary allusions to the Garden of Eden. Returning to Hermann's essay on the otherness of Vinland and its literary topography, she notes how the land's abundance and Leif's Christian beliefs as very intentional: "connecting the discovery of the new land with the will of God is apparent: the newly discovered land looks like a paradise or a promised land" (Hermann 4). The author's use of allusions to Eden connects Vinland with the Christian paradise of Genesis within the minds of medieval audiences. Vinland is presented as a land of untapped potential, unspoiled in its beauty and ability to sustain the settlers. The land's presentation upon discovery is very different from the mythical and dangerous lands depicted in Russia, yet the bias of the authors becomes very apparent with the introduction of the natives.

The Greenlanders encounter the skrælingar: the Native Americans. This discovery leads to the new understanding that Vinland is not as culturally empty and uninhabited as the settlers had previously thought (Hermann 9). The language behind the word "skrælingar" is unclear, either meaning "the wretched" or a term that refers to their skin or clothing. However, the use of "skrælingar" is telling due to its derogatory connotation when compared to the other words available to the Greenlanders. Eleanor Barraclough writes concerning the sagas' language used referring to non-Norse groups in her chapter "Travel" by expanding upon Sverrir Jakobsson's writing: "'The Skrælings are "black" and live in Africa. Yet they were not "blámenn" (Negroes), a term used for black Africans.' Despite this, he argues, the two racial groups do share similar characteristics, with the skrælingar described as being *illiligir* (malignant) with *illt hár* (bad hair)" (Barraclough 211). Sagas that include travels across the world, particularly to Africa, used negative, dehumanizing language to describe Africans. It might appear as if the Greenlanders thought they had landed in Africa—the thought of discovering a new continent was never a possibility— by using a similar descriptive language, yet they do not refer to the Native Americans as Africans. Instead, Hermann notes that they are given an entirely new description, one that dehumanizes them by a larger extreme: "A trope of diminution is deployed when Freydís Eiríksdóttir compares the natives with . . . livestock" (Hermann 11). The Native Americans are less than human in the text, equated to animals. The saga authors would have known that Africans could be Christian (like the Ethiopian eunuch of the New Testament) and thus could only dehumanize them so much, similarly to Queen Silkisif and her people of Russia.

Judith Jesch's chapter "Diaspora Sagas" discusses that converting pagans to Christianity is an integral part of diaspora sagas (Jesch 423), and since the natives of Vinland cannot be converted whatsoever due to language barriers (Vídalín 97), the Greenlanders view the Native Americans as less than Africans like the Ethiopian eunuch who converted to Christianity. Although the Greenlanders are new Christians, coming from an outpost on the edge of the world that is Greenland, the skrælingar are presented as monstrous sorcerers coming from a land beyond the edge of the world (Vídalín 97), due to the Christian author's bias. Vinland's abundance is thus recontextualized by the authors to be like a mirage in Hell, and the Greenlanders view the

skrælingar as beasts that can be killed without a second thought Hermann 11).

The demonic quality of Vinland presented in *The Saga of the Greenlanders* influences many of the events and characters of the sagas. Freydis is a woman amongst the settler groups and is the most impacted. She is seemingly possessed by the land itself, viewing the Native Americans as cattle and manipulating her people into killing other Greenlanders in the area. Hermann writes in her essay on the narrative impact of depicting Freydis as possessed: "Freydís's demonic nature is demonstrated by the contrast between the horrific event and her pleasure about it. Her wish to repress and erase the traumatic event from the minds of the witnesses suggests a highly controlling and authoritative personality" (Hermann 16). Freydis' time in Vinland has fundamentally altered her identity from the feminine ideal of the Greenlanders for the worse, adopting a masculine cruelty. Whether Vinland turned Freydis demonic or created a space for Freydis to exercise her pre-existing demonic qualities does not matter as much as the fact that the saga communicates how Vinland is where actions like these are possible.

Alongside Freydis' actions, many other supernatural events take place in *The Saga of the Greenlanders*. A supernatural sleep overtakes a group of Greenlanders, and a loud voice awakens them in time, saving their lives (Holtsmark 20). This voice seems to be God's (Hermann 18), adding to the otherness of Vinland. Gudrid, another woman amongst the settlers, speaks to a near-identical reflection of herself who disappears after fighting breaks out (Holtsmark 24). This apparition could have been a ghost, demon, doppelganger, protector, or even one of the Native Americans (Hermann 19), all of which draw upon the demonic, supernatural, or otherworldly quality of Vinland. Thorstein Eiriksson, another settler, seemingly resurrects from the dead to prophesy "a good Christian future" for his wife (Jesch 424). His Christian beliefs are presented as being strong enough to communicate this final message from beyond the grave. In *Erik the Red*, the settler Thorhall commits pagan rituals to Thor and summons a beached whale for food, but the Christian settlers cast out this food and commit their cause to God, which improves the weather and their hunting (Jones 149). Although the demonic is depicted as creating a real presence through Thorhall's actions, so too are Christian supernatural forces depicted with similar presences. While the sagas of traveling East presented the demonic through the lenses of mythological events, the sagas of traveling West simply present the demonic and

supernatural as it is, producing a "haunted quality" in *Eirik the Red* and *The Saga of the Greenlanders* (Jesch 433). This haunted quality is utilized by the Christian saga authors in the literary topography of Vinland and its people, dehumanizing them.

Hermann discusses this supernatural quality in her essay by writing that Vinland's depiction "is synchronously a bountiful and a dangerous place. Both sagas represent Vínland as a double-sided and ambiguous wilderness-space that is 'at one and the same time a place of possibility and of danger . . . simultaneously framed as a refuge, paradise, wasteland, and hell'" (Hermann 11). The extremes of good and evil in the Christian religion are presented through the frame of Vinland and the Greenlanders' experiences in the land and with the Native Americans. The Greenlanders end their time in Vinland due to the anxiety of impending attacks made by the skrælingar, which presents the land as more of a hell than a promised land. According to the saga authors' depicted narratives, there is no wrong the Greenlanders can commit against the Native Americans who are associated with Hell, even murdering several of them in their sleep—a clear violation of Old Norse societal values (Vídalín 99). This murder showcases the saga authors' dehumanizing of the Native Americans to the point of being less than human again, depicting the West as incapable of converting to Christianity due to being inhabited by monsters.

A mild description of Greenland is presented in both *Eirik the Red* and *The Saga of the Greenlanders* when compared to Vinland and Russia. Greenland was founded after Eirik the Red fled from Norway to Iceland after a series of killings, fleeing then from Iceland to Greenland after becoming an outlaw. Others soon followed, showcasing Greenland's origin as a space for men who have been outlawed time and time again, almost all of whom would have been pagan. By navigating the dangers of stormy seas, medieval settlers found Greenland "an outpost at the periphery of the known world" (Hermann 3), due to its distance from Christian nations and lack of Christians. The first several chapters of *The Saga of the Greenlanders* implicitly show that Greenlanders were originally heathen (Jesch 424). The sagas in the East and West have drawn a clear distinction between pagans and Christians—with particular focus placed on the pagan's ability to convert—however, Greenland is depicted as being capable of converting despite being on the fringes of the world. Jesch clarifies that missionaries are sent to Greenland in her chapter when writing that "King Óláfr Tryggvason sends Eiríkr's son, Leifr, to Greenland

to convert the country" (Jesch 424). The Christian authors communicate a narrative where the Greenlanders start as rough pagans on the edge of the world but still accept Christianity and convert. The goal in this narrative is to ensure their Christian identity and display a sign of their humanity. When the story of Greenland is compared to sagas of foreign literary topographies, the authors argue that a person who is less than human would be unable to convert. With the people's conversion, Greenland became a Christian nation, abandoning pagan traditions for Christian ones. From the edge of the world, Greenland is depicted as becoming "a great outpost of Christianity" from which the Greenlanders can travel to the West, bringing Christianity with them (Vídalín 96). The saga authors work to humanize Greenlanders through the Christian faith, presenting that the Greenlanders are not too dissimilar from the Icelanders or Norwegians who start pagan and become Christian—only the distance of their lands and the time it takes for conversion to take place is what differentiates them.

Thus, Icelandic sagas depicting travels to the East and West set up a structural dichotomy between civilized and uncivilized for medieval audiences, affirming the Christian Norse and degrading the other (Hermann 2) by differentiating people groups upon their ability to convert to Christianity. Fresh converts are reminded of their pagan backgrounds, while those left unconverted are dehumanized as beasts, monsters, and demons. Vídalín summarizes the depictions of travel in sagas by writing, "Travels to colonize the West, partly to establish a new outpost of Christianity on that unexplored periphery, fail miserably. In travelling East, our heroes escape their pagan pasts and become missionaries of the true faith" (Vídalín 101). Spreading Christianity humanizes the Sagas' protagonists and the authors who came after them while dehumanizing those who do not convert.

ETHAN REISLER born and raised in Maryland, is an English major with a creative writing concentration, a Communications minor, and a Broadcasting & Journalism minor at Messiah University. This paper was written for an Icelandic Sagas tutorial during a semester abroad at Oxford, in the United Kingdom. Ethan plans to pursue either a master's degree or an MFA after graduation and a career in authorship. Writing fantasy fiction is of most interest, but Ethan enjoys reading and writing anything.

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Anti-Catholicism's Impact on the Narrative in the Later Works of Charlotte Brontë

Megan Serfontein, Agnes Scott College

In England, Catholicism was the predominant religious tradition and the established state church from 597 AD until 1534 when King Henry the VIII established the Church of England. This ushered in a new era of dominant Protestantism, marked by the aggressive conversion of Catholics and the re-education of priests to Protestant Christianity. As a newly Protestant country surrounded by Catholic nations, a nationalistic pride emerged in England connected to Protestantism. By the Victorian era, the anti-Catholicism sentiment in England was less intense, but still a prevalent part of society. Particularly, it was noted "as un-English and idolatrous" (Herringer 1). Therefore, this hatred of Catholics as well as fear of the papacy was spouted through sermons, pamphlets, newspapers, and literature. One such author of anti-Catholic literature was Charlotte Brontë. This paper will explore the anti-Catholic sentiment in her works, particularly focusing on Brontë's use of the ideological and cultural views of Victorian England, and likely her own, to deepen the understanding of her characters and propel plot development; this ultimately contributes to broader questions concerning religion and moral rigidity in the Victorian era.

Though Brontë's views often seem extremist and fueled by bigotry through a modern lens, the opinions she expresses regarding Catholics are in line with her upbringing as well as her social position in Victorian society. By the Victorian era, the only major factions of Catholics were a few aristocratic families and the landed gentry (Herringer 1). Anti-Catholic feelings were strong among the lower classes; they believed that Catholics were keeping Protestants down in society.

Since the Brontë family was poor, these views were not only shared by her family but also permeated the community to which they belonged. Another element of her background that reasonably led to her strong anti-Catholic opinion was that Brontë's father, Reverend Patrick Brontë, was an Anglican minister who grew up in predominantly Catholic Ireland to a Catholic mother. Reverend Brontë's upbringing was even poorer than Charlotte and her siblings': he lived above the underclass for the first time when he came to England for theology school. These factors likely influenced his resentment towards Catholicism and Catholic nations, strong pride in Anglicanism/England, and his desire to instill those views in his children and congregation. A third feature of Charlotte's background and experience that likely hardened her anti-Catholic disposition was her time in majority Catholic Belgium, especially her love for her Catholic teacher, Monsieur Constantin Heger. Heger, a married man, would not divorce his wife for Brontë, as divorce is a sin in Catholicism. This therefore contributed to Charlotte feeling as though Catholicism kept her from her true love.

Despite these factors affecting Charlotte, the same strong anti-Catholic sentiment is not present in the works of her younger sisters Emily and Anne Brontë, despite their shared childhood and social status. However, this phenomenon is explainable as well. Emily is the author of one single novel; rather than social commentary, her explorations of themes in *Wuthering Heights* mix gothic and romantic elements in her treatment of her subjects. Anne, the author of two novels, had more time than Emily to explore a variety of themes; however, her topics and concerns are indicative of her own life experiences. Her views on marriage, temperance, and Christian morality reflect Anne's life journey, just as Charlotte's books reflect hers. Additionally, unlike Charlotte and Emily, Anne spent no time in Belgium. It is probable she did not have as strong an opinion on Catholicism due to her limited exposure to Catholics.

The reason why the theme of religion was in particular so important as well as a frequent fixture of Charlotte's novels was her dedication to Protestant Christianity and her love for England. She was a devout Christian, whose faith informed all decisions in her life, including her writing. In Emily Griesinger's "Charlotte Brontë's Religion: Faith, Feminism, and 'Jane Eyre,'" she samples one of Brontë's letters to lifelong friend Ellen Nussey, which illustrates the importance of Christianity to Brontë and her concern over spiritual matters:

"If I could always live with you, and 'daily' read the [B]ible with you, if your lips and mine could at the same time, drink the same draught from the same pure fountain of Mercy—I hope, I trust, I might one day, become better, far better, than my evil wandering thoughts, my corrupt heart, cold to the spirit, and warm to the flesh, will now permit me to be," (30). By criticizing Catholicism, which she felt was untrue and hurtful to the general public, she promotes and shows faith and dedication to Protestant Christianity. Additionally, it promotes the majority Protestant England and their ideals over other Catholic nations, evoking an English nationalism that, at the time, was very tied to Protestantism (Kohn 72). Therefore, by including themes of religious dedication she is showing her personal convictions as well reflecting the general societal attitudes of Victorian England as well, representing both herself and her audience in her work.

The first novel of Brontë's that features this anti-Catholic sentiment as a major theme is the earliest novel she wrote: *The Professor*. The titular character, William Crimsworth, teaches in Catholic Brussels and expresses anti-Catholic views throughout the novel. William serves as a literary surrogate of Charlotte Brontë and her views. Brontë found the freedom to express her views more boldly and assertively through the masculine voice of this character despite the constraints of Victorian England's patriarchal norms that relegated women to silent roles (Peschier 98). By choosing a male narrator as well as grappling with the limitations of her early writing experience, Brontë delivers a bold and unsparring critique of Catholicism in *The Professor*.

As the narrator of *The Professor*, Williams' internal monologue is where Brontë's anti-Catholicism views are expressed. In particular, Brontë portrays Catholicism as having a stifling effect on William's students, curbing their intellectual independence and promoting passive conformity. William, in contrast, is depicted as a liberating influence, encouraging critical thinking and moral agency. His Protestant beliefs are tied to personal responsibility and free will, traits that Brontë contrasts sharply with the blind obedience she attributes to Catholic doctrine. Throughout the novel, William critiques Catholicism in a myriad of ways, usually in the religious and moral sense: "they had picked up some scanty instruction, many bad habits, losing every notion even of the first elements of religion and morals, and acquiring an imbecile indifference to every sentiment that can elevate humanity," (Brontë 121). These comments about the

destruction of morality through the Catholic church are in line with much of the commentary Brontë makes throughout her other novels as well. However, also present in *The Professor* are extremely harsh comments absent from her other novels, illustrating the confidence she gets from speaking through a masculine voice. In particular, there are critiques of Catholicism based on the girls' appearances; William believes the Catholic girls in his class to be uglier than the Protestant girls: "[Adele Dronsart] was an unnatural-looking being—so young, fresh, blooming, yet so Gorgon-like" (Brontë 117). Though at first, it seems like he is upholding the patriarchy by being critical of the girls, establishing his male superiority and dominance over them, it is clear from previous episodes in the novel and especially from the chapters that follow this one that his criticisms lie in them being Catholic (Gilbert and Gubar 322). Though William is critical of all women, he does not hold the same vitriolic hatred for Protestant women as he does for Catholic women. It is fully a critique of religion rather than gender. Namely, he makes unfavorable commentary about his sister-in-law in chapter one; however, he can still recognize a 'coquettish beauty' about her. Additionally, William's love interest, Frances Evans Henri, is treated kindly in his judgments, something never awarded to the Catholic characters. For William, it is Catholicism that is directly changing the girls in every negative way, just as Brontë would have perceived the threat of Catholicism changing England in every negative way.

The main plot point of *The Professor* that can be viewed through the anti-Catholic lens is that the central Catholic characters of Monsieur Francois Pelet and Mademoiselle Zoraide Reuter are painted as the antagonists of the novel. Though William owes his whole career and marriage to Frances to those two characters, he sees them unfavorably. The moment they stop being useful and functioning to boost him, he paints them in a negative and hostile manner. Further, William leaves Brussels and moves back to England with his Protestant bride, escaping the so-called corruption of Catholicism. In Diana Peschier's seventh chapter, "The Perceived Anti-Catholicism of Charlotte Brontë's Novel: *The Professor*" in her book *Nineteenth-Century Anti-Catholicism Discourses* she says, "At no point does Crimsworth feel the attraction of the Catholic religion itself" (99). Like Brontë, William has a disgust for the religion which contributes to his leaving the Catholic nation and villainizing the Catholics he meets. This is a way to cement himself as a hero in the narrative, just as Brontë sees

herself as a hero by convincing audiences of the evils of Catholicism and turning people away from it through her literature.

Shirley, like *The Professor*, has a plot and theme of anti-Catholic views, though less significant than the previously mentioned work and remarkably less than the 1853 novel *Villette*. The main focus of *Shirley* is the Napoleonic Wars and Luddite uprisings; however, there is a subplot of Catholic versus Protestant religious wars. The criticisms of the Catholic Church in *Shirley* are more subtle and nuanced than those of *The Professor*, indicative of Brontë's growth as an author and a woman, though they are still present. Protestant skepticism surrounding Catholicism is the main feature of anti-Catholic sentiment in Shirley. One such instance of this Catholic skepticism is through the character Reverend Matthew Helstone. Though the Reverend is a Protestant minister, he is dictatorial and rigid in his authority. His character is a criticism of authoritarianism in the church, which Victorian Protestants saw as a hallmark of Catholicism. In J. Russell Perkin's "Charlotte Brontë's 'Shirley' as a Novel of Religious Controversy," he states, "I will argue here that one can learn a great deal about Charlotte Bronte's religious views, as well as gain significant insights into *Shirley* itself, by seeing the novel in relation to the internal politics and theological controversies of the Anglican church during the 1840s" (389). This indicates that while Brontë is more focused on exploring the human condition and critiques of authority than making statements about one particular religion, her views still peek through. Therefore, the anti-Catholic sentiment, especially as it relates to conflicts with Anglicanism, does influence the narrative of *Shirley*. Particularly, it influences Brontë's interest in writing about the Napoleonic Wars and the Yorkshire labor uprising; it connects back to her religious beliefs and influences.

The novel that has the most significant amount of anti-Catholicism theming and whose plot is heavily centered around Catholicism as a whole is *Villette*. The Anti-Catholic beliefs of the main character and narrator, Lucy Snowe, are once again just a mouthpiece for Brontë's beliefs and tie into other themes such as isolation and cross-cultural struggle. Despite her psychological distress exploring a new strange country as a young woman, her comments about Catholicism are just as unsparing and boldly masculine in (Victorian) nature. Such as the line "God is not with Rome," (Brontë 432). Brontë's choice of a female narrator reflects her evolution not only as a writer but also as an individual, showing a newfound confidence in express-

ing criticism in a voice akin to her own, despite still publishing under a gender-neutral pseudonym.

Just like *The Professor*, *Villette* is also a reflection of Brontë's time in Catholic Belgium at Constantin Heger's school. However, this novel is more obvious in that Lucy is a woman, like Brontë herself, and many of the characters are modeled after the Catholics she met while in Brussels. Like *Shirley*, there are features of anti-Catholicism in this novel regarding skepticism and distrust of the Catholic church, especially in regard to viewpoints expressed by Victorians during the "papal aggression" of the 1850s (Perkin 390); however, it is most similar to *The Professor* in its expression of anti-Catholic views. Though, it presents a more delicate and nuanced conversation about institutionalized religion as a whole rather than Catholic bashing like the previously mentioned novels, as Lucy (just like Brontë) learns to have a more open stance towards Catholicism and humanize the Catholics that she meets, due to the isolation she feels in the majority Catholic country. This not only shows Brontë's growth as an author but also her journey into critical thinking in her adulthood. This change is likely due to Brontë's experiences in Catholic Belgium such as going to confession as a way to fit in and finding love with Heger. Therefore, she recognized that Catholics are not inherently evil and corrupt, rather they contain multitudes just as Protestants do.

The anti-Catholic narrative in *Villette* has similarities to *The Professor* in that Lucy believes Catholicism is corrupt and a negative influence. Additionally, the Catholic characters serve a deep and genuine purpose for Lucy's narrative, but she frames them badly and antagonistically. Such an example is Madame Maria Beck whom Lucy can thank for her livelihood and wellbeing in Labassecour, but whom Lucy only speaks of negatively. Though Maria does try to keep Lucy and M. Paul Emmanuel apart to secure Paul's fortune for herself, it is not inherently evil of her. In the Victorian era, women were to socially advance through marrying well; therefore, the widowed Maria is only trying to secure a better life for herself and her children. Lucy, however, frames it as absolutely immoral and says that it is guided by materialism in religion, which Lucy, like most other Victorians, attributes to Catholicism (Clarke 17). Even Lucy's main love interest, Paul, has a cruelty to him, again representing Brontë's original beliefs in the inherent depravity in all Catholics caused by the corrupting influence of the church. However, *Villette* does have a notably different ending regarding Catholics and Catholicism than *The Professor*.

While William maintains a great distaste for Catholics and Catholic nations by the end of the novel, Lucy develops a liberalism towards Catholicism, mostly fueled by her love for Paul and her loneliness in a Catholic nation that is fixed by going to confession. She then reframes her anti-Catholic beliefs into an evaluation of the negatives of all religions, including Protestantism; however, there is still a focus on the evils of Catholicism. The anti-Catholic beliefs of Brontë do not disappear just because she becomes more tolerant; the hallmarks of her beliefs in Protestantism over Catholicism can still be seen through Lucy's refusal to convert to Catholicism for Paul.

This maturity towards religious tolerance, though still holding general anti-Catholic sentiments, and criticism of organized religions in general rather than just Catholicism is the major narrative change. It represents Lucy's transition from unreliable, immature, and intolerant to an adult woman; it is this narrative that marks her bildungsroman. Without the plot of Catholic acceptance, there is no maturity plot for Lucy since she ultimately does not end up married, which is the general marker of the completion of a female bildungsroman. As well, it shows Brontë's transition into adulthood. Therefore, anti-Catholicism is central to the understanding and general narrative of *Villette*.

Overall, the anti-Catholic attitude is scattered throughout Charlotte Brontë's literary canon. Brontë's upbringing and cultural context, which significantly influenced and informed her perception of Catholicism, can be picked up throughout her novels. Additionally, her maturity and growing tolerance towards the religious other can also be noted. The repeating theme of anti-Catholicism, especially in regard to how it contributes to the narratives, is critical to explore in relation to understanding Charlotte Brontë's works as well as the author herself. Ultimately, Brontë's examination of anti-Catholicism goes beyond just biases. It challenges readers to examine the intricacies of religion, love, and interpersonal relationships through the lens of societal prejudice. As Brontë's characters wrestle with their beliefs, audiences are also encouraged to consider the assumptions they make. These narratives are not wholly about condemnation but rather illumination, reflecting one's own prejudices through the views of Brontë and the never-ending quest for comprehension of the divine.

MEGAN SERFONTEIN is an English Literature major and Religious Studies minor at Agnes Scott College. Her paper, "Anti-Ca-

tholicism's Impact on the Narrative in the Later Works of Charlotte Brontë," was written for The Brontë Sisters course taught by Dr. Waqas Khwaja. Passionate about literary fiction, Megan's favorite book is *The School for Good Mothers*. She aspires to earn a PhD in English Literature and pursue a career as a professor.

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“The Touch of Him” in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*

Samantha Smallwood, University of Georgia

D.H. Lawrence’s attention to the physicality of perception in his 1928 novel *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* illuminates his renderings of the intensity of physical touch and the absence of such contact. Each reference to the inability of words to provide a fulfilling representation of physical contact amid such illustrations reveals echoes of Lawrence’s concern with the constraints of the text as a physical medium as he attempts to express the importance of touch as a form of perception—a point that resembles key parts of Abbie Garrington’s useful study *Haptic Modernism: Touch and the Tactile in Modernist Writing* (2013)—and highlight the involvement of tactile sensations in reading and writing. Extensions of such considerations in Lawrence’s “The Prussian Officer” (1914) and “The Blind Man” (1922) seemingly form “allotropic states” of his concern with the strained relationship between physicality and textual portrayals—the central consideration that is displayed in each key impression within the novel (*Letters* 198).

In this vein, Lawrence illustrates Connie Chatterley’s impression of her husband Clifford’s suppressed war trauma with the resonant image of a bruise—internal bleeding that results from physical contact and is evinced on the external surface: “slowly, slowly, Connie felt the bruise of fear and horror coming up, and spreading in him . . . the bruise of the too great shock … and as it spread in him, Connie felt it spread in her” (*Chatterley* 49). As Lawrence extends the meaning of physical trauma through this metaphor and uses commas and repetition to mimic the bruise’s reverberating, gradual “spread,” the “wounding shock” similarly extends, as Connie soon “[feels] the bruise” herself (*Chatterley* 49). The inextricable relationship between feeling and visuality in this imagery forms a useful framework that

enhances several impressions in the novel and in Lawrence's shorter fiction.

As Clifford's caretaker Mrs. Bolton describes the shock of her husband's death, her words also evoke the painful implications of a bruise: "it was as if my *feelings* wouldn't believe he'd gone. I just felt he'd *have* to come back and lie against me, so I could feel him with me. That was all I wanted . . . the touch of him! I've never got over it to this day, and never shall … it's terrible, once you've got a man into your blood!" (Lawrence, *Chatterley* 163). Her sadly futile desire to feel "the touch of him" again has persisted throughout the twenty-two years that have passed since his death, and her last remark metaphorically expresses the almost palpable, vital intensity of their love despite the unbearable reality of his absence, resembling the intangible reflection of prior physical contact that the bruise's image presents. "But can a touch last so long?" (Lawrence, *Chatterley* 164). Though Connie questions the endurance of this impression, Mrs. Bolton's reply affirms the primacy of such contact: "what else is there to last?" (Lawrence, *Chatterley* 164).

Mrs. Bolton's sentiments are echoed in several interactions between Connie and Oliver Mellors, the Chatterley's gamekeeper and the eponymous figure of the novel. The relation to physicality in the description of Mellors' initial fear of becoming involved with Connie reflects the apparent connection between physical impressions and perception in the novel: he "did not want to come into contact with a woman again," as "he had a big wound from old contacts" (Lawrence, *Chatterley* 88). Here, the "wound" metaphor and the word "contact" blur the lines between physical and figurative aspects to emphasize the intensity and lasting effects of his past relationships and how he fears the feeling of his "wound" being painfully reopened through further "contact" with Connie.

Clifford appears devoid of any capacity to experience such physical connection–or even contact–with Connie, as he himself may express best in this remark: "only I'm not having any of the Lieutenant Mellors touch" (Lawrence, *Chatterley* 92). Connie's impression of her husband seemingly being both literally and metaphorically "out of touch" permeates her consideration of his writing; to her, "there was no touch, no actual contact" in his words (Lawrence, *Chatterley* 18, 16). On one of their trips through the woods, she perceives similar reflections of his detachment in his recurrent use of quotations: "she was angry with him, turning everything into words. Violets were

Juno's eyelids and windflowers were unravished brides . . . words, always coming between her and life!" (Lawrence, *Chatterley* 93) In her mind, he creates an unbearable disconnect as he repeatedly distances himself from "life" even in his own speech by using someone else's words instead of his own to refer to the flowers that they see. Her frustration with the seemingly impossible gap between "words" and "life" touches on an essential conflict within the novel, as Lawrence himself attempts to effectively portray the physical and emotional experiences of these characters by "turning everything into words."

In *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* (1981), George Levine notes that this seemingly impossible strain between language and reality is a continued preoccupation of authors of realist fiction, and Lawrence's representations of physicality display an integral "self-conscious" awareness of this conflict (4). Levine's claim that one convention of realism is its notable "preoccupation with surfaces, things, [and] particularities" and his repetition of the phrase "the texture of realism" echo the essential implications of Lawrence's articulations of both the unique physicality of contact through language and the "impossibility" of such connection (15). "What language attempts to possess by describing eludes, like Keats' fair maiden of the urn, our longing embrace"; Levine's evocation of the closeness and impossibility of the frozen lovers on Keats' urn provides a useful image with which to view Lawrence's renderings (9).

As Clifford's sense of detachment "spreads" to affect Connie, her worsening sense of "disconnection" mirrors the physical and intangible effects of the bruise's image: "it twitched her limbs," "it jerked her spine," and it made her feel as if "she had lost touch with the substantial and vital world" (Lawrence, *Chatterley* 20). Even her vision becomes distorted by her perceived inability to come into contact with "the substantial and vital world," as aspects of her physical environment appear increasingly unreal to her: "oak-leaves to her were like oak-leaves seen ruffling in a mirror, she herself was a figure somebody had read about, picking primroses that were only shadows or memories, or words. No substance to her or anything—no touch, no contact" (Lawrence, *Chatterley* 18). Each of these aspects that she senses still seem impossibly intangible, becoming mere "simulacra of reality" in her mind, and Lawrence's use of similes and metaphors reinforces her sense of detachment (*Chatterley* 18).

This unreal, “painful dream” resembles the visionary renderings of the orderly’s own form of distorted perception in Lawrence’s “The Prussian Officer” (*Chatterley* 114). In this short story, the orderly’s feverish state of mind that is seemingly caused by the officer’s violent kicks—which, importantly, leave massive bruises on his thighs—appears to permeate and intensify his impressions. “Everything was distorted, born of an ache and resolving into an ache … his brain opening and shutting like the night” (Lawrence, *Stories* 160). Lawrence emphasizes the orderly’s sense of detachment from reality by splicing material descriptions of what he may actually be seeing or doing with increasingly unreal renderings, creating a more disorienting portrayal of his experience in effect. Though Connie’s unreal impressions seemingly result from her lack of physical contact, while the orderly’s sight becomes increasingly distorted after his violent interactions with the officer, each figure’s affected visions express the same seemingly inextricable link between physicality and altered perception.

The depiction of Mellors and Connie’s first intimate experience reflects Lawrence’s continued attention to this connection: “it was dark, quite dark” as she felt the “hand touching her body, feeling for her face. The hand stroked her face softly . . . she felt his hand groping softly, yet with queer thwarted clumsiness” (Lawrence, *Chatterley* 116). The darkness necessitates their reliance on physical touch as each tries to “find” the other in these altered circumstances. The touch of “the hand”—the only form that Connie is able to recognize in the darkness—creates an impression of unfamiliarity, especially as “the hand” is not even referred to as “his” for the first few lines, and this experience allows her to effectively form a new awareness of Mellors.

The portrayal of his touch in this scene interestingly resembles the pivotal moment in Lawrence’s short story “The Blind Man,” as the eponymous figure, Maurice Pervin, touches Bertie Reid, his awkward visitor, in an attempt to “know” him (Lawrence, *Stories* 218):

> He laid his hand on Bertie Reid’s head, closing the dome of the skull in a soft, firm grasp, gathering it, as it were; then, shifting his grasp and softly closing again, with a fine, close pressure, till he had covered the skull and the face of the smaller man, tracing the brows, and touching the full, closed eyes, touching the small nose and the nostrils, the rough, short moustache, the mouth, the rather strong chin. The hand of the blind man grasped the shoulder, the arm, the hand of

> the other man. He seemed to take him, in the soft, travelling grasp. (*Stories* 217)

Here, the text appears to mimic Bertie's impression of the excruciating intimacy of the experience as it outlines each part of his head and body that Maurice touches. In recreating how Maurice's hands travel over his form, this description almost resembles sculptural molding, as if the act re-forms Bertie's image, allowing him to be "seen" physically through the intimacy that he is most averse to—intimacy that is central to Maurice's own form of perception. Mellors and Connie's interaction mirrors the vulnerability of this moment. After feeling painfully exposed by Maurice's touch, Bertie is "like a mollusc whose shell is broken" (Lawrence, *Stories* 219); Mellors echoes Bertie's experience in his remark, "if I've got to be broken open again, I have" (Lawrence, *Chatterley* 118). Each man provides similar illustrations of the effect of touching, or being touched by, another person.

These representations of bruises, wounds, and other forms of physical contact in Lawrence's fiction consequently reveal further possibilities in analysis as he extends his attention to the physicality of perception in moments that reveal his awareness of the text itself as both a physical and visual medium to recognize the physical-visual relationship that is formed in the acts of writing and reading. Key parts of Abbie Garrington's analysis of "the touch that looks" in James Joyce's *Ulysses* both enhance and support such resonant implications in Lawrence's writings. Garrington's references to Rebecca West's 1928 essay "The Strange Necessity," Joyce's 1904 essay "A Portrait of the Artist," Maurice Pervin's strengthened intimacy with his wife which has resulted from his increased reliance on physicality, and the "blind stripling," a figure in *Ulysses* who similarly reinforces the association between tactile sensations and perception, importantly mirror Lawrence's own considerations in the two aforementioned scenes: "in a way which calls to mind the work of the sculptor, whose manual endeavours create work[s] . . . available to the imagined touch of the eye," Joyce's phrase "his sentence sculptural" necessitates recognition of his "consideration of the hand of the sculptor-author" in his work (Garrington 74, 8–9). Though Garrington outlines some of Lawrence's own haptic renderings, a gap remains in her analysis of such aspects in Joyce's works and Lawrence's own concern with the physicality of perception, especially the sculptural implications in these scenes (Garrington 164).

As Mellors references the strain of the quite literal pregnant pause before his anticipated reunion with Connie in his long letter to her—the final inclusion of the novel—he reinforces Lawrence's attention to both physical and intangible implications of contact in this phrase: "well, so many words, because I can't touch you" (*Chatterley* 301). Mellors figuratively tries to use words to fill the space created by his separation from Connie in his letter—a physical manifestation of his connection to her—though he laments the ineffective nature of "so many words," as the act remains unfulfilling, echoing Mrs. Bolton and Connie's recognition of the same disheartening and seemingly impossible gap between physical interactions and written, spoken, or remembered accounts of those experiences. Lawrence similarly contends with the limitations of textual representations of physicality, and it is essential to note that Lawrence does not provide a sense of resolution of this point of tension in any of these key moments. "Together, Lawrence and Mellors struggle to a new vocabulary," and "to 'touch' Mellors, Connie must purge herself of 'words'"; however, even in the novel's final passage, Lawrence leaves Mellors and Connie "still seeking that consummation . . . in the image of the Grecian urn" (Levine 326-328). "Lawrence knows that he doesn't know, and lives with that knowledge," though "his language [still] strains toward those 'secret places' as Connie and Mellors lean undespairing toward each other" (Levine 328). Throughout these inclusions, Lawrence retains a "self-conscious" awareness of the "unreality" of connections involving both language and reality.

As the implications of the bruise's image resurface in each description of experiencing touch and its bruising absence in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, "The Prussian Officer," and "The Blind Man," such exposures of the inability of words to provide a fulfilling representation of physicality reveal Lawrence's innovative considerations of the text itself as a physical medium and the essential involvement of tactile sensations in reading and writing.

SAMANTHA SMALLWOOD is an English major from Snellville, Georgia, graduating from the University of Georgia this spring with a certificate in British-Irish Studies, an area of emphasis in Studies in the Novel, and a Studio Art minor. Her research interests mainly draw from textual renderings of visuality and aesthetic structures, such as

sculptures, paintings, drawings, and written text, from the works of Shakespeare to those of D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf.

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Abigail Williams: Manipulation and Control in Salem
Hysteria, Power Dynamics, and Gender Characteristics

Geneva Sovinec, Pepperdine University

Introduction

Throughout Arthur Miller's play, *The Crucible*, the playwright shapes a detailed story involving complex characters and an enticing recollection of the Salem witch trials, which demonstrate a plethora of dynamics within the Salem community. As the town of Salem is consumed by fear of witchcraft, mass hysteria leads the village into an uproar of dread, revealing how rumors can spiral into chaos caused by fear. Hysteria in Salem is further fueled by the repression of women, whose societal roles deny them agency and voice, attributing the psychological disorder to female anatomy. Amid such disarray, power dynamics run rampant with male authority figures wielding power to maintain social control. This indicates the abuse of authority and manipulation of truth as a means of control, reinforcing the patriarchal structures of society. With the culmination of both hysteria and power dynamics, gender characteristics are apparent, as women are oppressed within society due to female autonomy being demonized. Men impose male-centric characteristics on women, resulting in a lack of female agency, which, consequently, allows men to abuse patriarchal roles in their authoritative positions. One character, triggered by the inherent gender biases during the 17th century, utilizes gender norms to her advantage and evokes hysteria throughout her community by wielding power in a manipulative manner.

Abigail Williams, the main protagonist in *The Crucible*, embodies the intersection of hysteria, power dynamics, and gender roles by using the constraints of her position as a young woman in Puritan

society to her advantage. Though women in Salem have little formal authority, especially during the late 1600s, Abigail is able to manipulate the town's hysteria over witchcraft to gain power (Booth 39). She does so through her perceived innocence as a woman and close relationships with male authority figures, wielding the power to hold others' fates in her hands. Her accusations exploit the gendered expectation that young girls are vulnerable and weak to many forces, positioning herself as a victim and a hidden authority figure in the eyes of judgment. Though much scholarly attention focuses on the portrayal of Abigail Williams as a woman in *The Crucible*, further exploration is needed for a deeper understanding of the psychological dimensions that fuel her manipulation and shape her influence throughout the narrative. In the complex telling of *The Crucible*, Abigail Williams embodies a myriad of psychological and feminist dimensions, leveraging gendered manipulation to her advantage to underscore major elements of the Salem witch trials, including hysteria, power dynamics, and gender roles.

Summary: *The Crucible*

In 1692, the community of Salem, Massachusetts, is torn apart by fear, lies, and the abuse of power. A group of girls, led by Abigail Williams, are caught dancing in the forest by Reverend Parris. This sparks rumors of witchcraft when one girl, Betty Parris, falls ill. Reverend Hale is called to investigate, and under coerced pressure, Tituba, a black enslaved individual, confesses to consorting with the devil, prompting Abigail to accuse other women of Salem of witchcraft (Miller 31–33). As fear spreads, the judicial court becomes a tool of vengeance and paranoia. Abigail manipulates the community's hysteria to pursue her obsession with John Proctor, a farmer who had an affair with her but now seeks to expose her lies. He proclaims, "I will prove you for the fraud you are" (Miller 96). While she manipulates the telling of witchcraft to male authority figures, wielding an insurmountable amount of power, mass hysteria begins to spread as neighbors turn against one another. Concurrently, the court blindly accepts false accusations, leading to the wrongful condemnation of innocent people like Martha Corey (Miller 54). These executions and censures are the source of mass hysteria in Salem, which reveals how rumors can lead to unnecessary fear.

Hysteria

Hysteria is a psychological disorder that exhibits behaviors manifesting as overwhelming or unmanageable fear and excessively projected emotions (Tasca et al.). Initially coined by the Greek philosopher Hippocrates, the term is "derived from the Greek word hysteria, which means uterus" (Bailey 332). This early association ties hysteria to the female reproductive system, reinforcing the stereotype that women are emotionally weaker than men and more prone to such symptoms. Historically, hysteria is synonymous with female emotional instability or weakness, further reinforcing the belief that women are emotionally weaker than men and subject to hysterical symptoms. Women's emotions are often pathologized—viewed as irrational and uncontrollable—and are used to justify their subordinate status in society through a medicalized diagnosis of hysteria.

Hysteria as a uniquely feminine affliction has stood the test of time since its creation in 1900 BC, with psychologists like Sigmund Freud attributing hysteria to female anatomy. In their work, *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud and Breuer, in conjunction with a human examination, argues that "it is precisely distressing things of this kind that, under hypnosis, we find are the basis of hysterical phenomena (e.g., hysterical deliria in saints and nuns, continent women, and well-brought-up children)" (13). Through his research, he posits that women in traditional and restrictive roles, like nuns, often develop hysteria as a result of repressed emotions. While historically known for being attributed to the female sex, hysteria is also notably associated with communities, leading to the emergence of the term 'mass hysteria.'

Mass hysteria is a social phenomenon that consists of collective anxiety due to a pertinent issue that can ripple into symptoms of illness without an identifiable cause (Stahl and Lebedun 44). The psychological sensation occurs through group thinking, as it has been "demonstrated that hysteria is transmitted through social networks" such as groups, communities, or towns (Stahl and Lebedun 45). With interpersonal relationships and community identity amplifying the effects of hysteria, the spread of this mental paradigm can lead to emotional and irrational behavior. These behaviors can manifest into detrimental accusations, leading to public acts of defiance and even death—paralleling the events of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*.

Hysteria in "The Crucible"

Throughout Miller's play, hysteria manifests both as a female-at-

tributed phenomenon and widespread societal panic. Hysteria, in his work, is portrayed as a destructive force that spreads fear and chaos, allowing personal vendettas and mass paranoia to override justice and reason. Interestingly, the play begins with dancing—a form of witchcraft according to the 1700s societal beliefs. *The Crucible's* opening immediately sets the scene for blind accusations, assuming that the girls were "dancing with the devil," reinforcing the belief that such movements were integral to rituals of demonic homage (Guazzo). Even as the young women try to defend their innocent, adolescent-like behavior, the fear of facing severe consequences outweighs logical reasoning, prompting Abigail to spill boisterous lies. In doing so, the girls conform to the hysterical identity that has been attributed to women for centuries, exhibiting signs of emotional instability and weakness upon delivering their coerced confessions.

While being vigorously questioned by Reverend Parris and Reverend Hale, Tituba admits that she has been fraternizing with the devil as she proclaims, "[the devil said] You work for me, Tituba, and I make you free!" (Miller 32). However, Tituba's confession is coerced through authoritative male manipulation. Additionally, Abigail accuses Tituba and falsely claims that Tituba was forcing her to drink blood and practice rituals. When Tituba finally confessed to a lie she was made to believe, Abigail further fuels those accusations, stating, "I saw Sarah Good with the Devil! I saw Goody Osburn with the Devil! I saw Bridget Bishop with the Devil!" (Miller 33). When trying to save herself from being ridiculed and punished for their adolescent activities, Abigail's coerced lies morph into an amplified issue that undoubtedly creates chaos.

As the emotions in the community intensify, reason gives way to chaos, allowing mass hysteria to take hold—the ceaseless spread of rumors in the small town of Salem fueling it. By igniting the hysteria surrounding witchcraft, Abigail deflects blame onto the townspeople, wielding her perceived innocence as a tool of manipulation. Her relentless accusations ultimately lead to "a frenzy of accusations and counter-accusations" (Benguega and Amira). These falsified claims send Salem into hysteric behavior, as accusations are transmitted through social networks, spreading like wildfire and contaminating the town like a figurative disease. The distressing and irrational behaviors as seen in the residents of Salem are noted through town gossip Mrs. Putnam's metaphor, stating, "There are wheels within wheels in this village, and fires within fires!" (Miller 20). Her state-

ment reveals the innate tendencies of humanity, manifesting through a hysteria-driven mindset. It reflects behaviors that are personified through overwhelming fear and unduly projected emotions, becoming embodied in relentless and unfounded accusations. However, the one who wields the power to start the chain of events, igniting fear through the masses, is the young girl who uses her innocence to manipulate authority figures to get what she wants: chaos and vengeance.

Power Dynamics

Power is not a fixed entity or simply a tool wielded by individuals or institutions; rather, it is a dynamic force present in society and individuals; their interactions and knowledge shape it. Michel Foucault, a French philosopher, delves into the many dimensions of power, theorizing it to be a multifaceted force that structures social, cultural, and political life through the influence of knowledge. It is perpetually exercised and exists within an abundance of relationships—socially or personally. Beyond relationships, this "power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (*Sexuality* 93). Many can harness this force of nature through physical strength or intellectual advancement. However, knowledge can be exerted through hierarchical dynamics. Often, it is used as a tool of control, with power leveraged to dominate others.

Those who wield power can use knowledge and manipulation for personal benefit, bending the truth to gain control. In the eyes of Foucault, "power is not an institution, nor a structure, nor a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society" (*Sexuality* 93). By controlling what is considered true, power restricts certain groups or individuals, feeding ideas of ingenuity to fuel the spread of lies that are made to seem true. Furthermore, when perpetrators use power as a means of manipulation for personal gain, victims begin to believe false accusations, as those with authority assume the perpetrators' lies are true. This is because "discipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise" (*Discipline* 170). Using power as a technique to discipline oppresses individuality and freedom. This ensures compliance with authority figures, given that many believe their words and actions to be truth. However, when authority is manipulated by one with less voice, authenticity is subject to scrutiny through falsified accusations. In *The Crucible*, power is wielded by one who

uses their voice to harness control, gaining a sense of discreet authority to use against others for personal gain.

Power Dynamics in "The Crucible"

As Salem descends into chaos, with a domino effect of accusations leading to incarceration and judgment, Abigail Williams remains untouched, manipulating the hysteria to fuel blind indictments. Through this manipulation, she exploits the growing hysteria, using it "to obtain power and influence over others," ultimately solidifying her control (Benguega and Amira). She uses Salem's hysteria to her benefit, but her power does not initially stem from an innate desire for vengeance; rather, it is legitimized through her relationships with authority figures like Reverend Parris.

Abigail is Reverend Parris's niece and ward, living under his roof since the murder of her parents; however, their interactions are fueled with tension and distrust due to Abigail's reckless behavior. Parris is deeply concerned about his reputation in Salem, as he was appointed their first ordained minister. Upon discovering Abigail and the other girls in the woods, dancing unclothed, Parris immediately sees their initial childlike innocence to be a portrayal of demonic witchcraft, stating, "Now tell me true, Abigail. And I pray you feel the weight of truth upon you, for now my ministry's at stake, my ministry and perhaps your cousin's life. Whatever abomination you have done, give me all of it now" (Miller 9). Despite Abigail repeatedly confessing the truth to Parris, explaining, "Uncle, we did dance; let you tell them I confessed it," he dismisses her words, unable to believe her due to their strained relationship (Miller 8). Instead, this drives her to coerce Tituba into confessing to witchcraft, succumbing to what her uncle most wanted to hear and appeasing his need for justified truth. By manipulating the very person who condemned her and distorting the 'truth' she sought to illuminate through Tituba, Abigail gains a sense of agency, enabling her to confess to falsehoods that release her from turmoil and disdain. These "confessions consist of 'confessional techniques'. . . manipulated by the powerful, who exercise their power over the powerless to promote their truth" (Rashid and Maysoon). Tituba, the powerless, becomes a pawn in Abigail's quest to assert her own 'truth.' Abigail exploits Tituba's confession to fuel calculated accusations, igniting the mass hysteria that consumes Salem.

Following the initial accusations of Sarah Good, Goody Osburn, and Bridget Bishop, a cascade of names follows, leading the town to

become consumed by hysterical dispositions that eventually result in deadly consequences. Abigail manipulates this hysteria to shift power dynamics in her favor, using fear and accusations to control others. When utilizing this sense of fear, she is able to "oppress others, as she exploit[s] the charges to settle personal scores and exact revenge on those she dislike[s]" (Benguega and Amira). This reveals that power dynamics are not under a straightforward hierarchy; rather, they are interconnected webs of interactions that can link to those who are supposedly powerless. The town of Salem is both an object and an instrument in the exercise of power where "the masses in a way delegate some part of their power to an element which, while being deeply attached to them, is nevertheless distinct" (*Knowledge* 7). The people of Salem rally behind Abigail, who takes the form of the element, embodying the fears of witchcraft, as the community surrenders individual critical thinking. The false accusations stemming from Abigail become deeply embedded in society's consciousness, stripping individuals of their distinct autonomy and creating a collective narrative that manifests as mass hysteria, all amplified by the power of words. The accusatory verbiage that Abigail uses to eliminate fault and feed into Reverend Parris's conceptualizations are about events at play. Additionally, her internal biases towards other individuals fuel her vengeful nature to accuse those she dislikes.

As an astute citizen of Salem, Abigail finds herself entangled in an affair with John Proctor, a married farmer, making her the mistress in his relationship with Elizabeth Proctor. Abigail worked for the Proctors as a servant but was dismissed by Elizabeth once the knowledge of an affair with John surfaced. After being let go, Abigail continues to have an ongoing obsession with John, which stimulates her need to falsely accuse Elizabeth Proctor. When Elizabeth is made aware that she is accused of witchcraft in the form of attempted murder, she tells John, "[Abigail] thinks to kill me, then to take my place" (Miller 41). Abigail remains fixated on John Proctor, desiring him for herself, a goal she believes can only be achieved with Elizabeth Proctor out of the picture. Driven by a personal vendetta against the Proctors, Abigail manipulates male authority figures like Reverend Parris and the judicial system into believing her lies, using her gender as a tool for control—blending innocence with sexuality as a tool for manipulation.

Gender Characteristics

In the late 1600s, traditional gender roles were purely defined—

men are the breadwinners, providing for the family, while women care for the children and ensure their husband's needs are met. Men are considered the more vigorous sex, embodying intelligent and courageous qualities. In contrast, women are thought to be governed by their emotions and are expected to be modest, virginal, holy, innocent, and compliant. Judith Butler, an American feminist philosopher, argues that gender is not a fixed identity but rather a performative construct shaped by society and the patriarchal power structure. While challenging traditional understandings of gender roles, Butler understands that the patriarchal view of being female "is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self," encompassing the traditional characteristics associated with the female sex (179). Furthermore, another feminist philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir, advances this assertion, expressing how "representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with the absolute truth" (*Second Sex* 196). It is the work of the male-dominated world that the narrative surrounding female characteristics is a product of the male's assessment of the female gender. In a world created by this fixed dogma, women are then seen as the second sex, lesser than the man.

Salem's society reinforced the belief that women were inferior to men, embedding this notion into its cultural, religious, and social structures. This confines women to subordinate roles and limits their autonomy. Men hold hierarchical authority positions, leaving women with restricted agency and minimal voice. The characteristics that shape a woman are meant to be feminine, to "show oneself as weak, futile, passive, and docile. The girl is supposed not only to primp and dress herself up, but also to repress her spontaneity and substitute for it the grace and charm her elder sisters have taught her. Any self-assertion will take away from her femininity and her seductiveness" (*Second Sex* 402). Women are conditioned to conform to preconceived sentiments set upon them by men. Their agency and autonomy are denied in a society that rejects equality between genders. However, when using these specific ideals of femininity—passivity, docility, and attractiveness—against those who created these systems, women can

dissuade men from believing that they embody these qualities while manipulating the very patriarchal society that is meant to oppress them.

Women are reduced to the role of the other and, in response, can use their seduction and charm as weapons to gain power within the constraints imposed by men. The female gender has long been oppressed by a patriarchal system that seeks to give them no agency, minimizing their essence through characteristics both ideally feminine, but also deceptive, and filled with malicious intent. De Beauvoir explains this phenomenon, expressing how "this condition defines what is called the woman's 'character': she 'wallows in immanence,' she is argumentative, she is cautious and petty, she does not have the sense either of truth or of accuracy, she lacks morality, she is vulgarly self-serving, selfish, she is a liar and an actress" (*Second Sex* 638). While these male-centric characteristics were imposed on women as a means of oppression, their innate nature can be used as a pawn for obtaining power in the form of manipulation. Abigail Williams exhibits this idea through her use of innocence and sexuality—positive male-centric attributes—while also secretly taking advantage of pettiness and lying—negative male-centric attributes.

Gender Characteristics in "The Crucible"

As a woman in Salem, Abigail lacks authority and is bound by gendered expectations, while her uncle, Reverend Parris, reminds her to preserve her purity to prevent tarnishing his name or reputation. He dismisses Abigail as the other, a mere subject to a man's needs and demands. When she is harshly questioned about her late-night activities in the woods, Abigail reaffirms her innocence, exclaiming, "I never sold myself! I'm a good girl! I'm a proper girl!" (Miller 30). While begging the authoritative male figures to believe her, she reinforces her innocent stance by placing the blame for witchcraft on other women. The unfounded accusations Abigail makes to reaffirm her innocence are designed to appease the men in her life, ultimately gaining her a sense of agency since "fathers never have exactly the daughters they want because they invent a notion of them that the daughters have to conform to" (*Destroyed* 102). In this instance, Abigail represents the daughter-like figure conforming to Reverend Parris, her father-like figure's notions of what he believes to be authentic. She tells him a lie to feed into his assumed power, ultimately giving Abigail a sense of control and agency. Her perceived innocence as a young girl who emulates purity and virtue enables Abigail to wield

power as a woman, which she exploits to escalate her lies, manipulate others into following her, and spark a wave of mass hysteria driven by accusations. However, Abigail does not merely use her innocence to gain power; she uses sexuality to exploit others for vengeance.

Abigail, who had been having an affair with John Proctor while serving as the Proctors' servant, was fired by Elizabeth, his wife, when the affair was exposed. Despite being fired, Abigail's infatuation with John persisted, as she told him, "I am watin' for you every night," but he rejected her advances, dismissing any sentiments of adoration (Miller 16). Angry over John's dismissal, Abigail is encapsulated by heartbroken rage, informing John that she is aware that Elizabeth is "blackening [her] name in the village" for their sexually charged relationship (Miller 17). Sex outside the constraints of marriage is considered unladylike. This assigns a gendered stigma to women's sexuality to control them and reinforce their perceived inferiority within the patriarchal system. Those who partake in sexual behaviors are regarded as bad girls who are "often considered a threat to the power balance between men and women when acting like a man, for which [they] risk being socially punished" (Gagino Mato 19). Abigail fears punishment for being labeled as a young girl who partakes in sexual relations with a married man and does not want her agency to be compromised and undermined any further. So, as John leaves her for the final time, she thinks only of calculated vengeance in the pursuit of romantic justice to spare her name.

Deprived of her romantic entanglement, Abigail devises a scheme fueled by personal desire, deep-seated frustration, and an unrelenting pursuit of power. Her innocent, childlike, and feminine demeanor permits her to manipulate those around her, persuading them to accept her words as truth. Driven by vengeance, she exploits the very witch trials she incited to punish John Proctor for rejecting her, decisively accusing his wife of witchcraft (Miller 69). Traditionally, women are regarded as objects while men are seen as subjects, but that is quickly negated when Abigail accuses Elizabeth of witchcraft, leaving Abigail as the subject and John as the object. Recognizing her newfound power and knowing that John cannot expose their affair without risking persecution for fornication, Abigail seizes control as the subject. Desperate to reveal the truth and save his wife from vindictive persecution, John hastily goes to court, declaring to the Judge, "It is a whore's vengeance, and you must see it" (Miller 70). His vulgar language strictly points toward Abigail's sexuality and is spoken in malice as he tries to strip away any sense of authority she upholds. The tension

that John intensifies exhibits how "no one is more arrogant toward women, more aggressive or scornful, than the man who is anxious about his virility" (*Second Sex* 34). Abigail strips away his masculinity by manipulating their sexual relationship into an act of vengeance after rejection. She uses her femininity and sexuality against John, showcasing how "the body is the instrument of our hold on the world" (*Second Sex* 66). Abigail harnesses the male-centric characteristics set upon her by the patriarchy to obtain power, whether it is through innocence or sexuality.

Conclusion

In Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, Salem becomes tainted by the idea of witchcraft, fueling ideas of hysteria, power dynamics, and gender characteristics. As hysteria becomes a destructive force that spirals out of control, lies are presented as the truth through manipulation in the hopes of gaining purifying exemption from retribution. Abigail Williams exemplifies the manipulation of power dynamics, using hysteria to her advantage by exploiting the community and authority figures to satisfy personal vendettas. Through her, Miller highlights the correlation of power, fear, and societal expectations, where the marginalized—often women—can leverage their perceived innocence or sexuality to gain influence. Abigail Williams leveraged her gendered characteristics to blur the line between truth and falsehood, persuading others to believe her fabricated accusations of witchcraft. In doing so, she incites mass hysteria, demonstrating the profound power of manipulation in seizing control over Salem's psyche.

GENEVA SOVINEC is an English Writing and Rhetoric major at Pepperdine University, committed to Duke University's Master of Arts in Teaching English Education program. She wrote this paper for her Literary Theory class, applying feminist and psychoanalytic criticism to *The Crucible*—two fields she is deeply passionate about. Geneva plans to pursue a career in teaching English. She hopes to continue researching psychoanalytic theory concerning media rhetorics, disability rhetorics, and literature to explore how these intersections shape understanding and representation.

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Put on the Whole Armor of God: Warrior Culture in Anglo-Saxon Literature

Olivia Williams, University of North Alabama

In the midst of the late sixth and early seventh centuries, the Anglo-Saxons of England found themselves facing a strange new world. Previously a society rich in pagan practices, Anglo-Saxons were now being introduced to the ideas and teachings of Christian Gregorian missionaries. This time of conversion was a tumultuous one, full of many instances of resistance and pushback against Christianity. However, the influence of this new religion took root and persisted, nevertheless. Anglo-Saxon culture existing prior to this introduction of Christianity could not simply be forgotten; however, it could be amended. One major element of this culture that had to now be accounted for was the highly regarded warrior's social importance and where it would now fit into this newly adopted system of beliefs. Where honor and glory for one's people once existed, warriors now transformed into soldiers of Christ. In examining prominent examples of Anglo-Saxon literature, the role of the warrior in Anglo-Saxon Christianity shows the ways in which these new religious practices (typically known to value pacifism) came to not just tolerate warrior culture, but to sanctify it.

Beginning in the year 595, Pope Gregory I began conversion efforts in the areas of England under Anglo-Saxon control, beginning with the kingdom of Kent. Under control of the leader Æthelberht, Kent had existed as a pagan nation up to this point. However, the king's wife, Bertha, was known to have been a practicing Christian prior to their marriage. The king allowed his wife to honor her religious practices, though he had no desire to understand or participate in them. As stated by author Frank Stenton in his work *Anglo-Saxon*

England, though still a foreign practice to both King Æthelberht and the rest of Kent, “Christian observances must have been followed within the king’s household for nine years” before the attempted conversion of the Anglo-Saxons (86). These conversion efforts would begin with a visit from a missionary known as Augustine on behalf of Pope Gregory I, specifically at the request of Bertha and the Kentish court. Though there is no set date for when the conversion of Æthelberht took place, he was eventually swayed by Augustine and his companions after allowing them to reside in Canterbury and carry on their religious practices in peace. After his conversion, Æthelberht officially became the first Christian Anglo-Saxon king (Stenton 86). This Christian leadership did face significant pushback after Æthelberht’s pagan son Eadbald ascended to the throne, but he was later converted. In his work *Ecclesiastical History of the English*, English monk Saint Bede writes that Eadbald was compelled to convert after a meeting with Laurentius, the archbishop of Canterbury. Laurentius, who believed he had been visited and marked by St. Peter, to encourage his conversion efforts in the area, was eager to meet with Eadbald and discuss the apparent divine intervention at hand. Of the encounter, Bede writes that upon seeing Laurentius’s scars, King Eadbald “Then abjuring the worship of idols, and renouncing his unlawful marriage, he embraced the faith of Christ, and being baptized, promoted the affairs of the church to the utmost of his power” (70). Soon, the Christianization of England was underway as citizens of the kingdom began to adopt these newfound practices observed by their kings.

Once Christianity had officially taken hold amongst the Anglo-Saxons, there existed a newly forming conundrum that needed addressing: the warrior. Within Anglo-Saxon culture, a vital importance was placed on the warrior’s role in society. War and fighting existed as a way of life during this time. Michael Delahoyde of Washington State University provides an outline of where war and warriors existed in Anglo-Saxon society in his piece “Anglo Saxon Culture.” Delahoyde explains that being a warrior was more than just a job; it established a sense of identity. During this time, there was no shortage of war, as it served as a building block for most Anglo-Saxon tribes. As noted by Delahoyde, it was considered disgraceful to not avenge a family member after their death, which produced “endlessly intricate blood-feuds that generated perpetual excuses for going to war.” The implementation of a pacifist religion like Christianity almost sounds unreasonable to a culture with such an emphasis on violence. This

was a concept that early converts wrestled with often, but in a culture so devoted to warfare and violence, there was no way this intrinsic element of their lives could simply be thrown away. Rather than disregard this undeniable part of their society and culture, they instead chose to adapt it to their newly found beliefs.

Rather than entirely rejecting or accepting the idea of Christian pacifism, the Anglo-Saxons chose to modify it. In his piece "Soldier Saints and Holy Warriors: Warfare and Sanctity in Anglo-Saxon England," author John Damon discusses the act of blending warrior practices into Christianity in stating that "Early Anglo-Saxon writers presented violence and sanctity as compatible in certain circumstances: the Anglo-Saxon saints who wielded swords and fought bloody battles all belonged to the special subclass of martyred warrior-kings" (83). Anglo-Saxons revered the martyr as one of the holiest positions that could be achieved as a human and let it influence their beliefs greatly when it came to reckoning with the concept of war. War became defined as a natural part of a king's "divine mission" and thus, the idea of the holy war was born (Damon 86). Through these new ideas, many Anglo-Saxon kings and their families were able to achieve martyrdom and went on to be canonized as saints. In introducing this new subclass of warriors, the Anglo-Saxons had finally found somewhere to place their warriors in their newly observed religion. The warriors did not just become holy, but holiness became a sign of valor.

Examples of this new concept of the holy warrior are plentiful within the available writings of Anglo-Saxons post-conversion. In one of the most iconic poems from this period, "The Dream of the Rood," Christ on the cross becomes a warrior leading his warband into battle, functioning as a metaphor for the loyalty of troops. Christ is referred to in this poem with words such as "mighty and victorious," along with describing his crucifixion as a "mighty battle" (Liuzza 65, 151). Author Jessica McGillivray elaborates on this new interpretation of Christ in "The Dream of the Rood" and what it meant to Anglo-Saxons at the time in her piece, *Instances of Religious Roles of the Anglo-Saxon Warrior Class*. McGillivray remarks that this retelling of Christ's crucifixion played perfectly into Anglo-Saxon traditions existing prior to their mass conversion in that "When the war leader dies, the warband is honor bound to stand until the end defending and supporting their leader. Or, in the terms of suffering, when the war leader suffers, so does the warband" (3). Christ being reimagined in

this fashion allowed Anglo-Saxons to relate the tale of Jesus to something that connected them to their original beliefs, while also supporting the beliefs of their adopted religion. Jesus became a figure that the Anglo-Saxons could not only see themselves in but see themselves honoring and defending. In his article "The Transformation of Scriptural Story, Motive, and Conception in Anglo-Saxon Poetry," author Arthur Skemp discusses the unique depiction of Christ in Anglo-Saxon beliefs and the ways in which the Anglo-Saxons wove the web of Christ's story to appeal to their pagan warrior roots. Skemp states that, though still based in scriptural realities, the Anglo-Saxon Christ "does not closely follow any single original; its sources are various, and are handled with freedom" (4). A depiction of Christ as a passive character would have been a major adjustment to a culture so bound to their warrior ways, but in turning Jesus into the ultimate warrior-king, the Anglo-Saxons found a figurehead they would be proud to follow.

In another instance of the holy warrior within Anglo-Saxon literature, the poem "Judith" features, once again, a biblical retelling that is rife with warrior influence. The Book of Judith is now considered a non-historical deuterocanonical book of the Old Testament in which Judith, a Jewish widow, defeats an army using her cunning and her beauty, thereby saving Jerusalem from the Assyrians (Carvalho 963). In the story presented by the Anglo-Saxons, however, Judith is much more than a witty, pretty face; Judith is a warrior princess. While "Judith" exists as an outlier featuring a female heroine, the poem still exists as a prime example of the melding of Christian and warrior culture. In this retelling, Judith's faith in God, not her looks and wit, gave her the strength she needed to overtake her Assyrian captor and save her people. Judith's strength deriving from her faith in God is mentioned multiple times within the poem. The strength that Judith gains from God is described in a very primal and violent way, giving her character the feel of a warrior:

> Then the highest Deemer inspired her at once with courage,
> as he does for every single of the mortal dwellers
> who seek him out as help with good sense and right faith.
> Then abundantly in her mind hope was renewed for the holy woman—
> then she seized the heathen man fast by his hair,
> dragging him towards her with her hands shamefully,
> and skillfully laid out the baleful one, the hateful man,

> as she could most easily manage the accursed one well.
> Then she, curly-haired, struck her hateful enemy,
> with the splattered sword. She chopped through half his neck,
> so that he lay in a daze, drunken and maimed. (Hostetter 94b–107a)

Judith's victory over the Assyrians is described later on as "an illustrious reward in warfare" (Hostetter 122). The figure of Judith would have been incredibly important to Anglo-Saxon culture, as explained by author Tracy-Anne Cooper in *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies Across the Disciplines*, as the onslaught of Viking attacks functioned as the Anglo-Saxons' own Assyrian aggressors (171). Judith served as an exemplary, pious warrior when the Anglo-Saxons needed one most. The reimagined story of Judith told the Anglo-Saxons that, so long as they maintained their faith, God would bestow them with the courage and the might necessary to overtake their oppressors.

When examining the poem "The Wanderer," a different narrative is proposed compared to that of "The Dream of the Rood" and "Judith." This story does not serve as a scriptural retelling with warrior influence, but as a warrior tale with Christian influence. As pointed out by author Bernard Huppé in his piece "'The Wanderer': Theme and Structure," by acknowledging the "transitoriness of earthly goods and the security of God's mercy," this poem shows the ways in which the Anglo-Saxons came to venerate the idea of the warrior as a religious symbol (516). Much like the content of "The Dream of the Rood," "The Wanderer" portrays the bonds of warrior bands as not just strictly social, but inherently religious as well. In the same spirit as the story of The Rood, the bond and loyalty present between warriors is comparable to that of the bond between man and God. In standing side by side with your fellow man in battle, one achieves honor in both life and death. It is not war that makes one holy, it is the act of being a warrior. By existing as a brave warrior in life and forsaking earthly things, God offers protection to one in death. This concept can be seen in "The Wanderer" through lines such as "It will be well for those who seek the favor, /the comfort from our father in heaven, /where a battlement bulwarks us all" (Hostetter 114–115). In this particular instance, Heaven itself is compared to a fortress made to protect those who died fighting with their fellow warriors in the name of God. Being willing to die for one's countrymen is akin to

being willing to die for God. Few things were more holy than true sacrifice in the eyes of the Anglo-Saxon warriors.

The sanctification of the warrior as a martyr for God can never fully separate itself from its pagan influence. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the veneration of warriors became wholly Christianized by the Anglo-Saxons; war became holy, and warriors became saintly. Despite the two's glaringly different belief systems, paganism and Christianity became inextricably linked when it came to the Anglo-Saxon culture and their penchant for war. In a society so deeply ingrained with the idea that violence was noble, it stands to reason that in the face of a new religion, it would surpass nobility and become holy. Through the examination of these iconic Old English works, it is easy to observe the blending of these two clashing elements of culture and the ways in which the newly Christianized English sought to maintain an important aspect of their identity while simultaneously undergoing a major religious overhaul. In the end, violence put on a new face and name in order to maintain its social importance, existing as a lone remnant of a secular society long gone.

OLIVIA WILLIAMS is a student at the University of North Alabama in Florence pursuing an English major with a Literature concentration and a Southern Studies minor. This essay was written for the Anglo-Saxon Language and Literature course offered in the Spring 2024 semester. After finishing her undergraduate degree, Olivia will be returning to the University of North Alabama to pursue a Master's degree in English. Her ultimate career goal is to receive a PhD and teach English at the collegiate level.

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Is Janie Trustworthy? Narrative Reliability and Authenticity in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Macy Wright, Messiah University

Zora Neale Hurston's beloved novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* has been widely praised for its authentic portrayal of human experience through the eyes of its protagonist, Janie Crawford; Janie's story is doubtless authentic, but is it truthful? Hurston frames Janie's experiences in the context of a story which Janie herself tells to her friend, Pheoby, upon her return to Eatonville. This unique narrative structure, along with Hurston's adept use of free indirect discourse, creates room for readers to question whether Janie's account of her story is entirely faithful to the reality of her experiences. Extensive scholarly discussion surrounds Hurston's distinctive narrative framework and techniques, and their relevance to how we interpret the narrative. For example, Amanda Bailey, Associate Professor of English at the University of Maryland, claims that the narrative context prevents the reader from accessing Janie's own telling of her story: "A reader's reading of the novel and Janie's oral narration to Pheoby exist in a shared time and space which are nevertheless inaccessible to one another" (324). Conversely, Glynis Carr, Associate Professor of English at Bucknell University, argues that the third-person narration "does not subvert Janie's role as a performer" because the narrative is still faithful to Janie's perspective (192). These discussions surrounding the role of the narrator's voice within the story provide key insights to our understanding of the novel but fail to address the essential question of how the storytelling framework impacts the narrative's reliability. While Hurston's unique narrative structure and frequent employment of free indirect discourse do seem to diminish the objective authority of the narrator, this diminished authority is not

detrimental to the novel. Rather, Hurston's narrative choices bring a more authentic quality to the story and encourage readers to acknowledge and embrace personal perspectives.

Hurston begins her novel at the story's end, as Janie Crawford returns to Eatonville after a journey that culminated in the solemn act of "burying the dead" (1). The remainder of the novel recounts Janie's experiences as she tells them to her friend, Pheoby, an account which is told by a third-person omniscient narrator. Scholars hold varying opinions regarding the effect of this narration. Maria Tai Wolff addresses this concept in her article, "Listening and Living: Reading and Experience in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," stating that "the narrator presents [Janie's story] as Janie tells it to Pheoby" (29). Wolff thereby expresses the belief that the third person narration is essentially equivalent to Janie's telling of her story. The use of free indirect discourse, a technique through which the narration frequently slips into Janie's voice and sometimes even reverts to first person pronouns, offers further support for Wolff's statement, as it allows Hurston to speak through Janie even when Janie herself is not speaking. Throughout this analysis of narrative reliability, I will operate under the assumption that this third person narration is indeed reflective of Janie's perspective; that is, the narrator is sharing Janie's story in the same way that Janie herself would share it. It is sensible to conclude that this account of Janie's story is authentic to Janie's experience, and I will proceed under that foundational assumption.

When exploring the reliability of a narrative, it is essential to clarify what is meant by the term "reliability." For the purposes of this paper, I will define "reliability" as a measure of the extent to which the provided narrative corresponds with the objective facts of reality. That is, reliability is a measure of truthfulness. "Truth," similarly, is a potentially difficult term which literary scholars have defined in numerous ways with regard to *Their Eyes.* Dr. Sarah Ford, professor of English at Baylor University, defines "truth" liberally, writing that "the narrative that you like to tell is the 'truth'" (409). This view of "truth" as a subjective concept, though common among Hurston's scholars, contradicts the understanding of "truth" that Hurston herself provides in the novel. At one of the story's most climactic moments, Janie finds herself seated in a courtroom following Tea Cake's sudden and controversial death as a "strange white man … told her to tell just how it happened and to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" (Hurston 187). In this manner, Hurston establishes an

operative definition for truth within the context of the novel—in order for Janie's story to be true, she must "tell it just how it happened." Thus, I will use the word "truth" in this paper to describe those things which are factually accurate in the sense of correspondence with reality. Opposingly, "authenticity" is a term that describes the extent to which the narrative effectively describes personal experience from a uniquely individualized perspective, and it is independent of objective accuracy.

When people share stories that describe meaningful events from their own lives, it is inherently understood that they are speaking from a singular and perhaps biased perspective, and this phenomenon is essential to our understanding of Janie Crawford's story within Hurston's unique storytelling framework. Throughout *Their Eyes,* Janie speaks to Pheoby of events that not only have deep personal significance but could potentially incriminate her given the details surrounding Tea Cake's death. These factors alone significantly diminish the objectivity of the story, as Janie, deeply invested in the pertinent events, cannot separate herself from her subjective experience in order to approach her storytelling from an objective standpoint. Sarah Ford examines this concept in her article "Necessary Chaos in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*" by asserting that storytelling serves as a way for people to "construct reality," a skill that comes with immense power (411). Ford's analysis has further implications as it demonstrates clearly that storytelling may have motives beyond simply sharing the truth. However, these motives need not be interpreted as deceptive or corrupt; Janie's goal in her sharing story is not to communicate objective truth, but to share her authentic personal experience. Additionally, in portraying storytelling as a method of "construct[ing] reality," Ford implies that the story likely presents a created rather than factual version of reality, which may not be true in an objective sense.

Not only is storytelling influenced by perspective and motivation, but it depends wholly upon the reliability of the storyteller's memory. Human memory is susceptible to countless influences and distractions, and it often undergoes subconscious changes. Psychologist Mark Howe explores this phenomenon in his paper, "The Adaptive Nature of Memory and Its Illusions," in which he states that we have a "powerful and adaptive memory system that is reconstructive" (312). Applying the concept of adaptive memory to Janie's telling of her story leads us to believe that even if her intention was to share her

experiences with complete honesty, her memory of what she experienced may not reflect the reality of her situations. Furthermore, Howe goes on to explain that "neural mechanisms underlying recall of past episodes also underlie imagining future behaviors," (312) and this connection between the memory and imagination of events supports Ford's idea that storytelling entails the construction of reality (411). If the processes of recall and imagination are neurologically similar, it makes sense that storytelling exists as a combination of these processes, drawing both on actual knowledge of the relevant events and imaginative elements in the creation of a story. Thus, Janie's story likely incorporates both factual and imagined elements of her experiences, which diminishes the reliability of the narrative as it strays from an objective account of events.

The narrative structure of *Their Eyes* provides cause to question the reliability of the narrator, and these questions can be expanded upon even further by considering Hurston's use of free indirect discourse as a narrative technique. Hurston conveys Janie's story by means of a third-person omniscient narrator. In most cases, this is a reliable form of narration because an omniscient narrator has the capacity to accurately report the events of the story without being influenced by personal biases or external motivations. However, Hurston frequently employs free indirect discourse throughout her narration, a technique which Barbara Johnson and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. define as "a bivocal utterance, containing elements of both direct and indirect speech. It is an 'utterance' that no one could have spoken, yet which we recognize because of its characteristic 'speakerlyness,' its paradoxically *written* manifestation of the aspiration to the *oral*" (qtd. in Brigham 407). Using free indirect discourse, Hurston's narration frequently slips into Janie's voice. In this way, Hurston removes some of the authority which is typically attributed to a third person narrator. When the narrative adopts the voice of a character, the narrator no longer maintains a neutral relationship to the story, thus making it susceptible to personal bias and external influences.

Examining the technique of free indirect discourse more broadly enables us to apply its effects directly to *Their Eyes* so as to reveal deeper insight regarding narrative reliability. In his article, "Dual Perspective: Free Indirect Discourse and Related Techniques," Paul Hernadi analyzes the narrative implications of free indirect discourse from a variety of perspectives, focusing largely on the distinction it makes between the subjective and the objective. Hernadi summarizes

this distinction by stating that techniques such as free indirect discourse serve to "suggest that an objective universe of things may be approached through our subjective awareness of selected facts about it" (43). That is, free indirect discourse portrays objective realities through the lens of personal experience, thereby limiting the narrative's ability to accurately and holistically represent the facts. This understanding of the technique can be directly applied to its use in *Their Eyes.* Hurston portrays the objective events of Janie's life in light of the way that Janie herself perceived them. In this way, she removed some of the narrator's authority but provided a deeper layer of authenticity and connection to the protagonist.

Analyzing specific instances of free indirect discourse within *Their Eyes* enables us to perceive its effects clearly and to assess its impact on narrative reliability. One particularly illustrative example occurs while Janie and her husband, Tea Cake, are fleeing from the hurricane. Hurston's third-person narrator describes their desperate search for a safe space to rest in an objective manner: "Tea Cake and Janie were some distance from the house before they struck serious water. Then they had to swim a distance . . . Janie was tired and limping . . . But they couldn't stop" (164). This passage reads as a factual account of the situation; it describes the plight of the characters without being influenced by their personal perspectives or internal processing. However, Hurston then transitions to using free indirect discourse, writing, "They had to reach the six-mile bridge. It was high and safe perhaps" (164). The presence of the word "perhaps" indicates clearly that the narration here is directly representative of the characters' thoughts rather than the mere facts of the situation. Furthermore, Hurston's use of the word "perhaps" demonstrates a lack of certainty in the narrative which would not have been present if the third-person narrator remained the dominant voice; the omniscient narrator would know for certain whether the bridge is safe, but Janie can only hopefully postulate. Here, in the words of Paul Hernadi, Janie approaches "the objective universe" of the hurricane through her own "subjective awareness" of the situation (43). Examining Hernadi's definition of free indirect discourse in conjunction with this instance of the technique's use in the novel exemplifies its tendency to diminish narrative authority by providing a narrower perspective of the situation.

Hurston's narrative context and use of free indirect discourse provide significant cause to question the objective reliability of the

narrator, and this is by no means an accident, which becomes apparent in examining the ways that Hurston herself seems to encourage readers to question narrative reliability from the outset of the novel. Hurston opens *Their Eyes* with a foundational dichotomy describing the differences in how men and women approach and perceive life. Having established that the dreams of men remain at an unreachable distance, Hurston goes on to write that "women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget" (1). Maria Tai Wolff provides an analysis of this passage, emphasizing that where men simply accept the reality that life provides, women "create their own lives" (29). Wolff's emphasis on "creating" one's life is essential to our understanding of Janie's story, as she demonstrates that storytelling is an act of creation rather than of communicating objective truth. However, Hurston goes beyond portraying women as creators of new realities, implying further that a woman's memory may not be an accurate representation of her own lived reality as she can forget the details which are seemingly unuseful or unpleasant and instead hyperfocus on those things that she deems worth remembering. Hurston's next sentence in the novel encourages readers to directly apply this understanding of women to the novel's protagonist: "So the beginning of this was a woman" (1). She concludes her general statement about women with a specific mention of Janie, a woman who exemplifies the qualities which Hurston has just described. Thus, we should read Janie's story with the understanding that she, as a woman, has the capacity to selectively and willfully alter her memory, and her version of events may not provide a factual account of what truly happened.

As Janie concludes the telling of her story, she herself implies that simply receiving the provided narrative is insufficient for a true understanding of her experiences, furthering the impression that Hurston desires that her readers question the narrative's reliability. Janie confidently tells her friend, "'It's uh known fact, Pheoby, you got tuh *go* there tuh *know* there. Yo' papa and yo' mama and nobody else can't tell yuh and show yuh. Two things everybody's got tuh do fuh themselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin' fuh themselves'" (Hurston 192). In this statement, Janie emphasizes that it is impossible to attain true knowledge of a situation without having experienced its reality. Janie acknowledges that simply hearing her story is insufficient to enlighten Pheoby about the reality

of all that she underwent; without "*go[ing]* there," Pheoby and the reader alike cannot truly "*know* there."

Having examined Hurston's narrative structure, techniques, and statements, it seems exceedingly clear that the narrator in *Their Eyes* is not reliable. However, each narrative element that serves to diminish the reliability of the narrative drastically increases its authenticity. Because of the novel's storytelling framework, the narrative represents Janie's own perspective on events which are close to her heart; because Hurston employs free indirect discourse, Janie's story becomes a direct reflection of her thoughts; because Hurston encourages her readers to doubt the narrator's reliability, readers reflect more on Janie's internal experiences than on those which are external. This deepened sense of authenticity is found only in the absence of reliability, and it is authenticity, not reliability, which Hurston primarily intends to communicate. Maria Tai Wolff describes the events of the novel as "Janie's repeated attempts to create a clear, satisfying picture of who she is" (29). This insightful interpretation of Janie's story could not be possible if Hurston allowed the third person narrator to maintain complete authority, because it is only through moments of unreliability in the narrative that the reader can witness Janie seeking to understand herself in the way that Wolff describes.

Hurston clearly demonstrates the value of authenticity in the absence of narrative authority by presenting Pheoby as a model of a good listener, a demonstration of how we are intended to receive Janie's story. As Pheoby prepares to hear of Janie's experiences, she reflects on what it means to be a listener:

> They sat there in the fresh young darkness close together. Pheoby eager to feel and do through Janie, but hating to show her zest for fear it might be thought mere curiosity. Janie full of that oldest human longing – self revelation. Pheoby held her tongue for a long time, but she couldn't help moving her feet. So Janie spoke. (Hurston 7)

Pheoby desires to hear Janie's story because she wants to understand her experiences—to "feel and do" through the story of her friend. Janie is not sharing her story with Pheoby to satisfy some "mere curiosity" in her friend; she shares her story with Pheoby out of a deep longing to reveal herself. From that intention, we learn that as recipients of Janie's story, we should listen to understand Janie herself rather than the things she experienced; we should seek to understand

her humanity rather than her hardships; what happened in her heart rather than what happened on her journey. In other words, the value in Janie's story comes from its authenticity, not its accuracy. Although we have established that Janie's story is not reliable in its ability to convey factual information, its authenticity fulfills its purpose regardless of its diminished reliability.

Not only should Janie's story serve as an authentic window into her heart, but it should also have the capacity to transform its listeners. Pheoby serves as an example of this phenomenon, as she comes away from her time with Janie feeling inspired to make tangible alterations to the way she lives her life, which she expresses at the conclusion of the story: "'Lawd!' Pheoby breathed out heavily, 'Ah done growed ten feet higher from jus' listenin' tuh you, Janie. Ah ain't satisfied wid mahself no mo'. Ah means tuh make Sam take me fishin' wid him after this'" (Hurston 192). In this moment, Pheoby allows Janie's personal experiences to change her. This transformation comes not because Pheoby heard a factual account of her friend's life, but because she witnessed Janie's own transformation throughout the course of her story. Janie's story provided Pheoby with an authentic understanding of her humanity, which led to an urgent need for transformation. Amanda Bailey supports this concept in her article "Necessary Narration in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," in which she states that the "true listeners . . . are the ones who can be changed through story" (332). Bailey recognizes that Pheoby exemplifies this statement, but her argument can be applied more broadly to all readers of Hurston's novel. Hurston asks her readers, like Pheoby, to allow themselves to be transformed by the contents of Janie's story. As privileged recipients of Janie's story, we are responsible to approach it as "true listeners."

In stark contrast to Pheoby's model of good listening, Hurston paints a vivid picture of the alternative approach, a style of listening which is shallow and harmful. The porch "sitters" of Eatonville embody a form of listening that is focused on factual details and ignores the immense impact which those details may have had on Janie as a person (Hurston 1). The porch asks countless questions, seeking to understand Janie's story with all the wrong intentions: "What she doin coming back here in dem overhalls? . . .Where's dat blue satin dress she left here in? …Where all dat money her husband took and died and left her? . . .Where she left dat young lad of a boy she went off here wid? . . . Where he left *her?*" (Hurston 2). Each question

which the porch asks revolves around selfishly obtaining an objective understanding of Janie's story. The questions of the porch come from a place of that "mere curiosity" which Pheoby was so eager to avoid (Hurston 7). The porch-sitters, who speak, according to Sarah Ford, as a way of "gaining power," desire a *reliable* narrative, in contrast to the *authentic* narrative that Pheoby seeks (408). Ford's understanding of what motivates the porch-sitters can be understood even more clearly when placed in direct contrast with Pheoby, whose "hungry listening" is motivated by a desire to understand Janie through her experiences rather than to merely gain knowledge of the facts surrounding her experiences. Listening to a story should not be a selfish endeavor; while hearing a story should result in personal transformation, the motive for listening should not be personal gain.

An unreliable narrative is often seen as a weakness in a text. Without a guarantee that the story is true, how can it have value? However, Hurston masterfully alters our perception of the unreliable narrator through her unique narrative style in *Their Eyes Were Watching God.* Through the novel's storytelling context, its frequent employment of free indirect discourse, and its bold refusal to be traditionally truthful, Hurston intentionally removes objective authority from the narrative, and it is only once this authority is stripped away that readers are forced to confront the deep authenticity of the text. Thus, the influence of an unreliable narrative is not a weakness of *Their Eyes* but rather serves as one of the novel's greatest strengths. Furthermore, understanding the unreliability of the narrative in Hurston's novel provides a direct connection to the inaccuracies which are found within Hurston's telling of her own story, and examining this biographical connection could provide further insight to our understanding of the novel. When we approach the text authentically rather than objectively, following Pheoby's example of patient and "hungry" listening, we enable ourselves to be transformed by its contents and to gain a deeper understanding of humanity (Hurston 10).

MACY WRIGHT is a senior at Messiah University with majors in English, Chemistry, and Biblical & Religious Studies, and a minor in Mathematics. This paper was written for an introductory English studies course. Macy will read anything and everything, but she particularly enjoys well-written popular science and anything by Emily Dickinson, John Milton, or C.S. Lewis. After graduating, Macy hopes to continue in her love for learning by attending graduate school.

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