

nomad²⁰¹¹

What Sustains Us

The Comparative Literature Program's
Journal of Undergraduate Writing
University of Oregon

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EDITOR'S COMMENTS

As I think about this year's *NOMAD* theme, "What Sustains Us," I'm amazed at the depth and variety of interpretations of the theme that this year's mentees brought to the table. From *Saturn Devouring his Son* to Brazilian favelas, from scatological poetry to food pornography, our mentees have examined the question of sustenance in innovative and creative ways, pressing upon the theme until it yielded up these eleven outstanding essays.

When I think about what this theme means to me, I can't help but think about all of the people who work together to sustain the *NOMAD* project. I think of the graduate and faculty mentors who work to help sustain the efforts of the undergraduate mentees, who in turn sustain each other through their mutual support, collegiality, and camaraderie. The mentorship coordinators, Anna Kovalchuk and Jenny Odintz, who I can't thank enough for their tireless efforts, provided sustenance for the project through their meticulous organization and careful communication. Emily McGinn and Jenny Odintz labored to sustain the integrity of the writing through their careful copy editing work, and I am deeply grateful for their eagle-eyed scrutiny. Sharon Kaplan, Museum Educator at the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, made our *NOMAD* conference possible through the generous sponsorship that she facilitated. Dr. Max Rayneard, editor emeritus, provided no end of assistance to me as I put the journal together. Dr. Lisa Freinkel's leadership, vision, and guidance were invaluable, and of course the whole project would be unsustainable without the incomparable dedication of Cynthia Stockwell.

AMANDA CORNWALL

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RAQUEL LEVINE

Raquel Levine is a comparative literature major with a minor in Spanish. This essay is dedicated to her Zaidy.

Nomad Prize for Excellence in Undergraduate Scholarship: **Winner**

Mentor: Max Rayneard

SUSTAINING/CONSUMING THE EGO:

FRANCISCO GOYA'S AND PETER PAUL RUBENS'
SATURN DEVOURING HIS SON

Francisco Goya's 19th century painting, *Saturn Devouring his Son*, presents us with an emaciated and startled Saturn tearing away at a partially devoured corpse. The sickly looking Saturn of Goya's painting is one of many renderings of the ancient Greek and Roman myth in which the angry god devours his children for fear of being overthrown by them. While Goya's is perhaps the most popular depiction of the

myth, the particular image was likely inspired by Peter Paul Rubens' majestic representation, completed more than a century before Goya was born (Hughes 383). In Rubens' painting of the same title, we see Saturn as an old man ripping at the soft chest of an infant. Formally, the two paintings share few immediately obvious aesthetic qualities and do not evoke the same "mood" or reaction. In fact, the foremost visible commonality between the two great works is their thematic foundation—Saturn devouring his son.

The god Saturn has held various cachets in western culture. His significance has been subject to flux depending on the social context from which it is perceived. My essay examines this transition and how it manifests itself in the ancient festival of Saturnalia and through various iterations of the Roman Catholic Carnival in seventeenth century Italy and nineteenth century Spain. Between the time of Rubens' and Goya's rendering of Saturn, an enormous ideological shift took place that inverted the figure's cultural significance from sublimity to abjection, terms which I will define using Julia Kristeva's work *The Powers of Horror: Essays on Abjection*. I want to consider these pieces not merely as political protest or emotional expression, as has been done in the past,¹ but as products of the philosophical, theological, and intellectual environment in which they were created.

The myth of Saturn is that the Roman god (or his Greek counterpart, Kronos) is destined to be overthrown by one of his children. To avoid this eventuality he eats each child as he or she is born. However, their mother, Ops, manages to save their son,

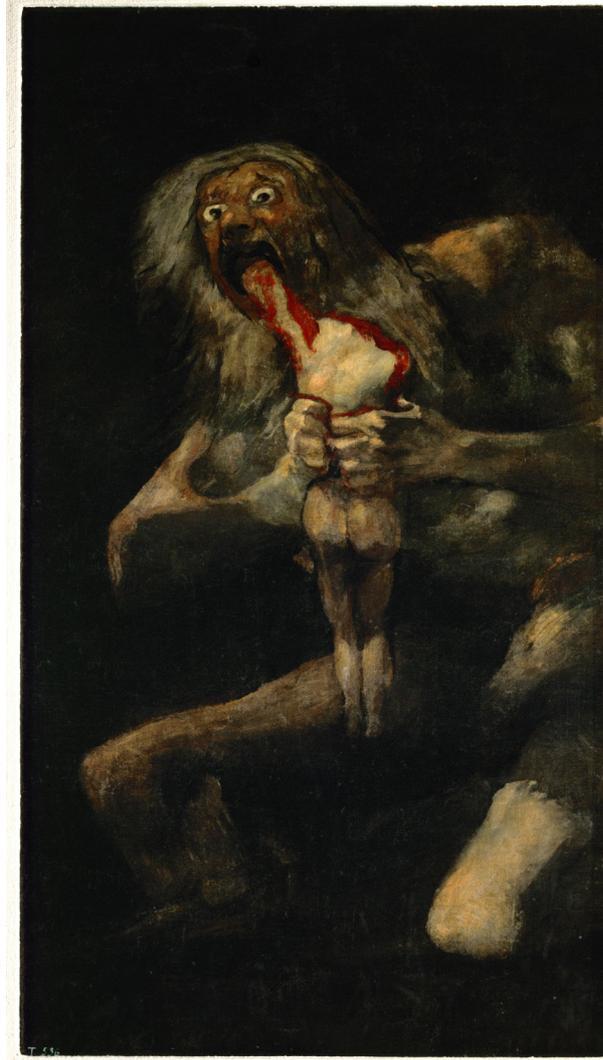
¹ See Hughes 383-384; Muller 170-177.



Peter Paul Rubens, *Saturn Devouring His Son*, 1636

Zeus, who eventually kills Saturn as was originally predicted (Warner 53).

At its most fundamental level this tale contradicts one's assumptions about linear generational progression and the familial roles that sustain them: a father should not eat his children. Rather, one expects that he would nurture and sustain his offspring. However, the myth of Saturn dismantles the security that is



Francisco Goya, *Saturn Devouring His Son*, 1819-1823

invested into the idea of a father and turns it into something threatening.

We can use Kristeva's work to understand this phenomenon as a collapse of symbolic stability. In Kristevan semianalysis, the "symbolic realm" is a patriarchal, structured system of signs, language and law that is in perpetual conflict

with the “semiotic realm,” which exists as a matriarchal, pre-symbolic state of chaos (12). The ego or the “I” is situated within the symbolic realm. Its existence is made possible by the subject’s entry into language (the symbolic realm), which is facilitated by the infant’s separation from the undifferentiated whole within which it is a function rather than an individual (13).

This separation is initiated by the “mirror phase,” or the moment when an infant sees his reflection in the mirror and recognizes himself as a separate entity from his mother (Kristeva 14). At this point the infant discovers the contours of his body and realizes there is space between him and his mother (and even that he is separate from the space that surrounds him), thus warranting the implementation of language to describe and secure these newly found borders. Kristeva draws on Freudian stages of development for her own analysis of the experience of the abject (as well as of the sublime). The mirror phase is the catalyst for our relocation from the semiotic realm to the symbolic realm and requires that we acquire language sustain that independence. Kristeva says, “the abject confronts us...within our personal archeology, with our earliest attempts to release the hold of *maternal* entity even before existing outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language” (13). Thus the abject is the potential of the failure of language as a safeguard from the disorder of the semiotic realm; a failure of symbolic agency.

When Saturn consumes his children it initiates a reversal of their separation, a reinforcement of the subject into the parental organism. The semiotic (the illogic of cannibalism and infanticide)

is consumed by the symbolic (father), which in turn means that the symbolic order of the linear bloodline is collapsed. In this way the “I” or the ego becomes lost in the collapse of structure that the myth represents. Kristeva captures that loss of the self, asking, “how can I be without be without border?” (4). After the ego’s separation from the semiotic realm, it becomes dependent on symbolic order to sustain and reinforce that “autonomy;” language and law are used to quarantine the disorder of the semiotic realm. Kristeva theorizes that the sublime and the abject occur within the immanent space between the symbolic and semiotic realms.

The experience of the abject is an innate, “corporeal” reaction that alerts us of the potential of a symbolic collapse such as we see in the myth of Saturn. It keeps us from crossing the bounds of the semiotic where “I” cannot exist (11). Sustained by contradiction, the abject is “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscious” (4). The abject is a vacuum of meaning that Kristeva refers to as “a weight of meaninglessness,” which both warns and threatens the subject with the prospect of non-being and sustains the symbolic (2). The collapse of generational linearity in the myth of Saturn certainly confronts the us with the potential of non-being, and reminds us of the instability of our symbolic security.

However, this compulsion to sustain symbolic autonomy has not always been emphasized. In fact, in his essay “Cannibalism and Carnavalesque: Incorporation as Utopia in the Early image of America,” Mario Klarer notes that this collapse of boundaries

has been seen in the past more as a “cosmic wholeness” of the individual with the universe, than a threat to one’s sense of self. It is on account of thinking that the abject becomes the sublime. The sublime, similar to the abject, exists outside our symbolic bounds; however instead of existing as a vacuum it is “something added” (Kristeva 12). It is a sensation that is just out of reach, one that “dissolves in the raptures of a bottomless memory” (12). Kristeva writes that “the same subject and speech bring [abjection and sublimity] into being. For the sublime has no object either” (11-12). In this way the sublime is an inversion of the abject and vice versa. For each, the simultaneity and inherent contradictions that make up their being (or lack thereof) are what make them so devastating and enthralling.

Saturn’s roles as a god are similarly contradictory yet interconnected. He is the god of time (Kronos), however, it is from this broad mantle that his incongruences are born. The concept of time can be understood linearly or cyclically: cyclic time suggests a perpetual renewal whereas linear time denotes a beginning and an end. Each begets ideas of death and transition. Because of this, Saturn was idolized as the god of the dead and in keeping with that association, many people offered the god human sacrifices, which sustains his connection with cannibalism (Pucci 38).

At odds with this foreboding conceptual position, Saturn was concurrently viewed as the god of celebration and harvest (Pucci 41, 43). Thus, the naturally oppositional qualities of life, death, sacrifice and bounty lend themselves simultaneously to the linear and cyclic properties of time. They are the foundation

of Saturn's place in cultural and philosophical history as well as the core of the ancient Roman festival, *Saturnalia*, which further highlights the collapse of meaning that is inherent to the god's image. (Pucci 43).

The *Saturnalia*, a celebration of Saturn, dates back to the year 217 B.C.E. and despite its eventual abandonment made notable cultural impacts across Europe, including its ritual connections with the Roman Catholic festival, Carnival (Pucci 39). The *Saturnalia* was a banquet held at the end of the year which represented an important transition time for a culture that was structured around agriculture. This transition period manifested itself in the celebration on several different layers: it represented the temporal transition and hope for a bountiful spring, a transition between life and death, as well as a temporary cultural transition in which hierarchal roles and social expectations were reversed or abandoned (Pucci 43-45). On this day servants or slaves were the commanders of their owners, and men and women would overindulge in grandiose meals and have public orgies that would otherwise be taboo. Giuseppe Pucci calls this disorderly affair "the ritualization of primordial chaos that precedes creation" (44). The people took an uncertain and transitional period and transfigured it into a celebration.

The Roman Catholic Carnival so closely resembles the structure of the ancient *Saturnalia* that most historians agree that Carnival is directly modeled from the earlier celebration. Klarer elaborates on the ritual similarities between the two festivals. He quotes Mikhail Bakhtin to clarify these connections: "the tradition of the Saturnalias remained unbroken and alive in the medieval

carnival, which expressed this universal renewal and was vividly felt as an escape from the usual official way of life” (qtd. in Klarer 402). Similarities between the two festivals and this “escape” to which Bakhtin refers include the inversion of societal and hierarchal roles, an abandonment of social norms, cannibalism and human sacrifice (Klarer 401, 402). What was once a “ritualization of primordial chaos” for those who partook in the *Saturnalia* became a similar means to quarantine disorder with Carnival, which would eventually become a spectacle under the close supervision of the Church.

The ritualized and cyclical nature of the Saturnalian perspective on life, death and time was one that was transfused into Carnival. Klarer investigates the seventeenth century affinity for the self-sustaining and perceived “cosmic wholeness” that ritual sacrifice and cannibalism seemed to provide (398). Referring to the Last Supper and the concept of “incorporation” as means to achieve unity with God and the universe, Klarer writes, “the cannibalistic deep-structure of Christian tradition is thus indirectly reflected in the carnival of early modern times” (403). This illustrates how truly pervasive pre-Christian ritual and myth are in the more modern religious and social structures of Europe.

As a “cosmic wholeness” and cyclic sustainability could be achieved through incorporation and ritual sacrifice, Klarer notes that the sixteenth century experienced a “revival” of interest in cannibalism and ritual celebrations that lent a great deal to the structure and formation of the festival, Carnival (400). In fact, the sixteenth century fascination with “wholeness” was not limited to pre-Christian celebrations, such as the *Saturnalia*, that endorsed

that thinking, but also included the myths of the Golden Age that were the foundation for some of these festivities (Georgievska-Shine 54, 55). The myths seem to represent a sublime purity and “an earlier state of symmetry” for which the academics and artists of the 1600s were nostalgic (Georgievska-Shine 54). This was manifested in the Baroque practice of classical imitation and an almost obsessive depiction and re-depiction of the Golden Age through their art.

Rubens, who was born in Germany in 1577 to a well educated and a philosophically opinionated father, was never far from this academic interest and discourse that was circulating through sixteenth century Europe (Stubbe 7). Like most artists of the decadent Baroque period, he traveled to Rome for his formal training in the arts (Georgievska-Shine 2). Thus many of his artistic, philosophical and intellectual perspectives were shaped by his education in Italy, a place that seemed to enact the very decadence that was typical of its art (Malraux 78). Additionally, this means that he was immersed in the country’s fascination with ritualized ceremony, Carnival and the utopian “wholeness” that was so desired at the time.

While Rubens is known primarily for his art, he managed to work his way into nearly every niche of high society, accumulating many hobbies and duties including, “a painter, antiquarian, diplomat and courtier” (Georgievska-Shine 2). It is important to note that Rubens was a court painter, meaning the majority of his work was painted on commission. However, this

does not mean that Rubens was not profoundly interested in the myths of the Golden Age.²

His *Saturn Devouring his Son* is painted with a profundity of style that speaks to the reverence of myth in the Baroque period. Rubens' Saturn is old, but clearly powerful; his muscular legs stand sturdily on either a hill of stones, or a mountain of clouds. His menacing posture in conjunction with the dark sky behind him lend the sense that the elements are at his will. Even the night sky is reacting to his wrath. In his arms the infant has an expression of anguish (logically), as the god rips the skin from his chest. The scythe in his other hand only adds to his thunderous power. The highlighted musculature, proportional depiction of the human body as well as the resplendent style of the painting are consistent with Baroque practice and lend to the glorified representation of the myth.

Taking into consideration the style of the representation, Rubens' own love for classicism as well as the academic and philosophical environment in which Rubens immersed himself, this version of *Saturn Devouring his Son* represents an admiration for the sublimity of the myth of Saturn. These tales of gods that existed before the beginning of time in a "primordial chaos" certainly speak to Kristeva's conception of the sublime. Hers is a

² This is reinforced by a correspondence with a friend that is recorded in *The Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*. Here he thanks his friend for sending him a box that is apparently full of antiquated mysteries. Gratefully he writes, "it has given me the utmost pleasure, for it is full of rare things worthy of the closest examination...The large glass vase is indeed a superb monument of antiquity" (401). He continues with his conjectures on the figures represented on the vase, but his enthusiasm and genuine love of the subject is evident in the exchange.

“pre-nominal” and “pre-objectal” phenomenon that, while we cannot access it abstractly, for it is out of symbolic bounds, still invokes a sensation of fullness, and an inarticulable “wholeness.” For the participants in the Saturnalia, Carnival and those with a renewed interest in classic myth, this same sensation of “wholeness,” or a divine circularity, seems to be the driving force behind their infatuation. The actual acts of cannibalism and infanticide were not necessarily the focal point of Rubens’ veneration, it was the suggestion of sublimity and perpetual sustainability behind the myth that seduced Rubens and his peers.

Klarer calls the idea of incorporation as a means to achieve some transcendent relationship with the universe one that is “subliminally regenerative” (403). Connecting that with the myth of Saturn and his incorporation of his children creates an entirely self-sustaining and “pure” system of being, one in which there is no symbolic separation of the self from the rest of the world as Kristeva details. In this way, Rubens’ *Saturn Devouring his Son* becomes a conceptual and physical vestige of that pre-symbolic state; a means to access the chimeric sublime.

Just as Rubens’ Saturn is shaped by a collective nostalgia for this perceived access to the sublime, Goya’s Saturn is a reflection of the social and cultural reasoning in which he lived and worked. For the myth of Saturn and its associated traditions, this meant a philosophical inversion from the grand to the grotesque, the festival of Carnival to the carnivalesque spectacle,

the sublime to the abject, and for our purposes, a movement from Italy to Spain.

Stoichita and Coderch note that the Roman Carnival was banned in Italy after the French Revolution in the late 1700s only to be reinstated in the early 1800s (12). It was during this time that a cultural shift took place making Carnival more of spectacle than a celebration. “Carnival, which should in principle have erased all boundaries between spectators and actors...has lost something of its all-encompassing power and therefore, implicitly, something of its innermost being. Hence the festival is turned into something it was not: a show” (11-12). By refiguring Carnival as a performance, participation is limited to the performers. In this way their behavior is singled out as obscene and the spectacle becomes a means to quarantine disorder or provide a moral lesson.

Arthur Mitzman reinforces this symbolic inversion in his essay, “Michelet and Social Romanticism: Religion, Revolution, Nature,” when he observes a revival of the “grotesque humor” of the Carnival (665). While Mitzman is celebrating a return of Carnival in the 1800s, referring to it as “grotesque” does not situate the celebration as a serious and meaningful tradition, rather it connotes that Carnival had become more of an outrageous performance that served to reinforce the symbolic order, rather than subvert it.

The metamorphosis of Carnival is telling of a larger cultural struggle between Roman tradition and the Catholic church. André Malraux summarizes Spain’s combined admiration for and rejection of Italy’s decadence. He says, “it cannot be doubted that

Spanish artists were impatient of the influence exercised by Italian art. They had come to terms with the baroque ecstasies where sensuality and spirituality met; but in Italy they met in sensuality whereas Spain had always wanted to unite them in God” (78). He writes about the harsh censorship that was enforced in Spain, for which Goya had narrowly escaped persecution several times in his career as a painter.

Goya (like Rubens) was officially declared a court painter in 1786 (Muller 22). This meant that as a liberal thinker and often satirical painter, Goya was uncomfortably straddling the divide between the tumultuous, political side of Spain, always deeply affected by the Church, and his own morality as an individual. Thus Goya’s position in his home country was not unlike that of Carnival’s, fraught with tension and conflicting values. Carnival, like the *Saturnalia*, has been regarded as a festival of inversion of social values; one that is culturally and politically subversive—even revolutionary (Stoichita and Coderch 23). For that reason, in a time when the Church was fighting for control, the disorderly and indulgent traditions of Carnival posed a logical threat to that ascendance. Robert Hughes calls the imposition of the Church a “dominant anxiety” in Goya’s life (4). He extrapolates: “the obsession with papal authority, and the concomitant power of the Church, was even greater, and to openly criticize either in Spain was not devoid of serious risk” (4). As Goya grew more and more resistant to religious and political authority, he experienced firsthand the consequences of that risk resulting with his exile to France in 1824, only a couple of years after historians estimate that he painted *Saturn Devouring his Son* (Hughes 366).

Living amidst the toils of the Peninsular War and the final decades of the Spanish Inquisition, Goya was no stranger to tragedy and trauma (Muller 174). Additionally, the artist suffered several nearly fatal illnesses, one of which resulted in his loss of hearing two decades before his death (Muller 11, 23). The progression from a pristine, classical style that we see in much of his earlier work to the heavier, darker content and style that pervaded much of his later painting seems to speak to the weight of the troubles he had endured throughout his life.³ In 1819 Goya moved to the isolated *Quinta del Sordo*, or ‘home of the deaf man’ (coincidentally named as such even before Goya bought it), in the Spanish countryside (Muller 11). It was here that Goya painted his famous “Black Paintings,” or fourteen dark murals on the walls of his country home; one of which was *Saturn Devouring his Son*.

Goya’s *Saturn Devouring his Son* confronts its audience with a subhuman Saturn that is feasting on his already partially devoured son. This son, however, is certainly not an infant as the myth and Rubens’ painting detail; it is a full grown (and ambiguously gendered) body. The corpse in Saturn’s hands takes on a neoclassical style that is more reminiscent of Rubens’ time period than it is Goya’s— anatomically and artistically more Baroque. The “son” along with Saturn’s eyes are the primary

³ Goya expressed in one of his correspondences, “I’ll have you know, I’m not afraid of witches, spirits, phantoms, boastful giants, rogues knaves, etc., nor do I fear any kind of beings except human ones” (qtd. in Warner 256). Implicit in this mentality is Goya’s rejection of what has been accepted as rational within the symbolic sphere. He conveys a collapse of order, which posits man as the threat where “witches” and “phantoms” would rationally be the object of fear.

points of light in the piece, while the rest of the painting remains obscured by shadows and blurred lines between lights and darks. Saturn is crouching in the darkness, and whether he is receding into or emerging from the shadows is not clear. His wide eyes are filled with a sense of alarm that gives the painting a voyeuristic quality—as though the viewers have happened upon a scene that they were never meant to see (which may very well be true considering that Goya painted the piece on a wall of his isolated country home). Saturn’s upturned eyebrows in conjunction with his shocked eyes express shame or shock. With stringy gray hair and an awkward, disproportionate body, this Saturn hardly evokes the same sensation of grandeur and godliness that Rubens’ does. Rather, Goya’s Saturn seems discarded, even desperate.

Taking into consideration the evolution of traditions such as Carnival and the growing imposition of the values of the Church in Goya’s Spain, this inglorious depiction of Saturn is not surprising. Spain’s internal turmoil is reflected in Saturn’s expression as we witness him guiltily devouring the sensuality of the Baroque. The figure embodies a symbolic collapse between decadence and shame. However, the viewer is not exempt from this transgression, as Saturn’s startled eyes humble his observer for indulging in the private scene. This instability serves to upset the viewer’s comfortable status as spectator by exposing and collapsing the symbolic wall that separates the audience from the ghastly scene. Saturn’s piercing gaze muddles the role of spectator and spectacle, and by extension, critiques their utility as a symbolic reinforcer under the reign of the Church.

Carnival had become more of a “show,” with clearly enforced norms for a celebration that was once structured around the very idea of collapsing social and categorical borders. This worked to bolster the symbolic regiment of the Church by reifying what threatened its order. In creating the symbolic wall between spectators and performers, the festival was no longer about a sublime unity, rather it was a well defined symbolic distinction between the grotesque, or “carnavalesque,” and the norm. Goya’s Saturn exposes this transformation by collapsing the boundary between the spectator and the spectacle. The voyeuristic feel the painting imbues arrests the viewer in a reciprocal relationship with Saturn that invokes the same shame in the voyeur as we see on the face of the figure; the spectator *becomes* the spectacle. Saturn’s gaze demands that the viewer is painfully self-conscious of his or her of complicity in the vile scene that defiles the sacredness and authority of the symbolic realm.

This myth that once suggested a “subliminally regenerative” state, becomes the abject. The notional self-sustainability that is inherent in this act of eating one’s own child now seems to threaten the solace of borderlines, propelling one into the “pre-nominal” and “pre-objectal” boundlessness of the abject. When Kristeva asks, “how can I be without border?” she encapsulates our craving to stake out a symbolic territory (4). The sublime “wholeness” or unity of an individual with the “primordial chaos” of the universe that was once sought out now seems to threaten the ego’s sense of place within the symbolic order. This collapse of borderlines is embodied in the painting’s

formal makeup that disintegrates those lines literally and figuratively. By obscuring the lines between light and dark, between background and foreground, spectacle and spectator, even Saturn and his son, the viewer cannot detect any clean borders that would lessen the mystery of the painting, and soften the uncomfortable confrontation with the abject.

Kristeva unravels the contradictions of the abject. She says abjection is “a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you...” (4). Abjection then is something that we do not have the symbolic resources to provide for. Its simultaneity and inherent contradictions do not allow for borders. The idea of a father who devours his own children would fall into that category. Everything about this combined act of cannibalism and infanticide threaten those boundaries that we are predisposed, by the logic of the symbolic realm, to desire.

Rubens’ depiction of *Saturn Devouring his Son* exalts a “sublime wholeness;” an idealized picture of self-sustainability and unity with the universe. Implicit in this “wholeness” is the lack of boundaries that became so threatening in Goya’s time, thus marking the transition of the sublime to the abject. Abjection is a product of ambiguity, where symbolic law and order fail to sustain the ego. Thus the abjection of Goya’s Saturn is not only enacted by the visuality of the painting, but by the suggestion of the collapse of symbolic authority. That order is collapsed in Goya’s painting by its exposure of Spain’s tempting and shameful indulgence in decadence, the Church’s invention of symbolic “borders,” and the spectacle of Carnival. This collapse emphasizes the vulnerabilities of the symbolic realm. Through its unveiling

of the boundaries that sustain the ego, it challenges their validity and the mentalities that call them into being. As Kristeva says, “the same subject and speech bring [sublimity and abjection] into being” (11-12). Therefore, the last and most captivating piece of the sublime and the abject is their inherent simultaneity. This makes them indistinguishable, devastating and enthralling.

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LUCAS ANDINO

Lucas Andino is an Ecuadorian student of comparative literature and philosophy. His primary interest--if not his only interest-- is poetry. He identifies with Adonis: "The world to come will be [scatologically] poetic or it will not be."

Nomad Prize for Excellence in Undergraduate Scholarship:
Honorable Mention

Mentor: Emily McGinn

TO SHIT AS GINSBURG

"You can turn your shit into gold"

Alejandro Jodorowski

The Holy Mountain

This article puts forth a rather disgusting theme that, by its recurrence and banality, could become annoying. The disgustingness, however, comes from the violent ambiguity of the subject that "is both naturally present but, in most cases, socially absent," and from the consequent social disorder that is provoked by the separation of human waste "from the individual who created it, and from the society that rejects it" (Persells

xiv). Tackling shit though, or, rather, welcoming it, implies a commitment to heal such disorder because it engages the very sustenance of the individual, as it finds itself socially repressed from developing its scatological capacities. Taking shit seriously, being critical about it, involves a movement that is the opposite of what modernity has made of it. Rather than shallowly taking shit as an expulsion and erasing it as if it were a mere reflex, one is to make space for it to be welcomed as a returning citizen.

Shit stands as the most execrable animal product for it contains all the residues of digestion. “What cannot be used from the consumed foods and drinks descends into a person’s lower intestines, changes itself into excrement...and is evacuated by the body” (Lewin vii), says Hildegard von Bingen in one of the earliest Western medical treatises, dating from around 1155. The concept of shit takes on the connotation of physiological rejection alone without admitting any other possible definitions. It disacknowledges, for example, the original experience of creation and the irreducible link with its creator. By relying on physiology, the definition becomes inviolable because nature is a given force that entangles humans. Indeed, the body can do nothing with shit once expelled and if reinserted in the food chain its high toxicity could only cause damage, although this is not the case for many animals, such as rabbits, gorillas, dogs, among others. This limited connotation (bound to repulsion as a reflex of self-preservation) is useful to explain our mechanical functions but is instantly invalid when socially enmeshed, as it repels people from one another. Repulsion of shit is, in the long run, repulsion of the

self. Considering shit an expression of rejection thus contains peril, for it contradicts any political project, any collectivity.

Not all epochs have defined shit in the same way. In antiquity, the Greeks had no trouble relating shit with sublimity, for in the main seats of the agora a basin was incorporated in order to enhance the moment of catharsis of a play. The moment of emotional liberation, the catharsis, was maximized by synchronizing it with the release of a dump, thus taking shit as a sublime experience. The Romans had public toilets that could host more than fifty people in which they held social gatherings. Nowadays, however, the mere mention of shitting as a social practice could instantly produce laughter, if not gagging. The condescending laughter of moderns who regard any past practice as ignorance, and the gagging of someone so embedded in such laughter, have somaticized the prejudice against shit. Such reflexes affirm the deep, unconscious, roots of our shit.

Nature loses its preeminence when mastered by reason and technique in modernity. Incapable of providing meaning to class power, nature is relegated to the underground as if an illegitimate experience. But reason and technique are correlative to nature because the mind is entangled in nature. Even though it has been cast out by modernity nature reappears by necessity, though as a negative counterpart of the mind that negates its origin. Modernity encompasses shit as negativity and cleanliness, its reasoned antidote, becomes the superimposed value. Cleanliness is the lack of shit, hence the modern place of zero danger, the barbed wired house in which cowardice is safe. But the lack is

only apparent in the totalized mind because shit, like nature, is inextricable.

Modernity can be reduced to an institutionalization of cleanliness (as a movement of separateness) in all areas. The making of censuses, for example, is a method of identifying the unwanted (the unproductive) and consequently pushing such parasites to work, if not disposing them in war. The institutionalization of cleanliness is also highly verifiable when looking at language institutions. The slogan ‘Cleans, sets and casts splendor,’ however fitting for a detergent is, in actuality, the motto of the Royal Spanish Academy. In other words, the academy’s work is to extricate language, to dictate and make it opulent. Language academies are the most effective institutions in modernity, if not the best, for they command the frame for the development of discourse. Denial and veiling of shit extends to every particle of language.

The cleaning of the tools with which any discourse is developed—words and syntax—has decisive consequences in other spheres. Here is an example of how the manipulation of language engages the sphere of politics. In August of 1539, in France, the Ordinance of Villers-Cotterets mandated that all official documents were to be cleansed of all ambiguities or uncertainties by means of their translation into ‘proper’ French. In November of the same year, the King ordered another edict in which he expressed his disgust towards Paris, “which has in a great many places so degenerated into ruin and destruction... that it provokes great horror and greater displeasure in all valiant persons of

substance. These scandalous and dishonorable acts are the work of corrupted individuals who sojourn and assemble in this our city and its surroundings” (Laporte 4-5). The anteriority of the language edict suggests cleanliness as a precondition in the way of thinking before realizing the dirtiness of urban surroundings.

Repercussions of the institutionalization of cleanliness can also be traced in the sphere of art with the appearance of the first scatological writer of modernity, Rabelais. If art is considered a movement of criticism, such repercussions occur here as a revolt against this cleanliness. Rabelais’s constant and unrestrained scatological references make his writing a denunciation of the institutional banning of shit and, at the same time, the documentation of a disrupted order in the sphere of language. There is a passage from *Gargantua and Pantagruel* that documents rather palpably the interruption of modern discourse into the act of shitting. “Then [after reading the Scriptures] he [Gargantua] would go off and, in some private place, permit the natural result of his digestive process to be excreted. While he was thus occupied, his teacher would repeat what had been read to him, clarifying and explaining the more obscure and difficult points” (57). Before this passage, Gargantua defecated in ‘improper places,’ thus it is only by God’s guidance (reading the Scriptures) and modern education (the preceptor) that cleanliness and privacy become the proper way of shitting. The obsessive determination of the preceptor to hammer knowledge into Gargantua’s mind denounces the violence of the modern project of cleanliness. By

means of satire the counter-part of cleanliness is raised by art and with it lies the longing for an order that has been disrupted.

Cleanliness can be further traced to Platonism or what could be called the history of nihilism. Besides killing himself, Socrates also killed the mythic world by enacting Plato's words in which he gives to Western thinking the theory of forms. Forms are posited as the true world, transcendent, and thus are put above the earthly world, a physic beyond the physic, a metaphysic. Western knowledge is conceived in this lofty incubator and concentrates in the broadest form of God. With such 'grounding' a short step remains to start polishing that new created world by means of casting away all elements that are unpleasant to the historic context or, better, distasteful to the subjectivity of the author. While Socrates, in Plato's *Parmenides*, is explaining the theory of forms to Parmenides, the latter interrupts to ask if "hair, for instance, or mud, or dirt, or anything else notably vile and worthless" has a distinct form. "By no means," jumps Socrates, "in these cases, the things are what we see them to be; to believe in a form of them would perhaps be too much of a paradox" (*Parmenides* 50-51). Ideal forms are too 'beautiful' to have to do with such lowly matters. It is needless to say what would have happened if Parmenides had mentioned shit, though mud already connotes a similar meaning. Whatever is considered lowly in the origins of culture is cast aside from the future to come. A pure and sanitized new God is construed in opposition to earthly matters and the body becomes the place of defilement par excellence. "...It isn't possible to recognize anything at all purely

when in company with the body” (38), says the Socrates of the *Phaedo*.

Modernity is often described as a systematic human appropriation of God—meaning with ‘systematic’ a rationalization of language, a progression of logic (Taylor 20). Thus whatever high ideal was put before, would be transmitted when appropriated, or dissolved, secularized, declined. The ascetic Platonic God is what is transposed to the human conception in modernity. Hence a God of cleanliness commands from within the modern self and makes of its nature its politics. Its ‘highest’ achievement: the cleaning of language. Its fatal consequence: social cleansing in the forms of extermination and colonization. Cleaning of language has to appear first in the form of an abrupt disruption in order to make a space in discourse that could later justify a politics of radical segregation.

In the figure of Nietzsche, Platonism ends or, likewise, nihilism takes complete form and any hard truth (or value) vanishes from landscape. The ‘true world that became a fable’ can be interpreted as a death of cleanliness as historically understood. In turn, the task that is put forth is the revaluation of the body. Assuming this task results in the cutting of any relationship with truth, i.e. with God, and individuals are pushed towards the seeking of metaphors that engage the body. Scatological literature assumes such a task with commitment.

Rabelais was mentioned before as the first modern scatological writer. Throughout modernity there is a long tradition of writing about shit that ranges from John Dryden to Jonathan

Swift, from the Marquis de Sade to the Comte de Lautréamont. In the 20th century many great poets, such as Céline or Bukowski, are scatologists, but it is Allen Ginsberg who sums up the demoted tradition in one empowering moan. Usually regarded as ‘obscene,’ Ginsberg’s language encountered opposition in many of the places where it was displayed. His poem “Howl,” for example, resulted in what is now called the Obscenity Trial where he had to defend himself against charges of writing about ‘illicit’ practices, namely drugs and sodomy. Throughout his work there are scatological references that range from rebellious to political to a notion of knowledge. The latter is the most interesting type.

In Ginsberg’s early period, before “Howl,” there is already an interest in excrement and all its surrounding elements. A diary entry dating from November 13, 1946, has the title “Scatological Trimmings.” He does not register the actual fact of shitting or the shit itself, but there is a dialogue between his own visceral movements and the context in which they rise. One such trimming reads, “7. Visual image of forcing out feces and masturbation (flexing penis muscles). This to do with defilement and fear of pants with buttons which kept shitting near me, against me” (The Book of Martyrdom 152). These private notes, enumerated and disengaged, work as a labor of poetic self-consciousness. There are no conclusions offered in the entry, only registrations, as if he were a detective collecting data.

Further, in his poem of 1950, “The Terms in Which I Think of Reality,” there already exists a development of shit as a metaphor linked to knowledge. The very title of the poem declares

a cognitive ambition and when shit makes its appearance it is the whole world that is put at stake. “For the world is a mountain / of shit: if it’s going to / be moved at all, it’s got / to be taken by handfuls”, says Ginsberg (Collected Poems 59). Indeed, the world is described neutrally as a mountain of feces and could be interpreted as an apprehensible magma out of which reality is made. The second part of the quoted lines, however, weakens the interpretation of the first ones, for a certain humor is inserted when Ginsberg mocks the proverb that prescribes faith as capable of moving mountains. The strength of scatology as a font of knowledge is presented here in its incomplete potentiality because it has an immature form, as it is iconoclastic just for the sake of being so.

Under the shade of “Howl,” as if an intermediate period, shit plays again a major role in the poem “September on Jessore Road.” The poem talks about the pain of poverty and war and yells for justice as it holds the U.S. government responsible for Vietnam. Shit here rises as a political value, and the harshness of the word works as an impetus to support the accusation and the taking of sides. “Who can bring bread to this shit flood foul’d lair?” (Collected Poems 582) asks the poem. Later it describes how cries “[Sleep] in huge pipes in the wet shit-field rain” (Collected Poems 582). The political content of the poem makes shit a material of rebellion, as at this point shit is deprived from immaturity and leads to a more serious consideration.

It is in the threshold of death, twelve days before Ginsberg dies, that one finds shit unleashed to its maximum capacity.

“Scatological Observations,” written in March 23, 1997, curiously recalls Ginsberg’s early notations as he made his route towards becoming a big figure. Major poets usually know from early on what they are seeking and thus they have very few themes. The poem could be considered a song, as its rigid structure of four-line stanzas composed with rhyme and chorus repeats in order to fit musical accompaniment. If one is to consider Ginsberg’s intensive relationship with Buddhism, the repetition and hypnotizing rhyme could also be interpreted as a peculiar mantra, removed from its Sanskrit and thematic tradition (not known for including shit) and put forth with the particular use of language of the author. Mantras are repetitive schemes of words that push for individual transformation and, even though they come from a long Vedic tradition, there is no reason as to why mantras today are not useful or cannot be newly created. Due to its radical commitment to shitting, the poem brings about multiple interpretations that are articulated in the discussion developed so far.¹

In the first stanza there is already a straightforward criticism of shit as obscenity. “Young romantic readers / Skip this part of the book” (*Collected Poems* 1147) are the first two lines. Only romantic consciousness, in its overflowing and thus its superimposition, could feel ashamed of the hard reality of shit and should avoid reading the poem. “If you want a glimpse of life / You’re free to take a look” it continues. Shit is correlated with freedom, life and reality, while its negative side, repression,

² See the appendix for a complete look at the poem.

avoidance of life and cleanliness, is regarded as a romantic superimposition.

Though it may seem that the poem embraces a sort of futurist love of the machine (“Shit machine shit machine / I’m an incredible shit machine”), in actuality the chorus uses the machine as an adjective. Ginsberg’s familiarity with street language explains it better, as it merely poses the machine as being a radically good shitter and pisser. By the repetition of the phrases there is a hammering of the ‘I’, and by the awkwardness of the prosaic element in a poem it exercises and suggests freedom of the self-affirmed ‘I’. Shitting thus stands as a metaphor of maximum individual sovereignty, emphasized by the hyperboles ‘incredible’ and ‘inexhaustible.’

By proposing a cherished state of shitting, the poem articulates an ethical position. There is no formula as to how to shit well or what is a good shit because any such proposal would mean a standard common to everybody and it was already affirmed that absolute values are not applicable, as they are a cleaning procedure summarized in the history of nihilism. This history has eroded our concept of ethics to the point that all we are left with is our own subjectivity by which to judge our actions. This, however, is not an openness to chaos, for there is a rigorous reduction of options by means of predicting the effects of shitting. To shit well is to feel emotionally well, thus if one feels emotionally well it is due to a good shit. One is compelled to be extremely aware of what were the different actions made that produced an emotional state of bliss or misery. In this sense there is a negative and positive reduction of options insomuch a misery

discards actions from the future and a bliss produces repetition of past actions, i.e. infinite affirmation. Distinctive procedures can be identified and transformed into a rule for further actions, yielding ethical rules, thus a middle path or Golden Mean suggested in the third stanza (“Piss & shit machine / That’s the Golden Mean”). The Aristotelian formula of the Golden Mean, which is a balancing between excess and deficiency in order to achieve virtue, is grounded here in an ethics of shitting. So pulled to the earth is Aristotle here that the very act of shitting becomes the virtue: shitting is virtuosity. Far from Western philosophy, a theory of a middle path is also offered in the Buddhist *System of the Middle Way* and most prominently in Confucianism. The Golden Mean thus is carefully picked by Ginsberg in order to convey a sort of universal ethics (every living creature shits) that is, nevertheless, very particular (shitting can only be made by the individual concerned).

To make of shitting a source of ethical knowledge, or any other type of knowledge, by the premise of a ‘Golden Shitting’ brings a paradox to the argument. If values crumble with the disappearance of truth or God, why then should metaphors of shit be valuable? The paradox is unresolved not only for this poem and paper but to the story of nihilism as well. Postmodernism, as rising from nihilism’s fulfillment on, struggles with this irresoluteness that almost recommends dwelling in supreme banality. The paradox resembles that of Buridan’s ass, who died of thirst and hunger when placed midway between a stack of hay and a bucket of water. If we are to extend the anecdote, political matters get even worse, for they involves the death of the

collective. Indeed, as Joshua D. Esty has noted in his article *Excremental Postcolonialism*, suggesting shit or any universality is a peril because it can both represent and resist power. Esty makes an analysis of vulgar images and suggests a “radical ambiguity of scatology” (26). Since shit is a paradox, it can only be sustained negatively as being the subject that opposes more thoroughly God or monotheism. Thus shit can never be taken at its face value and all its metaphors (values) are to be movements that get near (without ever concretizing) to what is historically innocent and devalued, i.e. the body. Values are negated their supremacy, though granted their being as nearness. Being as nearness is an irresolute being; the nearest to a solution, nonetheless. Since a poem is a written form, in the end an objectification, Ginsberg has no other choice but to nominalize this shifting (getting close to resolution) character of shitting in the static formula of Golden Mean.

Discourse, from this perspective, appears as a stream of metaphors swiftly moving above the oil, but some, like the very shit, are so significantly charged and near to the body that the ad-infinitum chain of metaphors (words that are defined by other words that are themselves defined by other words, i.e. the whole language) reaches its limit and slows. When this occurs it is as if a certain part of the pointed referent is materially substituted by discourse, as if touched, becoming a metonymy. This substitution

² Rodney Sharkey, in his article *From Hardware to Software, or “Rocks, Cocks, Creation, Defecation, and Death...”*, explores the creativity (the bringing to corporeal life) of shit by anchoring his argument in a concept of metaphor as magic that he takes from Thomas Docherty.

is a leap that may always purport insufficient explanations from any viewpoint and could only be called magic². A tangential explanation could be that when mentioning these metonymys; all the signifiers they convey focally point to the subject they deal with, interpretations thus get reduced to the very least and the agreement of what their images express is so tense that even matter feels interpolated. Hence ‘truth’, in a devalued or weak sense, is the metonymization of discourse that is capable of touching matter. The insistent repetition of the chorus of our poem could be explained as an attempt to modify matter by the incantation of words. A magic formula, a mantra that speaks to the invoked material.

The poem contains a series of comparisons (“whether young or old,” “brown or black or green,” “hard or soft or loose,” “babe or boy or youth,” “baby girl or maid”) that brings into focus the broad applicability of shit. Shit, like the rose that blooms, is one of the metaphors that conveys more signifiers because it is an ending stage—*eschatos* in Greek means last—where everything converges. Nevertheless, signifiers of the rose are much inclined to literalism, while shit has a bolder reality because it is literarily and colloquially charged. This broad range of connotations adds to the elementality of shit. Its boldness brings to bear the rough superficiality of materiality and the deepness of a mystery, as it is intricately involved in literature. “...When written”, says Barthes, “shit does not have an odor” (137), describing the unreachability of an object that is strongly visible.

The describing of shit as a universality brings to presence not only that shit is a source of knowledge, but of predictability

as well. Any archeologist knows that in order to know a given culture the best place to look at is its landfill. Everything that was once useful is placed there, from food to technology, with the only problem that everything is scrambled and class struggle is erased. Trash and shit are like death, as they both equalize humanity. (Death, nonetheless, remains the protagonist of the proverb because the meanings of shit and trash deviate once interpreted, while death is liminal.) Inasmuch as shit contains all residues from what is consumed by the body it resembles a landfill and if one had the capacity to interpret its footprint—by means of observing, for example, its particular consistency and coloration³—, then one would be able to read the eternity in the present. “Everything will be seen,” asserts the poem.

Ginsberg’s commitment to the body is radical and verified in an extreme conciseness: “Fuck fart shit Piss / It all comes down to this.” His words violently demand em-bodying knowledge, as he is conscious of the derivative dangers of God and its cleaning attitude. Thus he continues with transgressions of religious references in order to sever any relationship with God. In “Beautiful male Madonnas” virginal Mary is transexualized. In “Wrathful Maids of Honor” the institution of marriage is a place of enmity rather than communion. Such is Ginsberg’s confidence in the body that he concludes these two transgressive lines with “To be frank & Honest / Stink the watercloset”. These could be interpreted as a callow use of shit, as if he were recommending

³ As an example, this is what the protagonist of Ruben Fonseca’s story Copromancy does.

‘to damage everything’, but if one is to consider Ginsberg’s long history of political activism then it is highly unlikely he is advocating for chaos; his continuous political taking of sides delegitimizes such interpretation. If we are to shit as Ginsberg then to ‘stink the watercloset’ or, even, ‘stink on everything’ is not a soiling but an all-inclusive celebration.

The poem ends with the repetitive enunciation of the word shit (and piss) along with some tautological lines, namely “Nature’s not obscene” and “Nature never wrong.” Indeed, nature is a given element that cannot be judged morally. By mentioning it, though, Ginsberg emphasizes the complete forgetfulness of the body and denounces the overlapping of a clean nature, to the point that the primeval one turns unconsciously obscene and wrong.

A mantra with the correct choice of words, like the one Ginsberg offers, metonymyzises language and is able to liberate shit from its keeper that rejects it. It does not speak, however, to the creation, but to the creator and literally shakes out of her/him the reversal of everything contained in its uttermost rejection. Only by inversion can shit be neutrally, if not blissfully, ejected. Paradoxically enough, an ejection without rejection: shit is the path to virtue. ‘Stink on everything’, pounds Ginsberg, and indeed we must, for political implications of this standpoint could only mean the depletion of modernity and its teleology of human repulsion. Modernity is construed by the superimposition and moratoria of the body while a radical commitment to shit implies the infesting of the body at every point. Thus confidence in shit

must be retained because it holds at its center the origins of any weakened truth and is opposed to what modern catastrophe has produced. Unless one takes sides with a politics of miserable shitting, then knowledge, that is ultimately a problem of origin, cannot move toward cleanliness and its annihilating consequences, but rather toward inclusivity.

Appendix

Scatological Observations

The Ass knows more than the mind knows

Young romantic readers

Skip this part of the book

If you want a glimpse of life

You're free to take a look

Shit machine shit machine

I'm an incredible shit machine

Piss machine Piss machine

Inexhaustible piss machine

Piss & shit machine

That's the Golden Mean

Whether young or old

Move your bowels of Gold

Piss & shit machine
It always comes out clean
Whether you're old or young
Never hold your tongue

Chorus

Shit machine piss machine
I'm an incredible piss machine
Piss machine piss machine
Inexhaustible shit machine.

Brown or black or green
everything will be seen
hard or soft or loose
shit's a glimpse of truth

Babe or boy or youth
Fart's without a tooth
baby girl or maid
Many a fart in laid

Shit piss shit piss
fuck & shit & piss
Fuck fart shit Piss
It all comes down to this

Beautiful male Madonnas
Wrathful Maids of Honor
To be frank & Honest
Stink the watercloset

Shit machine piss machine
Much comes down to this
Piss machine shit machine
Nature's not obscene

Shit piss shit piss
How'll I end my song?
shit piss shit piss
Nature never wrong

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Nomad Prize for Excellence in Undergraduate Scholarship:
Honorable Mention

Mentor: Dr. Michael Stern

EXSANGUINATING FRIENDSHIP

ALIENATION AND LOVE IN *LET THE RIGHT ONE IN*

“Be me a little.”

-Eli, *Let the Right One In*

As the opening credits to Tomas Alfredson's 2008 film *Let the Right One In* flash across the screen, the viewer is presented with a simple preliminary shot: a black, featureless void punctuated only by the languid fall of fresh snow, inching slowly out of focus. The mesmerizing silence with which the film begins is disrupted by the voice of a young boy who whispers menacingly “Squeal like a pig. Squeal!”

(Alfredson). The eerie calm evoked by the opening backdrop gives way to a voice both innocent in its origin, a child, and threateningly violent in its tone. It all seems a strange introduction to a nuanced tale of friendship. The voice of our adolescent speaker belongs to twelve year-old Oskar, a pale, ash-blond boy who is the unfortunate object of incessant torment and bullying on the part of his classmates, and his aforementioned opening lines are a vocalized echo of their repeated taunts.

Oskar soon befriends a young girl named Eli who moves in next door and it is not long before the action reveals her to be an ageless vampire stuck in twelve year-old form, fated to lead a clandestine life of isolation and exsanguination. The two learn very quickly – Eli via her eternal, tragic nature and Oskar through a system of unforgiving social strata and standards – that they have commonalities not only in their close relationship to violence but also in their marginalization from everyday society.

The film's social landscape is characterized by a duplicity that at once encourages self-reliance, while concurrently breeding a suspicion of outsiders and divergences from normative standards. The dynamic which emerges is one that is devoid of meaningful interaction between people. The selfish commodification of experience lays waste to the dialogical nature of human existence which – in its most ideal form – encourages equality and reciprocity. Violence, both in its physical and metaphysical forms, is ignored, tolerated even, by an adult world that lacks an active presence. A subtle, deliberate obfuscation of the line between the public and private spheres permeates Alfredson's wintry, Cold War-era Sweden. At the redemptive

center of the film is the pure bond between Oskar and Eli. As a vampire, Eli functions as an alienated, symbolic representation of a viscerally violent reliance on others for survival. Oskar, a product rather than a direct source of violence, undergoes an equally traumatic marginalization through a process of vicious bullying. The relationship that Oskar and Eli cultivate in the film is illustrative of both the marginalization symptomatic in their society – a phenomenon centered around the inherent objectification and value judgments sewn into shallow interpersonal interaction – and the companionship that must contra-pose this, not only as an escape from the loneliness and torment of a negligent world but also as a welcomed necessity for mental and physical sustenance.

The foundation for the events within the film is Tomas Alfredson's portrayal of civil society in 1980s Sweden, more specifically the Stockholm suburb of Blackeberg. The film depicts a blurring of the line between public and private life, a phenomenon that is the primary topic of Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. In analyzing the origins of the European social welfare state, Habermas states that "the new interventionism of the nineteenth century was embraced by a state that in virtue of the constitutionalization...of a political public sphere tended to adopt the interest of civil society as its own" (Habermas 142-143). This was a transformative era for civil society and one of which Habermas is highly critical. The voice of the state began to appropriate the voice of society, thus diminishing the discursive power of the public sphere and

alienating the individuals within it from their own subjectivity. Perhaps nowhere in Western Europe did this come to truer fruition than in Scandinavia. Stuck halfway between the Iron Curtain and the individualist West, Sweden in the 1980s represented a middle-ground where state-intervention created a superficial simplicity of living for its largely homogenous population. In an interview with Karin Brandt in the *Bright Lights Film Journal* Alfredson describes his choice of setting and its close resemblance to his childhood home:

The square in the middle of the town is typical: there is the social security office, the co-op, the library, the liquor monopoly, and other such state-controlled institutions. It is a calming environment, behind the Iron Curtain. You could choose from only three kinds of toothpaste. My film is deliberately set in 1982. (Badt, 2009)

With this in mind, one could characterize the setting as a peaceful, uncomplicated environment, but social and civic uniformity fostered by the state's heavy involvement in everyday life, as the film attests, elicits converse feelings of loneliness and isolation. Here we see the thematic elements of the film, alienation engendered by strict and overly simplistic social standards, reflecting back to the opening scene: the calm and benign simplicity of snowfall interrupted by a macabre exclamation from a marginalized victim.

During the Cold War, Sweden occupied a liminal space - in the doorway between public and private, not communist, but not entirely liberal - a gray space in a black and white world. A

dark, cold Scandinavian winter makes a perfect stage for Oskar and Eli's story. Drawing from Habermas's theoretical perspective, *Let the Right One In* presents this convergence of public and private as resulting in a system of public suspicion for those who deviate from a state-supported social norm. Alfredson posits in his interview that "what's interesting about bullying is the mob psychology; the victim has something you don't like...something awkward that disturbs the group. When you are a kid you don't want to be very special or original. You want to be part of the group" (Badt, 2009). Put another way, one who strays from the norm of homogeneity is perceived as a threat to the artificial sense of group harmony. Individuality is suppressed through a system of alienation where, within relationships, the other is commodified, distinguished not by their potential for mutual friendship, but by their value towards reinforcing the norm. As evidenced by the group of defeated, alcoholic adults in the film, friendship seems more about a pursuit of shallow self-assurance that one fits into society rather than genuine care or interest¹.

Eli's reliance on others, however, stems from something far deeper: her struggle for her very survival. Her physical consumption of others for sustenance represents the hyperbolic end of a society that marginalizes through difference and commodifies human interaction. Where the vampiric Eli is the

¹ This commodified interaction between the adults is exemplified when we see Håkan in their local hangout for the first time. Seeing him as a potential new member of their group, Virginia says "Kanske kan han bjuda någonting", which translates to "Perhaps he can offer something", most likely referring to a round of drinks for the group.

embodiment of alienation, Oskar is a very real *product* of a negligent social order. The world of children within the film has furthermore been abandoned by any semblance of moral authority and it is, ironically, Oskar and Eli - the two characters cast away by a society that strives for group harmony - who find an escape in each other.

Coupled with a dysfunctional social dynamic it is this very lack of authority and moral guidance which ultimately force Oskar and Eli's departure. In his book *Being and Time* Martin Heidegger provides an explanation for this nebulous sense of authority when he discusses the concept of the "They," a faceless, societal figure of authority. Heidegger portrays this concept as "not this one and not that one, not oneself and not the sum of them all"; the They is instead the authoritative, imaginary manifestation of an implied social standard (Heidegger, 118-119). Additionally, Heidegger says of this anonymous power that within its discourse "Everyone is the other, and no one is himself" (128). In other words, everyone becomes objectified within interpersonal experience under the aegis of the They, and the treasured notion of the authentic self fades.

Oskar's lead tormenter Conny, for example, exists in this very same world of parental neglect and oblivious educators. He too is a victim of misguidance and blurred authority. However, whereas Oskar wallows in his difference and lack of coherent self, Conny's insecurity displays itself by submitting to the tenuous social standards and violently objectifying those who do not. In *Blackeberg* the children are left to search aimlessly for a sense of moral guidance, one that will help foster a successful upbringing,

that appears to exist but is wholly intangible. Oskar and Eli's first meeting exemplifies this moral confusion when Eli claims they cannot be friends simply because "That's just the way it is." Here, Eli is acutely aware of her own marginalization and rejection from society. She is compelled by a vague, scrutinizing hand of authority to initially reject any kind of meaningful interaction with Oskar. However, this initial hesitation eventually becomes their salvation. Where Eli is ontologically different, alienated via her very being, Oskar is systematically shunned because of his differences. This connection is the source of their friendship – a true commonality within true otherness.

There is, of course, ample room for disagreement in this assessment of Oskar and Eli's profound companionship and none is more glaring than that of John Calhoun in his piece "Childhood's End: *Let the Right One In* and Other Deaths of Innocence." Calhoun takes a decidedly different approach to the two main characters, saying that Oskar is a boy "troubled by his own burgeoning antisocial impulses" (Calhoun, 27). Eli, by Calhoun's estimation, is "a repository of adult fears about children...in touch with the id in ways that can elicit great anxiety and discomfort" saying finally that "insatiability for blood is almost too perfect a metaphor for the amorphous tyrants children can be" (28). In both of these qualifications there is a flaw. To say that Oskar has "antisocial impulses" is to imply that his sense of alienation is somehow self-imposed or self-originating, but how can this be when his bullying and torment, which seem to have been going on for years, occupy such a focal point of the film? It is clear, then, that Oskar's

detachment from society is an involuntary marginalization, a product rather than a cause of his objectification.

In a similar vein, Calhoun's characterization of Eli as a representation of a child's potential for tyranny and unpredictability seems to overlook the nuance and uniqueness of this particular vampire. Eli may be feared on the grounds of her thirst for blood or her superhuman abilities, but her being a child has little to do with the anxiety she instills, a notion reinforced by a group of human bullies who appear infinitely more oppressive than our young vampire. Referring to Eli as an insatiable tyrant evokes notions of pleasure-taking in her violent pursuit of sustenance, but for Eli the drinking of human blood is not a form of greedy exploitation, it is simply a necessary means of survival.

In both instances Calhoun severely misjudges Oskar and Eli's nature. For Eli in particular we see evidence of a more dynamic and emotional side, contrary to Calhoun's more severe characterization, early in the film. Whatever Eli's relationship is with the middle-aged Håkan, it is clear through his inclusion that she has made earnest attempts at deferring the violence that is integral to her existence. Upon killing Jocke, her first meal not provided by Håkan, it is immediately apparent that such direct violence causes her physical and existential pain.

This rejection of bloodshed is important also in its indication of the care and creativity with which Alfredson treats the figure of the vampire. In traditional form the vampire is often highly sexualized and desirable, charismatic and nearly all-powerful. Not only is Eli a pre-pubescent girl, thus non-sexual,

she is also portrayed as highly vulnerable with her vampirism an affliction as opposed to a gift. Håkan may exhibit a pedophilic attraction to Eli in some instances, but Eli herself is not a sexualized being.

In Oskar's case it is a bit simpler: to imply that he is antisocial by nature is to disregard his very real desire for friendship and his emotional attraction to Eli. While escape is only truly a possibility for one of them, given that Eli is essentially and eternally cast away from any normative society, both Oskar and Eli yearn to flee from social frameworks centered on the objectification and commodification of human experience, a repressive tradition to which Karl Marx gives a thorough treatment in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*.

While Marx's thrust is predominantly aimed at alienation as it pertains to labor, one can equally and successfully project the theory onto basic human interaction as well. In relation to political economy Marx insists that the worker is commodified in the sense that he "is related to the *product of his labor* as to an *alien* object" and "his wretchedness...is in inverse proportion to the...magnitude of his production" (Edles, 42-43). If instead we employ social communication as the optic-- that which is central to *Let the Right One In*-- where an individual takes the place of the laborer and another individual becomes the "alien object" then Marx's assertion can be interpreted both as an anticipation of Heidegger's "everyone is the other," the notion of objectified and impersonal human experience, and also as the claim that the more thoroughly one participates in the system the more objectified one becomes. In this regard, and with the social

dynamic of the film in mind, the conclusion drawn is that with every attempt Oskar makes to actively assert himself subjectively, the more alienated and commodified his existence.

As with Marx's conception of labor, if the product of interpersonal relationships is alienation, then interaction itself is active alienation (Edles, 44). Heidegger as well points to a similar idea in his discussion of *distantiality*, or being-with-one-another. His contention here is that interpersonal dialogue in a society with an authoritative "They" leads to the creation of *averageness*, a space where "no one is himself" and no one is, nor would want to be, extraordinary (Heidegger, 119). However, when viewed in conjunction with Marx, Heidegger's diagnosis of a society obsessed with *averageness* only holds true in those which are bound to commodified experience, places where relationships and friendships are strictly utilitarian. In *Let the Right One In* it is therefore somewhat counterintuitive that Oskar and Eli's companionship, a shared existence based on pure interaction, allows for a greater sense of personal development than the surrounding society: one which shuns reciprocity of the self--the shared interest in mutuality and the gateway to dialogical existence-- stubbornly guards a false sense of existential authenticity, and appraises all interaction for the sake of personal gain.

Through the lens of classical Greek philosophy this latter arrangement, typified by denial, egocentrism and hollow materialism, would be regarded by Aristotle as gravely defective, purely incidental and, as it pertains to friendship, inferior to those which pursue pleasure or mutual goodness (Pangle 39-42).

Aristotle defined three total kinds of friendship, with the interactions in *Let the Right One In* most effectively categorized as those of *utility*. Friendships, acquaintances, and most other kinds of relationships within the film rarely exist simply for their own sake, but are rather a means to an end. Lacke, Virginia, Jocke, and Gösta are companions not out of a genuine interest in one another's betterment, but due to a shared taste for cigarettes and alcohol and a pitiable commonality in their own stagnant lives. Martin and Andreas are only friends with Conny to avoid becoming the victims of bullying themselves and Conny's older brother is merely there for protection, and his own sadism, when the object of Conny's torment decides to defend himself. It is within this particular dialectic of cold, utilitarian interaction that Eli appears as a hostile specter, a threat to a rabid balance of selfish appropriation not only in her uncanny participation in the system, but also in her departure from it.

As a vampire, Eli utilizes others in their most literal, corporeal forms, draining them of their blood for her sole source of nutritional sustenance. This, however, is an abject act of commodification of the other that goes far beyond the more mundane variety of utility and objectification seen in Blackeberg. John Calhoun was indeed correct in declaring the perfection of blood-drinking as a metaphor within the film, though it is not Eli's supposed tyranny or insatiability that lends credence to her violence; it is the implication that she must physically rely on others for her own survival. Within the theoretical framework of Habermas, Heidegger, and Alfredson's Blackeberg, people are preoccupied with their own ontological security, no matter if

exploitation and alienation of another is a consequence, but a line is drawn when a selfish desire for existential reassurance within a group turns into vampiric reliance. For a civil society where adherence to homogenous social standards is a requirement a dark-haired, olive-skinned vampire presents a frightening challenge. Eli has extensive experience in interpersonal interaction, so long as draining humans of their blood qualifies, but her difference, and thus her power in the face of the Blackeberg community, lies in the fact that her reliance on others has *essential* value and not simply *material* value. In other words, Eli does not simply leech superficially on others out of a desire for greater ontological security; she relies on them instead as her only source of physical sustenance.

It is, however, in Eli's relationship with Håkan where the viewer sees how an interaction based solely on commodified, material value leads to her deep unhappiness and a desire for something greater. Eli's relationship with him is just as commodified as any of the other relationships within the narrative and its superficiality is defined by a lack of reciprocity. Just before Håkan moves to maim himself beyond recognition with a jar of acid he mutters a single word. There is a mistranslation in the English subtitles which reads "I'm trapped," but in reality Håkan simply mutters Eli's name. His devotion is confirmed as unrequited when Eli, after feeding upon a critically-injured Håkan in the hospital window, goes directly to Oskar's bed where she agrees to "go steady." To Eli, Håkan was useful, but not essential. She is more than capable of finding her own meals, a fact proven on numerous occasions, but her discomfort with the violent act

led her to Håkan, and while the origins of their relationship are unclear in the film he nonetheless functions as a go-between who shielded Eli from direct bloodshed. A child trapped in blood-ridden immortality and another a hopeless victim of the unforgiving world that raised him, Eli and Oskar find a sense of freedom in each other. This freedom is a departure from violence, and an outlet to the kind of emotion and happiness vital to an Aristotelian friendship that achieves pleasure, but is primarily concerned with the pursuit of heartfelt care and interest in one another.

Oskar's existence, like Eli's, is shrouded in the trauma of fractured human dialogue. Where Oskar is circumstantially shaped by violence, Eli is essentially defined by it, and it is here where they find a chance for escape and eventually a deep friendship and sense of shared experience. Throughout the film Oskar is traumatized in myriad forms, both physically and mentally. He is betrayed by a fleeting, delinquent authority, abandoned by his parents, ceaselessly bullied, and shunned from the social order. An absent "They" and a repetitious structure of alienation leaves Oskar with the belief that the reciprocation of violence is his only recourse to personal salvation, evidenced again by the film's opening lines. But, as Marx insinuates, the more an objectified being participates, i.e. perpetuates, a system of alienation, the deeper and more firm the suppression (Marx,

² It is noteworthy also that in this moment of retaliation while on a field trip, the teacher is distracted from Oskar and Conny's confrontation by the discovery of Jocke's body frozen in the ice. This lends even deeper support to the connection between the two characters' violent acts.

43). Early in the film Håkan attempts to hide the body of his latest victim using a long stick. Later, Oskar comes dangerously close to deeper involvement in this cyclical, alienating society when he employs the same stick in his only retaliation towards the bully Conny. To Eli and to the film's environment at large Håkan was an objectified and exploited enabler of the cycle of alienation. By attacking Conny with a symbol of Håkan's servitude, undoubtedly gratifying in a momentary sense, Oskar steps precariously close to an infinite loop of subjugation². A common reading of the film wrestles with the paradox that despite Oskar and Eli's relationship, he will nonetheless age and eventually die while she will remain. While there is legitimate concern to be had over the implied finitude of their friendship, my focus here lies not in the verisimilitudes of plot, but in the nature of Oskar and Eli's relationship and its function as a symbol of a deeply emotional form of ontological sustenance. Despite what may occur after the action of the film concludes the bond Oskar and Eli form is nonetheless critical to their immediate survival in the particular diegetic moment. It is only with Eli's help and her own desire for a more metaphysically rewarding existence that Oskar is able to free himself.

In the most pointed example this sentiment is expressed through Eli's note to Oskar which reads, "To flee is life, to remain, death," a proclamation that begs Oskar to abandon the ideological constraints of his world in a way that she cannot. Eli is immortally bound to a violent life in the margins. Oskar harbors a naïve fascination with violence, yet it is Eli's contempt for her own sanguine needs that leads her to implore a change in Oskar. If

Oskar wishes to survive as a complete subject, he must flee the shallow society which discarded him. Additionally, in response to Eli's assertion that they are the same, Oskar responds coldly, "I don't kill people." Eli astutely replies, "No, but you'd like to if you could, to get even. I do it because I have to. Be me a little." In her final request, to "be me a little," Eli pleads with Oskar to not only evaluate his own morbid interests, but also to engage in a critical act of empathy-- to understand her tragic reliance on violence-- that seems to have disappeared from their world of Marxian alienation and Heideggerian rejection of dialogical interaction. In an exemplary scene of Oskar's transformation, upon seeing Eli engage in violence for the first time as she kills Lacke, Oskar closes the door, turns away and drops his knife to the ground. In the end the weapon that symbolized his deferred desires for retribution goes entirely unused.

Our two young companions, once defined by a cold rationality and detached valuation of human interaction-- Marx's "wretched commodities"-- find in each other a cause for an Aristotelian friendship of mutual goodness, Oskar at once concerned with Eli's happiness and she with his very survival. In the Alfredson interview, the director discusses how stories of childhood strife usually concern sweeter, more sensitive characters. Oskar, however, is in Alfredson's estimation "very unsentimental" about his experience. It is this practicality, a symptom of an alien world, that is countered with an ultimate hunger for true dialogue, companionship, and love. For Eli, hopelessly ensnared in an eternal, vampiric state, Oskar represents a chance at happiness that seemed impossible in her marginalized

existence. In stark contrast to a friendship of utility it is, as Aristotle claims, “those who desire the good of their friends for the friends’ sake that are most truly friends, because each loves the other for what he is” (Pangle, 42). In Eli’s case this relationship presents her with a rare opportunity to do something for someone else, to finally reciprocate some of that which she has taken from others. An early scene in the film anticipates Oskar and Eli’s mutually-inspired union when Eli helps Oskar to solve a Rubik’s Cube. In previous shots Eli is positioned above Oskar within the frame, a position of dominance, but in this scene she descends onto the same physical plane as Oskar, a plane of equality. She hands him the completed puzzle and this act stands in as a metaphor for her newfound selflessness. This concept of give and take forms the foundation of Oskar and Eli’s exploration of their new dialogical pairing, but no analysis is complete without examining their necessary removal of the barriers that breed objectification and alienation.

Where Oskar and Eli’s relationship takes its most beautiful and delicate turn is in their mutual negotiation of both the literal and figurative walls which mediate their experience. Metaphorically, the topic arises in Eli’s simple question, “Can I come in?” In Alfredson’s very particular take on the vampire genre Eli must not only request entrance to a space, but be invited in as well. As it relates to fractured human contact this idea subverts not only the Heideggerian claim that “Everyone is the other”, but also Marxian notions of exploitation and personal gain. The question and answer necessitate reciprocity, subjectivity, and a mutual desire for dialogue and company in a shared space.

Physically, mediation is expressed throughout the film in a number of scenes. As Oskar grows suspicious of the mysterious Eli they are at one point separated by a glass door. Oskar questions her as they simultaneously graze the glass with their hands, within sight yet barely separate, both searching for a way through to share of themselves. It is only after the revelation of Eli's vampirism, the vulnerable truth which requires the giving over of oneself, that the door opens and they can physically be together. This idea reappears when Eli flees after Lacke's death and Oskar's ghostly image is shown in his bedroom window. He presses his hand longingly against the glass and his handprint quickly disappears. In this near exact mirroring of the opening scene, without Eli, Oskar is merely a reflection without origin. They seem to have become, in a sense, a single being through their rich companionship.

Ingeniously, Eli and Oskar undermine the metaphorical and physical boundaries which generate alienation and mediation most efficiently through their reimagining of language. Using Marxian logic one could infer that if interaction is the embodiment of active alienation, then the words we use to interact become the language of alienation. Thus, Oskar and Eli find a new linguistic form in the use of Morse code. Not only are *physical* barriers transformed into communicative media through tapping, but Eli and Oskar also bypass the *figurative* barrier of language by way of a private, unspoken tongue that allows their friendship the chance for unencumbered growth. In the final scene as the two make their escape, Eli protected from the sunlight in a box

beside Oskar, they tap the word “k-i-s-s” to each other. In this moment, a closing testament to their bond, the viewer sees that their companionship is at once aesthetically-striking, overflowing with heartfelt emotion, and deeply rooted in mutuality. Far from the wintry utilitarianism of their previous lives, their togetherness is now the untainted pursuit of goodness and love.

To form a friendship is, to some degree, to reject a particular instinct. It involves giving part of oneself over in vulnerability to another and placing it in his or her care, in the good faith that his or her intention is one of altruism. To do this requires a divergence from the social tendency to protect one’s sense of self with an unwavering, impenetrable feeling of authenticity and egotism. Oskar and Eli are successful in this quest. Both characters are children born of an innocence that is slowly corrupted by a system of neglect and both literal and figurative violence. However, it is this very childhood innocence and their pre-sexual state that allows for a friendship of such purity and decency. Unlike many incarnations of the vampire, Eli is not concerned with the consumption of physical bodies, at least no more than is necessary for survival, and Oskar himself is indifferent to Eli’s warning that she is not a girl. In *Let the Right One In* the title hints at a distinction between the “right” and “wrong” person to allow into one’s existence and sense of self. In tandem, Oskar and Eli choose correctly. They mutually create their own moral authority where the “wrong”-- the egotistical, the utilitarian, the violent, and the alienating-- is subordinated to a dialogue of equality, love, and companionship. In the end, the dysfunctional social frameworks which result in self-destruction and wrest away the dialogical

nucleus of human experience are exposed as farcical, artificial boundaries that must be razed in favor of a return to the mutual relationships which give to humanity and vampires alike the fullest form of existential sustenance.

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PORNOGRAPHY IN THE KITCHEN:

REE DRUMMOND'S *PIONEER WOMAN*, FOOD PORN,
AND THE RULES OF DOMESTICITY

Feminist thought is not at home in the kitchen. The domestic sphere has long appeared too closely tethered to the patriarchal notion of feminine subservience to acquire much appreciation in feminist discourse. Indeed, domestic and feminist spaces appear mutually exclusive: a woman who voluntarily slaves away at a hot stove for her family has not freed herself

from the ideology of masculine dominance and remains locked in a system favoring male power and female subjugation.

However, I suggest that it is possible for women to find individual agency well within the kitchen space, despite that room's decidedly antifeminist connotations of subservience. Ree Drummond's *Confessions of a Pioneer Woman* blog suggests that cookery can become a form of currency, garnering value outside of the strictly domestic space. Through the externalization of domesticity in her Internet blog, the Pioneer Woman demonstratively exploits her sensuality through food and earns powerful female agency. Her woman-to-woman online guide is truly an affirmation of individual female might.

The tradition of woman-to-woman domestic "guides" is most definitely not new. British writer and housewife Isabella Beeton famously published her well-known *Book of Household Management* in 1861. It is a gargantuan, imposing, all-encompassing guide for young housewives. The text famously contains an overabundance of minutely detailed instructions for cuisine, and also addresses anything that a young housewife would potentially come across: from the "Arrangement and Economy of the Kitchen" to the "Rearing, Management, and Diseases of Infancy and Childhood." *Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management* is a guide that helps its readers establish authority within the domestic sphere. It does not, however, advise its readers as to how they might garner agency outside of this realm, suggesting that women are authoritative in the home, but men are authorities everywhere else.

Conventional thought does not associate feminism with the kitchen. In the article "Power and Ideology in the 'Women's

Sphere’” writer Judith Lowder Newton suggests that “the ideology of women’s sphere...served the interests of industrial capitalism by insuring the continuing domination of middle-class women by middle-class men” (Lowder Newton 891). However, I propose that women in the domestic sphere are truly able to produce valuable commodities exchangeable, consumable, and worthy outside of this realm. Indeed, the Pioneer Woman is successful at establishing worth outside of her small domestic realm through the publication of her blog, which is available to everyone with Internet access.

In sociological theory, this worth is deemed “capital,” and is usually divided into three categories: economic, social, and cultural. These categories are vitally important tools in “understanding social and economic processes, social interaction, and social mobility” (Hakim 499). In the article “Erotic Capital,” sociologist Catherine Hakim proposes a fourth category fundamentally important in social communication, called “erotic capital.” Exchange of this capital is pertinent among women, who according to Hakim “appear to have greater erotic capital than men” if only for their “fertility” (499).

Hakim defines erotic capital as sexual desirability to be exploited for symbolic exchange and valuation in social space. She asserts that erotic capital is not merely a “major asset in mating and marriage markets but can also be important in labor markets, the media, the arts... and in everyday social interaction” (499). Erotic capital contains seven elements surprisingly not all limited to superficial attractiveness. The third element of erotic capital, for example, is “definitely social: grace, charm, social skills in

interaction, the ability to make people like you” (500) and “includes skills that can be learnt and developed” (501), creating a “combination of aesthetic, visual, social and sexual attractiveness to other members of your society... in all social contexts” (501). Erotic capital is more than just sexiness: it is a viable social asset.

It is clear that Isabella Beeton does little to perform sexual desirability. She acquires almost no erotic capital through her writing and, thus, remains a virtually powerless female figure. Ree Drummond, on the other hand, succeeds in attaining erotic capital through the performance of her sensual cookery. She effectively re-inscribes herself as an active, powerful female working within a sphere traditionally associated with subservience and negotiates a place for herself situated between traditionally opposite domestic and feminist realms. Through externalization and publication of her private duties on the blog, Drummond is able to cash in on her erotic capital – exchanging her value not only in the kitchen, but in the blog’s forum as well. Her erotic capital – achieved through the overall presentation of her food – is earned by sharing her assets with the millions worldwide who read and respond to the blog.

Oklahoma housewife Ree Drummond created *Confessions of a Pioneer Woman* in May 2006, initially as an attempt to staying in contact with out-of-town friends and family. Fast forward five years and the *Pioneer Woman* has developed into a veritable blogging behemoth – garnering upwards of 13 million hits per month. Despite beginnings as a lifestyle blog, *Confessions of a Pioneer Woman* is primarily a blog about food. Critics celebrate

Drummond's blog for the beautifully executed step-by-step pictorial recipes punctuated with trademark tongue-in-cheek humor. The succulent imagery on the *Pioneer Woman Cooks* section of *Confessions of a Pioneer Woman* carries the blog's success: each of the 28 pictures in the entry describing how to recreate "Pioneer Woman's Knock You Naked Brownies," for example, is bright, clear, and utterly mouthwatering.

Drummond's blog is only another (albeit wildly successful) installation in the spread of food blogs who title their stylish imagery "food porn." This phenomenon is marked by elaborately devised photography, delectable food creations, and, most importantly, millions of ogling "readers" who consume food porn more readily than food itself. Judging by the Web's excess of voracious food porn-consumers-and-pornographers, it is clear that such culinary imagery is becoming as widely devoured as sexual pornography. Cher Holt-Fortin goes so far as to remark that "the consumption of a food culture... seems to be displacing sex and the consumption of sexuality. As we avidly discussed our sexual exploits and liberation during the sixties, so we now avidly discuss the meals we've cooked and the restaurants we've eaten in"(Holt-Fortin).

Suggesting "pornography" in the domestic sphere would appear problematic in a blog with as mainstream a following as *Confessions of a Pioneer Woman*. Drummond readily resolves this issue by using her blog's food pornography to bank the aforementioned erotic capital, thereby securing herself before her audience. This capital definitively establishes her individual worth and complicates preconceptions of the dichotomy between

chaste domesticity and blatant sensuality. Through the performative use of food pornography within the (G-rated) domestic sphere, and by publicizing her culinary adventures to the voyeuristic millions who read her blog, Drummond accumulates female agency for herself, despite the seemingly limited domestic setting. Indeed, by deploying this domesticity onto an audience of over 2 million readers per month, Drummond attains her value as an entrepreneur, writer, chef, and success story.

What, even, is “food porn?” The term is highly evocative. Food writer Molly O’Neill describes it as a culinary phenomenon “so removed from real life that it cannot be used except as vicarious experience.” Indeed, the food in “food porn” is not physical nourishment, but rather an “aesthetic-experience” so far removed from reality that it offers little in the way of actual nutritional value. Similarly, Richard Magee speculates that food, when “removed from the kitchen, becomes divorced from its nutritive or taste qualities and enters a realm where surface appearance is all-important... the interest here is in creating a graphic simulation of a real food that is beyond anything that the home cook could produce.” In “food porn,” the aesthetic trumps the physical and satiates an entirely different hunger for consumption.

“Food porn” really is a fantasy: its images are so perfectly stylized and its digital photos so meticulously edited that part of what comes with its consumption is the knowledge that the home cook will never feasibly be able to recreate the dish. The magical world of food pornography has “as little to do with the real

pleasures of eating as the other pornography has to do with the real pleasures of sex” (Magee). In the fantasy world of both symbolic and physical consumption, food porn reinforces the importance of what we (would like to) consume and what we (would like to) be.

Roland Barthes highlights food’s symbolic potency in his collection of essays, *Mythologies*. In the essay “Ornamental Cookery,” regarding the food pages of *Elle* magazine, Barthes pays careful attention to the section’s extravagant imagery, stating that “there is an obvious endeavor to glaze surfaces, to round them off, to bury the food under the even sediment of sauces” (78). Indeed, this “ornamental cookery” is the food porn of the 1950’s. *Elle*’s section consists of cookery with “unbridled beautification” where gustatory reality is of little concern: it is a “cookery ... based on coatings and alibis for ever trying to extenuate and even to disguise the primary nature of foodstuffs” (Barthes 78). Food porn is pure fancy. Approaching reality through these images is as absurd an idea as eating the image itself. Instead, the fantasy tells us more of its context than of its content, alluding to human desires and hungers left unfed.

The term “food porn” is so polemically evocative because of its sexual connotations. The term could not exist without its taboo counterpart, “real,” or sexual pornography. Both food and sexual pornography are fantasies available for eager consumption by the greedy masses. However, this perceived voyeurism is false: pornography is always an intentional performance, and gazing upon it is neither unexpected nor accidental. Pornography exists to be watched. In the book *Porn Studies*, Linda Williams

emphasizes the value of the performative, stating that “the performed acts construct the ‘it’ that they purport to reveal” (6). Richard Magee again states it best in saying that “both food pornography and sexual pornography are primarily focused on food or sex as performance, and like all performances, are designed as a voyeuristic exercise.”

The Pioneer Woman Cooks, then, is pornographic. The blog’s chief claim to fame is the beautiful, step-by-step pictorials of each dish’s preparation, which are pure performance: the home cook, especially the domestic one presumably already busy with childcare and home duties, does not normally photograph the process of cracking eggs or mincing garlic. Drummond furthermore makes sure that the photographs are edited, styled and composed perfectly, even apologizing for the occasional aesthetic misstep, such as in the entry for “Make ahead Muffin Melts,” wherein she comments on her second photo by stating, “Sorry about the excessive bokeh¹. It happens sometimes.” Her meticulous food photography is “manicured just as photos in ‘girlie’ magazines are and have little to do with reality” (Holt-Fortin). Food pornography depends on its surface appearance, if simply because that is all that is available.

Additionally, *Confessions of a Pioneer Woman* is pornographic in its vocabulary, which is patently, sensually expressive. For example, Pioneer Woman’s chocolate sheet cake “causes moans and groans in anyone who takes a bite” (“The Best Chocolate Sheet Cake. Ever”), her pasta with red pepper sauce

¹ A photographic function in which the foreground is clear while the background is blurry.

“renders me speechless” (“Pasta with Roasted Red Pepper Sauce”), and “you’ll want to lick up every last drop” of Drummond’s “Filet au Poivre.” Drummond emphasizes gustatory delight in her fare – it’s all food that “makes her skirt fly up” (she uses this particular phrase quite often). Moreover, a typical finale to a recipe is a picture of the food Drummond has just prepared, concluding with a dynamic, monosyllabic expression: “Yikes,” “Yum,” or “Ahh.”

This language indicates that the Pioneer Woman’s cuisine is ultimately meant to be consumed. Indeed, the “pure sensual enjoyment of the food stands at the apex of [the] hierarchy” in the Pioneer Woman’s blog (Magee). This striking emphasis on consumption is erotically evocative, as the ecstasy of the senses is valued above all else. While the blog’s imagery is far too dazzling to seem approachable, through expressive writing, Drummond encourages readers to mimic her construction of “food porn.” While food pornography often seems staunchly inapproachable in its perfection, Drummond stresses her recipes’ accessibility and even their lusciousness. The recipes in Barthes’ “Ornamental Cookery” are marked with ingredients so fanciful that “the real problem is not to have the idea of sticking cherries into a partridge, it is to have the partridge, that is to say, to pay for it” (79). The Pioneer Woman, on the other hand, has received criticism for requesting Kraft pre-sliced mozzarella in her lasagna recipe. Her food is packed with ingredients that may even appear vulgar in their mass accessibility, therefore, both immediately available and sensuous.

This savor-ability of The Pioneer Woman’s cuisine presents a complication in traditional notions of food pornography.

Pornography has no stronghold in reality – instead it recalls distance and fantasy and is meant for only visual consumption. *The Pioneer Woman Cooks*, on the other hand, is all about proximity: *eat this now*; it seems to say to its readers. The blog is, thereby, doubly pornographic. In its imagery, the blog is inapproachable, a fanciful culinary fantasy, “food pornography” at its finest. And yet the recipes exist for gustatory pleasure and gluttonous, decadent consumption. This construction ultimately establishes the Pioneer Woman as one with erotic desirability and agency. Drummond’s appetite seems to “operate as a metaphor for sexual appetite” (Magee). Recipes are fueled by the Pioneer Woman’s own ravenous desire for taste that appears like a rapacious desire for sensuality.

This sexualization is somewhat problematic, given the blog’s otherwise wholesome domestic content: Drummond is a stay-at-home mother with four children (homeschooled by none other than Drummond herself). She lives on a ranch and has affectionately dubbed her rugged, cowboy husband “Marlboro Man.” Besides cooking, Drummond’s blog contains sections with titles like “Home & Garden,” “Photography,” “Confessions” and “Homeschooling.” Drummond’s second book, *From High Heels to Tractor Wheels*, is the autobiographical story of how Drummond, a recent USC graduate headed to law school, met her cowboy husband and decided to “settle down” as a stay-at-home wife and mother. At first, the blog appears a retrograde how-to guide for female pacification. Drummond performs as the

queen of a gorgeous household and the blog seems an extended how-to guide for housewives around the world.

Just as *Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management* was an authoritative, comprehensive source of household information for young housewives in 1861, *Confessions of a Pioneer Woman* would appear to be the domestic Bible of the new Millennium. Drummond's primary topics – cooking, home/garden design, and homeschooling – are unquestionably domestic, all occurring within the home. Even her other topics seem like appropriately trifling hobbies for a housewife otherwise in control of her realm. However, while *Confessions of a Pioneer Woman* and *Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management* overlap content-wise, *Confessions of a Pioneer Woman* presents a departure from the domestic tradition that Beeton's book suggests.

Mrs. Beeton is a dense, involved colossus. Few pictures accompany the text and those that do exist for strictly informational purposes. Furthermore, Beeton's text is almost distant in its account. Indeed, Beeton performs her domesticity rather austere and does little to promote female agency in the outside realm. Despite the fact that Beeton has released her writing into a reading public, she does not successfully achieve agency (or, it would seem, even attempt to do so) outside of the domestic sphere.

While *Mrs. Beeton's* is impersonal and technical, Drummond's blog, on the other hand, showcases her vibrant personality. as each entry is highly entertaining and humorous.

All of the Pioneer Woman's entries are marked by both lighthearted banter and brilliant photography. Her cooking entries are not only colorfully illustrated, but are also flippantly self-deprecating, poking fun at her fingers' "alien-like" appearance and at her own lack of self-control around food. The "Confessions" section of her blog contains remarks like quote "I went about the task of cleaning out the workout room in our house, which over the past year had become overrun with such treasures as empty cattle vaccine bottles, a Stairmaster strewn with Carharrrt coats, eighty thousand gloves with no mates, outgrown boots, worn out boots, and a chicken bone" end quote ("The One that got Away"). Drummond's writing is on the whole far more dynamic than Beeton's.

Drummond's recipes are most definitely not offensively or tastelessly sexual in the traditional sense. Still, sexuality and female agency are patently visible in the Pioneer Woman's blog. She simply achieves it through subversive means. The deployment of "food pornography" online ultimately endows the Pioneer Woman with personal agency attained through symbolic erotic exchange and capital. By acquiring erotic capital and value through the presentation of the food and her unique performance of domesticity, Drummond negotiates a unique, and powerful female identity.

Ultimately, the eroticized food pornography on Drummond's blog is tantamount in creating her erotic capital. Her readers consume the blog's content voraciously. Drummond,

as the blog's very successful producer, is seated in a position of power and thus chooses how to perform to her audience. By making her blog so publically available, she is able to bridge the gap between female sexuality and domesticity and in doing so she refuses to be categorized by any other means than those that she has determined. The erotic capital she acquires through the patent sensuality performed to millions in *The Pioneer Woman Cooks* seems to be the transition between the spheres of domesticity and feminism. In accumulating authority through a domestic lens, the Pioneer Woman challenges conventional definitions of such concepts and suggests an alternative femininity, powerful both in the kitchen and in the outside world.

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DYNAMIC SELF-BECOMING

AND THE PERCEPTION OF CHRISTIAN SIN IN DOSTOEVSKY'S
THE BROTHERS KARAMOZOV AND THE WORKS OF SØREN
KIERKEGAARD

The theme of dynamic self-becoming, that one is perpetually striving to establish a self, lies at the fore of Søren Kierkegaard's work. Self-becoming, as opposed to the rejection of the existence of human free will in determinism, hinges on the notion of "movement," that the self is constantly in flux. Within his pseudonymously composed texts *The Concept*

of *Anxiety* and *The Sickness Unto Death*, Kierkegaard elaborates the theme of dynamic self-becoming and its application to individual religious development. Namely, Kierkegaard's pseudonyms examine, within the context of Christian theology, the universality of sin. Sin, in both of these texts, embodies the fundamental opposition to self-becoming, a process whereby an individual discovers his relation to the divine through cultivating active self-knowledge. That an individual is in sin, rather than in faith, implies that the individual maintains or cultivates what Kierkegaard calls a "misrelation to God," that is, a passive and static state of being, or non-becoming. Both pseudonyms articulate the symptoms of this 'sickness': anxiety, for the pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis in *The Concept of Anxiety*, and despair, for Anti-Climacus in *The Sickness Unto Death*.

These two expressions of sin, anxiety and despair also manifest themselves within the narrative of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. Ivan and Dmitri, the eldest sons of Fyodor Pavlovich, encounter and react to these symptoms dynamically within an emerging dialectic of sin, in which, in order to become a self, one must destroy complacency and position oneself in relation to God, the divine absolute. But it cannot be assumed that either brother will then ultimately live in faith. Dostoevsky ends his exposition of the characters with Kierkegaard's notion of a 'pathos-filled transition,' or an impassioned leap from possibility to actuality. These dramatic events ultimately showcase actual movement and development of the self under the template of the dialectic of sin. Dostoevsky

communicates through his characters that, within the dialectic of sin, guilt exists as the crux around which all movement takes place. The sin-consciousness of an individual existing within this dialectic relies on his own authenticity in sustaining his will against self-deception, so that his self may come to recurrently face this guilt as an existential necessity related to becoming.

Integral to Kierkegaard's methodology of sin is his utilization of psychology. Haufniensis approaches sin psychologically through anxiety, and Anti-Climacus through despair. As psychological forces, anxiety and despair expose the universality of sin in humanity. Haufniensis comments: "How sin came into the world, each man understands solely by himself. If he would learn it from another, he would *eo ipso* misunderstand it. The only science that can help a little is psychology" (COA 51). That one is in sin cannot be taught by another; this awareness of sin can only follow from one's experience. Through worldly experience, anxiety and despair indicate the individual's sinfulness to the individual. Kierkegaard's psychological methodology intends to aid the intellect in realizing that a genuine understanding of sin cannot be achieved through logical thought and reflection alone. Sin must be understood passionately; in anxiety and despair the humiliation of omnipresent sinfulness stands as an impassable barrier to self-development.

That sin can come to be recognized, Kierkegaard holds, is evidence of the individual's divine aspect: the spirit. Both Haufniensis and Anti-Climacus define the individual in roughly the same manner: "man is a synthesis of the psychical and the

physical... united in a third. This third is spirit” (COA 43, SUD 13). Thus an individual is a combination of psyche and body. The fusion of these earthly components results in the birth of the individual’s spirit, synonymous with the individual’s ‘self’. The spirit becomes indicative of the individual’s relation to God and the divine (SUD 13-14). The well being of the individual spirit then becomes expressive of the well being of the individual’s relation to God.

Thus a negative relation to the self, characterized by an attempt to repress the self, amounts to a misrelation with God. When an individual maintains or cultivates a misrelation to God, the individual is in sin. Anti-Climacus establishes sin as “not a negation but a position... *before God*” (SUD 96-100) and, in quoting Romans, maintains that “whatever does not proceed from faith is sin” (SUD 105). This basic description reveals a sin/faith dichotomy, within which an individual is either in the position of sin before God, or in the position of faith. Each individual possesses the capacity to express each. This capacity is illustrated by a dialectic of sin, within which the individual spirit perpetually oscillates between faith and sin in the divine relation.

Kierkegaard’s dialectic of sin is strictly non-Hegelian. Kierkegaard rejects Hegel’s dialectic, which he understands as an historical and deterministic dialectic with the capacity to logically mediate and reconcile all oppositions. Kierkegaard argues instead that essential contradictions, inherent especially within Christianity, are the basis for the individual’s capacity for dynamic movement between opposites (Carlisle 30-45), and the only mode

by which an individual could become a self, the most crucial of human endeavors. Through self-becoming an individual asserts his significance to the world.

The essential opposites within the dialectic, faith and sin, appear mutually exclusive before the individual spirit, and to choose to become one or the other stands as a recurring existential necessity requiring spiritual exertion. Anti-Climacus notes that the dialectic, in its abstractness, stands as a paradox but emphasizes strength of spirit in the individual:

There is nothing meritorious about being in despair to a higher degree. Esthetically it is an advantage, for esthetically there is concern only for vigor; but ethically the more intensive form of despair is further from salvation than the lesser form... there is no merit in being a sinner... but on the other hand, how in the world can an essential sin-consciousness be found in a life that is so immersed in triviality... a life that is too spiritless to be called sin” (101).

In the mode of religious feeling, the ethical realm comes to clash with esthetic passion. It is both reprehensible and a saving grace to remain deep in sin. Such a person is doomed to wallow in depravity and damnation, but to have the capacity to remain deeply in despair implies great spiritual strength. Thus the possibility of salvation, should it ever become realized in actuality, would become all the more glorious.

The possibilities within the sin/faith dichotomy are informed by the dialectic of sin, but Kierkegaard holds that if any change is to become actualized, the individual must undergo a

‘pathos-filled transition.’ “If a dialectical transition leads from one possibility to another, a pathos-filled transition is a leap from possibility to actuality... dialectical transitions... [do not] change anything in actuality” (Eriksen 123). The capacity for movement in an individual consciousness is highlighted in the dialectal relation of opposites. But for change to occur concretely in a movement of actualized possibility, an impassioned and dynamic ‘leap’ must occur within the spirit of the individual. This movement is qualified by the sin/faith dichotomy and explains how great sin can lead to great faith: “Sin has a salvational dimension... because sinning brings one so close to spiritual death that the only way out is a radical turn in a different direction” (Blank 11). This ‘radical turn’ represents the impassioned dynamics involved in the individual’s frantic transcendence of obscurity through becoming.

Concretely, in the context of the spirit of the individual, the relationship between sin and faith is ambivalent and complex. In order to gain a clearer perception of sin without abstracting it into triviality, Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms examine the notable relationship between the abstract modes of anxiety and despair and their embodied manifestation in sin. Unacknowledged or intentional sinfulness disrupts the individual’s synthesis (physical and psychical joining to elevate the spirit) and impedes the development of the spirit. In psychology these expressions of sin are denoted respectively as anxiety and despair.

Anxiety affects the individual earliest in the progression of the spirit. The individual is born into the world seemingly innocent and completely ignorant of his eternal aspect, the spirit.

“In innocence, man is not qualified as spirit... The spirit in man is dreaming” (COA 41). Anxiety’s ominous form soon becomes discernable. A psychological phenomenon, anxiety acts as an emissary of the spirit, which wants to be acknowledged and posited. Anxiety subtly seduces the individual with the possibility of freedom and potential self-determination, what Kierkegaard calls “the possibility of possibility” (COA 42). The individual attempts to assert and actualize this freedom, but he is initially unsuccessful. The resultant failure and humiliation forces the individual to become painfully aware of his ignorance and sinfulness. “Hence anxiety is the dizziness of freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis,” which is, as Haufniensis says, “the physical and the psychical united in spirit” (61).

Anxiety surfaces in Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* within the first son of Fyodor Pavlovich, Dmitri Karamazov. Dmitri’s relations with his father are particularly scandalous and heated. His violent and passionate feud with this sensuous ‘buffoon’ revolves around the morally ambiguous Grushenka, who, by their own description, is sure to announce her decision to become betrothed to one of them very soon.

In his three-part ‘Confession of an Ardent Heart’ Dmitri intimates to his brother, Alyosha, his personal struggle: “Have you ever felt, have you ever dreamt of falling down a precipice into a pit? That’s just how I’m falling, but not in a dream” (93). This description of his trajectory, as though he were plunging into an abyss, is expressive of Dmitri’s defeated spirit, left mortified by ruthless anxiety. Additionally, Haufniensis’ description of

anxiety as the ‘dizziness of freedom’ bears considerable likeness to the motion of falling. Indeed, Dmitri remarks that he is ‘falling’ but is ‘not in a dream.’ This corresponds with Haufniensis’ notion of the ‘dreaming, or unborn, spirit,’ the state of the individual ignorant of his divine aspect. Dmitri continues: “I go on and I don’t know whether I’m going to shame or to light and joy. That’s the trouble, for everything in the world is a riddle!” (96) In Dmitri’s state of ambivalence and confusion, his dormant spirit is suddenly shaken awake and immediately blinded by the radiance of the new and imminent possibility of religious experience. And yet he feels compelled to continue fumbling forward, embarrassed by his nakedness, hitherto helpless within the miserable throes of anxiety.

In *The Sickness Unto Death*, Anti-Climacus takes up the topic of sin with relation to the development of self once again, but at a different point in the progression of the spirit. The psychological force in this case is notably different: despair. Despair is a “sickness of the self,” described by Anti-Climacus as “an impotent self-consuming” (18). It can be described as the unwillingness to posit the entire relation, as an individual human being, and an attempt to abort the self and to prevent the spirit from thriving. Anti-Climacus calls this willed evasiveness “in despair not to will to be oneself” (49).

But Anti-Climacus asserts that for the human being, there exists another dimension to the self, and because the individual is not established by itself, but by God, there is the potential for a deeper form of despair. “The human self is such a derived, established relation, a relation that relates itself to itself and in

relating itself to itself relates itself to another” (13-14). Therefore an individual could attempt to become a relation that would gladly and without question relate itself to itself in order to posit spirit. But, according to Anti-Climacus, “the misrelation of [this form of] despair is... a misrelation in a relation that relates itself to itself and has been established by another” (14). Because this individual did not establish itself and is not the source of any aspects of the synthesis, this self, in relating itself to itself, must in turn relate itself back to that which established the entire relation. Thus the individual that is in despair attempts to impede the exaltation of that which represents the eternal and divine in oneself: the spirit, or self. In both cases, the individual in despair is in sin, for to be in despair amounts to a revolt against God. This form, characterized as “in despair to will to be oneself,” is a more advanced and intense form of despair and is for this reason more sinful.

It is this form of despair that is suffered by the second son of the iniquitous Fyodor Pavlovich, Ivan Karamazov. Ivan’s despair becomes apparent through his conversation with Alyosha. Ivan relates stories of recent cases of human atrocities, concentrating specifically on atrocities committed against children. Ivan finds it outrageous and unwarranted that innocent children should be subjected to the obscene and unthinkable acts of cruelty possible (and as Ivan indicates, sometimes fulfilled) on earth and within the societies of men: “The innocents must not suffer for another’s sins, and especially such innocents!” (219) He asserts that “[adults] have retribution—they’ve eaten the apple

and know good and evil... but the children haven't eaten anything and are so far innocent" (218-219). Ivan cannot accept a world in which such rampant and unjustifiable depravity is allowed against innocent children, those without the knowledge of good and evil. Thus Ivan rejects God's creation, the ultimate expression of God's will, and in a literal revolt against God, attempts to pit himself and his sense of justice against divine will. This despairing insubordination stifles his relationship to God and is sinful.

Thus, anxiety and despair are useful in that they act as psychological indicators of sin. In a dialectical sense, in pointing to *the possibility* of sin in an individual, they can in turn demonstrate the possibility of faith in an individual. The infinite possibility contained in the dialectic is echoed once again in Kierkegaard's pseudonyms. Haufniensis remarks: "The greatness of anxiety is a prophecy of the greatness of perfection" (64). Anti-Climacus says of despair: "Consequently, to be able to despair is an infinite advantage and yet to be in despair is not only the worst misfortune and misery—no, it is ruination... despair is like a descent when compared with being able to be; the descent is as infinitely low as the excellence of possibility is high" (15). Kierkegaard maintains that the great suffering induced by anxiety and despair in fact speak to the fortitude of the individual's spirit, and rather than abolish the individual's God relation, these forces generate tension within this relation, allowing for a semblance of severance or recoil. Thus, the vehemence of Dmitri and Ivan's sinfulness, made evident by their psychological symptoms of anxiety and despair respectively, highlights their possibility for decisive and pivotal becoming within the Christian dialectic of repentance.

Within Dostoevsky's novels, and certainly within *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky brings together characters with conflicting ideals and forces them to interact. His ambiguous and seemingly impartial treatment of these views has prompted multiple interpretations of his worldview (Blank 3-6). Mikhail Bakhtin asserts that this disagreement is prompted by an inherent deviation from the typical European style novel, in which the tension between characters culminates in the representation of an authorial monologue or unified message. Bakhtin holds that the epitome of this style is reached in the Byronic hero, in that the ideals of the Byronic hero represent those of the author in what Bakhtin calls a "monologic all-encompassing consciousness" (Bakhtin 7). Conversely, the voices of Dostoevsky's characters collectively supercede the voice of the author so that it remains completely indiscernible: "Not only does the novel give no firm support outside the rupture-prone world of dialogue for a third, monologically all-encompassing consciousness—but on the contrary, everything in the novel is structured to make dialogic opposition unresolvable" (Bakhtin 18). This irreconcilability of worldviews is essential to Dostoevsky's work and, as Ksana Blank maintains, lies at the foundation of his understanding of Christianity.

In Dostoevsky's philosophy and theology, various opposites are outwardly mutually exclusive, but inwardly they are indivisible and inseparable—and therefore they must be approached synchronically. In his universe, opposites form a single unity that cannot exist or be cognized without each other. The pros and contras involved in this eternal dialogue form a single, *antinomic* whole. For Dostoevsky, grasping the two aspects

of this single whole *simultaneously* was an inherently Christian endeavor... one must be able to recognize... inseparability and interdependence vis-a vis a dynamic, constantly changing temporal background (7).

In Dostoevsky's view, Christianity teaches that contradictory views are actually only single aspects of a larger 'eternal dialogue' within which ideas and individuals are never at rest and exist dynamically. Distilled to its quintessence, these dynamics appear as an oscillation within a sin/faith dichotomy. Blank illustrates Dostoevsky's dynamic conception as a 'dialectic of sin.' Different from Hegelian dialectics, Blank explains that "here opposites do not emerge as stages; they do not cancel each other out in a synthesis. Each part contains a kernel of its opposite that can potentially lead to radical change. The antithesis is thus born *from inside* the thesis" (16). In this dialectic, as in Kierkegaard's, the possibility of sin, as well as the possibility of faith lies within every individual.

Though each character in *The Brothers Karamazov* would appear to represent a single point of view, Blank maintains that Dostoevsky illustrates their capacity to become altered through moments of 'non-coincidence': "In *The Brothers Karamazov*, almost every character has moments of 'non-coincidence'...Ivan is always consistent in his reasoning... yet... his rational abilities fail him and he yields to hallucination in the form of a conversation with the devil" (57). As for Dmitri, following his father's murder, everyone in town is convinced of his guilt, for Dmitri had publicly wished for his father's death, and had even broken into his house and violently assaulted him. But Dmitri maintains his innocence, claiming that his "devil was conquered"

(446). These ‘moments of non-coincidence’ highlight the possibility of movement within an individual consciousness.

The village people view Dmitri’s infamous licentiousness as, with the exception of his father, unrivaled. Like his father, Dmitri’s reputation as a sensualist precedes him. He woefully proclaims: “‘To insects—sensual lust’... I am that insect brother... and all we Karamazovs are such insects...[for us] sensual lust is a tempest—worse than a tempest’ ” (96-97). Haufniensis holds that the predomination of this sensuality is an apparent indicator of Dmitri’s sinfulness. “By sin, sensuousness became sinfulness” (COA 63). Sensuality plagues the individual as a remnant of original sin. Haufniensis explains: “Sinfulness is by no means sensuousness, but without sin there is no sexuality, and without sexuality, no history. A perfect spirit has neither the one nor the other” (49). By original sin, humanity’s mortality is realized, and every individual subsequent to Adam comes to exist naturally and sexualized in sin.

Ivan’s sin has its origins in his rejection of God’s creation and his derisive turn away from immortality: “If the sufferings of children go to swell the sum of sufferings which was necessary to pay for truth, then I protest that truth is not worth the price... It’s not God that I don’t accept, Alyosha, only I most respectfully return Him the ticket [for eternal life]” (226). “That’s rebellion,” Alyosha responds. Ivan’s revolt against God is complete with his declaration that, if such injustice is allowed to occur, then “everything is lawful” (244). His offense exposes the depth of his despair as “before God, or with the conception of God... in despair to will to be oneself. Thus... intensified defiance” (SUD 78). Anti-Climacus would understand Ivan’s vehement defiance as an

unfathomable rift between Ivan and God made vast by despair. “In order that the ‘No,’ which in a way wants to grapple with God, can be heard, a person must get as far away from God as possible. The most offensive forwardness toward God is at the greatest distance” (114). Ivan’s rebellion is indicative of his intense despair. Its uninterrupted continuity results in the proliferation of his profound sinfulness.

Psychically, Dmitri and Ivan are harried by anxiety and despair, and it can be said that neither attempts to evade these forces or strives for self-deception. These characters rush into battle; the suffering that leads to truth causes unrivaled anguish. Yet this torment inspires within them the greatest form of human passion as they clash with sin. Each brother advances toward the precipice and in passionate defiance of non-being, leaps into the abyss to engage in the relentless struggle. The outcome is unknown, but no individual can come away from this confrontation unscathed. Dmitri dreams of a peasant village burnt to the ground in the midst of the frigid Siberian winter. The peasants are made to stand along the dirt road, and Dmitri is struck with the image of a baby, its cloth soaked through, freezing from the cold and starving in poverty. Dmitri cries: “But why is it weeping... why are its little arms bare? Why don’t they wrap it up... why are people poor? Why is the babe poor? Why is the steppe barren? Why don’t they hug each other and kiss? Why don’t they sing songs of joy? Why are they so dark from black misery? Why don’t they feed the babe?” (479) Ivan is taunted by the devil himself, for he cannot uphold his mutinous precept ‘everything is lawful.’ “Conscience! What is conscience? I make it up for myself. Why am I tormented by it? From habit. From the

universal habit of mankind for seven thousand years. So let us give it up, and we shall be gods.’ It was he [the devil] who said that, it was he who said that!” (620) Ivan and Dmitri cannot force themselves into contentment with their current mode of sinfulness. Great guilt instills itself and compels within them an anxious desire for change. We witness before our eyes Kierkegaard’s ‘pathos-filled transitions’ arising from out of their debased and corrupted hollows. Their souls turned over, their only option is that of becoming.

Dmitri and Ivan, deep in sin, have thus far sought to exercise their freedom as individuals. Their sinfulness led to their dissolute foundering, but in the process both have come to recognize something else: guilt. Kierkegaard explains that this phenomenon is indeed related to their supposed free will: “Hence anxiety is the dizziness of freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis and freedom looks down into its own possibility, laying hold of finiteness to support itself... Freedom succumbs in this dizziness... and freedom, when it again rises, sees that it is guilty” (COA 61). Their attempts to realize complete freedom were exhaustive and futile.

Socially isolated by numerous scandals, Dmitri admits to Alyosha: “I hardly think of anything but of that degraded man... I think about that man because I am that man myself” (95). Dmitri now recognizes the innate sinfulness of mankind and perceives clearly its relation to his personal woes and individual sinfulness. Suddenly Dmitri’s secular trial pales in importance to the trial of his individual spirit, in which he must overcome merciless anxiety.

In an effort to widen the chasm in his relation to the divine, Ivan declares ‘everything is lawful,’ as both an assertion of autonomy and an intentional mockery of God’s seemingly absurd Creation. But this principle does not stand. Pale and with evident ‘brain fever,’ Ivan declares of Smerdyakov at Dmitri’s trial: “It was he, not my brother, who killed our father. He murdered him and I incited him to do it.” (651) Manifested by his defiance, the strain on Ivan’s spirit ends in collapse with his devil hallucination and subsequent ‘catastrophic’ performance at Dmitri’s trial. Guilt pervades and his actions begin to be dictated by this.

Robin Feuer Miller offers her own interpretation of the presence of guilt in both Dmitri and Ivan. Whereas Kierkegaard associates guilt with the development of the individual self, Miller concerns herself with “The interrelationship between guilt and [ethical] responsibility” (Miller 115). In her reading of Dmitri’s dream sequence and ‘the babe,’ Miller highlights Dmitri’s conclusion: “We are all responsible for all” (Dostoevsky 560). The question of Dmitri’s responsibility regarding his treatment of others is amplified by his suspected perpetration of his father’s murder. Dmitri’s dream sequence and subsequent self-analysis lead to his willingness to accept his exile, regardless of his innocence, shows that Dmitri now observes this ethical responsibility with newfound primacy: “I go for all, because someone must go for all. I didn’t kill father, but I’ve got to go” (Dostoevsky 560).

Ivan, too, discovers his own ethical responsibility related to the murder of Fyodor Pavlovich. Though Dmitri is formally accused of his father’s murder, Ivan begins to suspect the guilt of

Fyodor's servant, Smerdyakov, who had always looked upon Ivan as a mentor of sorts. "In Ivan's formulation, 'everything is permitted'; there is, likewise, no guilt and no responsibility" (Miller 111). In the possibility of this formulation's influence on the actions of Smerdyakov, Ivan perceives his own responsibility, his own guilt in the case of his father's murder: "If it's not Dmitri, but Smerdyakov who's the murderer, I share his guilt, for I put him up to it" (Dostoevsky 585).

For Kierkegaard, the acknowledgement of this ethical responsibility does not contradict the notion of individual development, but rather, within his methodology, the primacy of ethical responsibility is disputed. In the first place, individual freedom must become disciplined through recourse with anxiety; despair must be authentically acknowledged, taken on, and finally expelled. *The revelation of the collective guilt of humanity must be preceded by the revelation of individual guilt accompanied by a shift in worldly comportment*; only then can the individual contemplate ethical responsibility¹. When exactly this shift occurs for each person is by no means measurable, and that some sort of shift occurs does not mean that the individual becomes suddenly complete. As was stated earlier, the individual is always in flux; individual development is never complete, and the individual

¹ As it relates to 'the other', Kierkegaard's methodology can be compared to the dialogic philosophy of Martin Buber. If "the relation of freedom to guilt is anxiety" (COA 109), then anxiety as the possibility of guilt is like the possibility of failing to establish an 'I-Thou' relationship with the other. In this type, the mutual individual freedom and complete and utter difference between individuals is acknowledged and respected. Opposite the I-Thou relationship stands the 'I-It' relationship, one concerned exclusively with the utility of the other. For Buber, freedom is embodied in the 'I-Thou' relationship. See: *I and Thou* by Martin Buber and "Ethics and the Place of the Other" by Neve Gordon from *Levinas and Buber: Dialogue and Difference*.

must remain ever vigilant of the possibility of progression or lapse. The acknowledgment of the necessity of this vigilance is an indicator that the individual is ready to make a turn to the ethical. Any attempt at grasping ethical responsibility prior to this individual discipline of freedom would result in unsightly vanity. Thus for Kierkegaard, ethical responsibility follows naturally from the discipline of individual freedom.

Miller's analysis also acknowledges the importance of the individual aspect. She nods to Dmitri's change in demeanor: "The hymn that Mitya [Dmitri] at last sounds out to Alyosha expresses Mitya's epiphanic dream of the babe as well as the novel's epigraph². The seed has taken root in Mitya; the 'new man' hidden within him has 'come to the surface' because of the cruel burden that has been placed upon him" (Miller 114). This perceived "new man" arisen in Dmitri expresses his change in worldly comportment by means of a pathos-filled transition and differs notably from the woefully anxious Dmitri. Miller questions the outcome of Ivan's struggle with despair: "Is the devil's strategy to reawaken faith in Ivan or to squelch it forever? Is the devil here an agent of evil or is he somehow functioning as a way station on Ivan's path to eventual spiritual regeneration?" (Miller 121). Miller too conceives of the polarity of Ivan's possible conclusions as a despairing spirit existing before God within the sin/faith dichotomy. For Miller, the challenge of the devil is a symbol of Ivan's exceptional and vehement despair.

² "Verily, verily I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."(John 12:24)

Movement within the dialectic of sin occurs when the spirit allows guilt to relate to freedom. The Christian individual acknowledges the fact that sin represents man's schism with God ever since Adam obtained for himself and his descendants freedom in the knowledge of good and evil. But this acknowledgement does not inspire existential guilt in the individual. Dmitri surely lamented his sin, but his demeanor remained unchanged. Anxiety and despair indicate that sin is also relevant to him, and is in fact deep-seated in his existence. This revelation coincides with the individual's humiliated freedom, and suddenly the individual understands the full implications of sin complete with the fullness of his being. From here, guilt directs the freedom of the individual spirit as it suffers through its divinely bestowed knowledge, ardently striving to ascertain the paradigm of the God-man in Christ. Kierkegaard professes that man's earthly existence consists solely of this position before God and is determined by the sin/faith dichotomy. Guilt may inspire a movement toward faith, or, like Dostoevsky's Ivan, rouse impressive and irreverent defiance.

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SEMBENE OUSMANE'S "TRIBAL SCARS":

STORYTELLING AS SUSTENANCE IN POST-COLONIAL
SENEGAL

“[Stories] have a kind of power, sometimes an awesome power. And usually they are necessary for our survival.”

-J. Edward Chamberlin

A story of survival, both in the oral and written form, lives to be retold. Our most vivid and violent memories become stories we tell and, turning to J. Edward Chamberlin's notion, the stories we choose to share revive an experience of struggle, learning, and even triumph that, in personal and pivotal ways, sustain us. In his article "From Hand to Mouth: The Postcolonial Politics of Oral and Written Tradition,"

Chamberlin claims that, “we need a set of remembered words and occasions in order to maintain the coherence and continuity of our societies” (125). Chamberlin argues that storytelling reinforces ideas lost in the past in order to enrich the complexity of the present and the enigma of the future — simply put, stories can embody hope. These ideas and stories, often told through novels or around campfires through oral tradition, are weighted with cultural significance and purpose.

In 1962 Senegalese writer and film director Sembene Ousmane wrote “Tribal Scars.” The short fiction piece was a response to the slave trade that occurred in Senegal during the 19th and 20th century crusades of colonialism. During these years, French colonialists invaded Senegal and transformed it into an economically dependent country—an accessory for the French slave traders. In “Tribal Scars,” Ousmane captures the frantic chaos of a Senegalese colonial world at war with itself. It is a world in which heritage is forgotten and barbaric competition is first priority; a colonized country that experiences political oppression, decay of language, and loss of culture - its roots, its identity.

This essay explores the possibility that storytelling can revive the past and create a new sense of meaning to sustain an individual’s identity that was dismantled by colonial rule. In this sense, I do not mean to argue that an original identity can be completely restored after a serious disjuncture. The series of traumatizing events that are symptoms of colonialism leave no continuity for a natural personal revolution, or a straight path leading back to an indigenous identity. On the contrary,

colonialism does more to create disparity within a culture than it does to harmonize a culture into unity. In his essay “Thinking the Diaspora: Home-Thoughts from Abroad” Stuart Hall ask the question, “[if] ‘cultural identity’ carries so many overtones of essential unity, primordial oneness, indivisibility and sameness, how are we to ‘think’ identities inscribed within relations of power and constructed across difference, and disjuncture?”(3) With a similar perspective to Hall, the actual restoration of a cultural identity—that is, the norms, beliefs, and behaviors installed in a community of people—is challenging and nearly impossible. The changes produced by colonialism are irrevocable and as permanent as the stories created from the horrific experience of colonialism.

As sensitive as this issue is, I will convey this exploration by taking into account both the Senegalese need for cultural survival and the credibility of a story as a mark of tradition. Frantz Fanon makes possible the argument that remembering an indigenous identity after colonialism is indeed necessary in order to continue living; Aaron Smuts complicates the sheer concept of storytelling as a trustworthy medium due to its transitive nature. It is a fact that colonialism oppressed multiple cultures by invading their country, substituting the native language with a foreign tongue, and treating the indigenous population as if they were strangers to themselves—aliens in their own skin. “Tribal Scars” attests to these demeaning actions while expressing the need to retell a story as an act of resistance towards colonial oppression.

In Ousmane's piece exists a story within a story—a kind of meta-telling of how one Senegalese tribe broke apart after being invaded by colonists. The story produces three tellers, as the story itself has three layers. Ousmane, the author, creates a scene set in post-independence Senegal, in which a group of men gather to hear a story. Within this group of men is the character Saer, a man born after independence, who tells a story to the others. The third teller is the character Amoo, who emerges in Saer's spoken story, and lives in the conditions of French-Senegalese colonialism. In Amoo's story begins the restatement of resistance against colonialism: colonists looted his tribe and captured his daughter, and his need is to both rescue her and return to his village. The structure of the story itself justifies Chamberlin's notion: that storytelling is essential for our survival. These characters depend on each other, as one creates the world in which the next character will emerge.

First, before moving to my argument, I must point out the undeniable challenge the topic of storytelling presents. Stories, both in oral and written form, are more than truthful reiterations; bias and perspective organically taint them. Out of this problem a question arises: if the act of storytelling carries facets of humanity—history, creeds, emotions, traditions—can storytelling achieve a viable sustainability to overcome the invasive usurping of an identity? To answer this, I turn to the story “Tribal Scars” itself to explain why storytelling can, in fact, rediscover an identity.

“Tribal Scars” is set in post-colonial Senegal and begins with a group of Senegalese men gathered and chatting around a

table. When normally the conversation would lead to local and global politics, their talk turns to the scars that mark some of their faces. No one sitting in the circle can answer why or how they came to have these scars. Many propose stories of the scars' origins, like "it was a mark of nobility" (102) or that perhaps a member of the tribe was cut as a punishment for rejecting tribal customs after being educated in Europe. All of these propositions are dismissed. One man, Saer, claims he knows. He says French slave-traders sought their bodies for work and their skin for apparel; the Senegalese tribe would cut their own bodies to ruin their skin and save themselves from slavery.

The story Saer tells creates the third layer of the story's structure and presents a new character: Amoo, a Senegalese man captured and taken from his village by French colonists. Amoo is rescued by Momutu, a Senegalese rebel whose scheme is to rescue slaves from colonists, only to barter them off again as slaves for his own capital gain. While Amoo only wants to rescue his daughter, Iome, from slavery, Momutu wants to restrain Amoo and Iome from returning to their village—to traditional culture. A power-struggle between these two native Senegalese men, who are both puppets to colonialism but uphold different values, ensues.

Near the end of "Tribal Scars," during a surprise invasion by French colonists, Amoo and Iome escape from Momutu's grip. Together they retreat back to their village, where their tribe eagerly awaits their arrival. For a full summer Amoo, Iome, and the tribe live peaceful lives in the community: they hunt and gather, have

tribal dances around fires, and continue the rituals into which they were born. However, the tribe understands their location is endangered, because they've already endured one looting from French colonists. They plan to relocate at the end of summer. When their day of relocation arrives, "not a sacred day, but a day like any other," (Ousmane, 115) colonists attack Amoo's tribe. He escapes with his daughter and mother, but at a cost. The only way to ensure that Iome will not be recaptured into slavery is to make cuts across her body and lessen her capital value as an item of the slavery market:

Swiftly, Amoo gripped the girl between his strong legs and began making cuts all over her body. The child's cries rang through the forests; she screamed till she had no voice left. Amoo just had time to finish before slave-hunters seized him. He had wrapped the leaves all round the girl...Iome returned to the village with her grandmother, and thanks to the old woman's knowledge of herbs Iome's body soon healed; but she still bore the scars... The slave-hunters returned to the village; they capture Iome but let her go again. She was worth nothing, because of the blemishes on her body. (116)

When Amoo makes this violent act upon his daughter's skin, he simultaneously upholds the pride of his culture and his people. He sacrifices himself as a slave to the colonists, and sacrifices his daughter's body to permanent physical damage in order to save Iome from slavery. Though Iome undergoes indescribable pain, she later on evades the clutches of slavery only because scars render her undesirable to the slavers.

Hearing Saer's iteration of the story, the Senegalese men gathered around the table can imagine how their scars are important; they can understand why the scars not marks of shame, but marks of pride. Saer tells them, "The news [of the scars success] spread... People came from the remotest villages to consult the grandmother. And over the years and the centuries a diversity of scars appeared on the bodies of our ancestors" (116). In this moment, through the telling of the story, the men are reminded of the defining root of their "cultural identity." The scars represent their past, while the story of the scars creates continuity between what their culture was before colonialism, and what it is now, after their independence. Without the story of the origin of the scars, they would be only enigmatic marks left on a forgotten body. In this sense, the story of the scars does not mend the gaps from the past to the present, but the tale of survival ignites hope in the Senegalese men.

I wonder, however, why Saer's account is trusted most out of all of them. He is the only character who is half Senegalese and half Voltaique, which means he is half French. This is problematic only in that, if this story is meant to represent the culture as a unified entity that overcame colonialism, can it be told by Saer, who half represents the culture that dominated Senegal? I would argue that even the slightest hint of imaginative cultural coherence—in a word, hope—can weave together a torn community. The reality Saer presents through his story is one of ancestral honor, which retells the Senegalese experience as if it were a revered artifact. In this light, J. Edward Chamberlin frames

storytelling as a way to look at the past through eyes hungry for cultural meaning. He writes:

This world, the world of imagination, is not a world in which we escape reality but one by means of which we engage reality on terms that reflect our own meanings and values. If our words and our several modes of imaginative representation are replaced by others that are not the reflection of our hearts and minds and experiences and the heritage of our people, then so is our sense of reality.
(127)

Saer's explanation of their scars, which saved some Senegalese from slavery, not only connects them to their past, to a peacefulness lost in the wake of French colonialism, but it also attributes meaning to a haunting wound. In addition, Ousmane presents the text's structure in a meta-story: as Saer retreats into his past to retell the story, Ousmane himself delves into the depths of colonialism through imagination. If the story is still told, it's possible that the emotional aspect of the experience can still persist. Colonialism affects its subjects not only physically, but mentally as well.

Frantz Fanon proves the ruined state of a colonized mind. Fanon claims in *The Wretched of the Earth* that colonialism "hammer[s] into the heads of the indigenous population that if the colonists were to leave they would regress into barbarism, degradation, and bestiality," and consequently a colonized nation "achieves cultural alienation" (149). Colonialism creates a relationship between the colonist and the colonized that is

obviously unequal. By feeling lorded-over and of base value, the colonized population cowers under the colonist's raised foot and willingly abandons their personal values and behaviors—what sustains them—in order to appease the colonists. This means that the indigenous people become strangers to their own skin; they are physically and psychologically injured by the colonizing nation. In this state of oppression, the colonized nation is separated from their identity, where they were once at home.

In Fanon's schema of colonial consciousness, the indigenous people are convinced that their language, their behavior, and their perspectives of life are worthless, unless mandated by colonial rule. Rather than being the independent nation it was, the colonized nation becomes dependent on the colonists, as if they *need* to be subjugated in order to survive. Fanon, likening the overbearing nation to an abusive mother, states, "The colonial mother is protecting the child [the colonized] from itself, from its ego, physiology, its biology and its ontological misfortune," (149). It means that not only are the indigenous people severed from their natural state of being, but they mentally turn against themselves and become disgusted with their original way of life—the way of life that formally sustained them.

Fanon's indictment of cultural alienation in colonialism provides a framework for understanding Momutu's experience of loss in "Tribal Scars." One evening, loosened under the exhaustion of a day's trek, Momutu reminisces to Amoo about his past:

I once had a village, too, on the edge of a forest. My mother and father lived there, many relatives – a whole

clan! We had meat to eat and sometimes fish. But over the years, the village declined. There was no end to lamentations. Ever since I was born I'd heard nothing but screams, seen mad flights into the bush or the forest. You go into the forest, and you die from some disease; you stay in the open, and you're captured to be sold into slavery. What was I to do? Well, I made my choice. I'd rather be with the hunters than the hunted. (111)

From hearing his villagers scream in disarray and confusion, and seeing his own people torn from their huts and fields and stolen away on French ships, Momutu is mentally tortured. He grew from child to man in the midst of constant violence, chaos and cultural decay. He had a choice to either remain with his tribe-- "the hunted"-- or join the colonizers--"the hunters"-- and with that came the sacrifice of either his life or his culture; he chose to sacrifice his culture. Momutu illustrates Fanon's definition of the colonized mind. Fanon states that, "the young colonized subject who grows up in an atmosphere of fire and brimstone has no scruples mocking zombie ancestors, two-headed horses, corpses woken from the dead, and djinns who, taking advantage of a yawn, slip inside the body," (21). These cultural traditions and creeds exemplify what a colonized child would soon reject in order to overcome his state of repression and oppression. The colonized purposely isolate their culture while painfully accepting the colonist culture as their own.

Though Amoo has experienced violence the way Momutu has, colonial rule has not entirely tainted him. Momutu remarks that Amoo is "an odd fellow. He thinks of nothing but his village,

his wife and his daughter,'” (107). It’s true: Amoo admits he has killed men, “‘but,’” Amoo says, “‘never to take prisoners and sell them as slaves. That’s your work [Momutu’s work], but it isn’t mine. I want to get back to my village,” (107). While Amoo’s dedication to his family strikes Momutu as weak or strange, Amoo sees returning to his tribe as the natural thing to do. His identity resides in his village. He has not succumbed to colonialism at its worst, the way Momutu has. He retains a sense of pride in his traditional way of life. Finding solace in his family and his people, Amoo understands that in order to survive, he must sustain his life by leaving an irrevocable blemish on his daughter. After Amoo cuts Iome, she is recaptured into slavery. However, because of her ruined skin, they release her. The story of the scars’ success spreads to other villages and the Senegalese use scarring to exempt themselves from slavery. Amoo’s and Iome’s courage is so powerful, and the scars so lasting, that their story withstands the mill of time. Passing from generation to generation, it finally falls out of Saer’s mouth and into the ears of the wondering Senegalese men.

While Saer’s story of the scars’ salvation, of triumph through sacrifice, provokes the vision of a desired identity, Aaron Smuts’s article “Story Identity and Story Type” challenges the notion that storytelling is a transaction of simple ‘telling.’ There are issues with every story’s credibility. Stories are often exaggerations sprinkled with elements of reality. However, stories themselves have representative identities. According to Smuts, a story can present an identity for the listener or reader to perceive, however the story also contains its own set of ideals or values

that builds a unique “story-identity” (5). It’s likely that Saer’s story-identity has mutated throughout its progression. Smuts argues, “the foundational claim underlying nearly all narrative theory is that a distinction can be made between the story and its telling,” (5). Smuts argues that the “transposability of the story,” is essentially the act of retelling, and it inevitably omits details included in the original narrative. The story must pass through a kind of metaphorical and unspoken sieve that routinely filters bits and pieces of information, depending on the teller or author. Smuts claims “it is rare to tell the same story twice,” (12) because each time the story will take on new meaning, inherit perhaps a different sequence or a different main character, and morph into a new identity. Much of the story’s identity conforms to the way of the teller or writer and, subsequently, how the audience perceives the story.

With respect to “Tribal Scars,” both Sembene Ousmane—the author—and Saer—the fictional story-passer—create a unique story-identity that can be perceived as historical evidence of the Senegalese cultural past. What they tell and write is consequently selective due to their personal bias—both embody a Senegalese identity as well as a French identity. However, this does not mean that their stories are incorrect or unbelievable. It simply means that the stories they tell have been molded to their particular interpretation. The way the tellers of “Tribal Scars” retell the sequence of events—like Amoo’s past, his experience in slavery, and his route to escape it—creates a specific story-identity that represents their personal perspective. In terms of the credibility or identity of Saer’s narrative, it would naturally have gaps. The

story of the tribal scars was passed along to multiple villages through many mouths and, inevitably, it will have changed along the way. Accuracy then becomes second in importance. The story's identity—that is, the values and empowerment it projects—trumps the story's precise “transposability.” It will be sustained through each telling of it, only because, reflecting from Aaron Smuts' essay, the essentials of a story are captured in the repetitive events, characters, setting and conclusion.

The story-identity in “Tribal Scars” has a visceral quality, which the Senegalese men can feel through its telling. It embodies their past, the strength of those who stood aggressively and proudly against slavery, and the reason to remember, appreciate, and move forward and onward from their oppressed state. It tells of blood and wounds, battles and sacrifices, loss and gain of both the colonists and the colonized. But more than the pitfalls and successes of colonialism, it reminds the Senegalese men that they are alive and free. Like the push of an overpowering gust of wind, the story of their scars brings forth the energy that Amoo, Iome and many other anti-colonial and anti-slavery Africans put towards clearing their country of invasive rule.

But a question remains: can the story-identity really translate into a personal identity? In the article “The Revival of Storytelling,” Haike Frank claims the process of storytelling:

can be seen as the storyteller's contribution to the identity construction of a social community, in the sense that the member of the audience acquires the ability to see him- or herself with the eyes of his or her environment and thus

experience him- or herself as an Other...[this] is an inevitable step in developing into a self. (288)

The process of “developing into a self” means that an individual inherits values or experiences and allows the experience of another person to enter them and become a part of them in order to have a “self” or an identity. Upon hearing the experience of another, the listener embodies the experience, or behavioral practice of another to make it a part of herself or himself. This notion creates a model of living that can easily be adapted into an attribute of the self. How possible is it, then, for a story to recreate a cultural identity for the Senegalese men? If Aaron Smuts’s article claims that rarely stories are told identical to their original form, then could a story so shifted from its original form restore a precolonial identity? Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze problematizes the notion of identity restoration further.

In “Toward a Critical Theory of Postcolonial African Identities,” Eze underlines the inconsistencies within rediscovering a self after colonialism:

Between the truths and myths in their fictional energy imposed at the very depths of our being, and the more objective truths provided by reflective and critical analysis, it is the field of the imaginary representations that carries the heaviest weight in the determination of conduct and collective orientation. Thus, when this “zone”—the zone of the social imaginary—is “distorted” or “diseased” and “inflamed,” our actions and “knowledge” become systematically distorted as well. (343-344)

In other words, if the atmosphere surrounding a culture becomes so infested with the harsh confusion and “diseased” mentality of

colonialism, the idea of “identity” or “actions and ‘knowledge’” of the self drastically shifts from what it originally was. The “imaginary representations” that define the borders and mechanics of a culture are no longer their legitimate roots, because those roots have been ripped from their traditional, natural ground and contorted in a way that is alien. War, mangled bodies, and the captive human life represent their culture. Eze argues this state is severe enough that returning to cultural roots is unthinkable. The identity once defined by the precolonial Senegalese is not one to be necessarily rediscovered or restored; rather, it needs to be reinvented. Therefore, is it even possible to regain an identity through stories that may be more fictional than real? Eze claims it is nearly impossible to completely restore an identity with its original values and form, but that does not mean it is impossible to overcome the hardships of colonialism.

Recalling Chamberlin’s argument, storytelling provides cultural relevance to help remember a desired identity. In an attempt to convince colonized peoples that reinvention is possible, and fueled by the sheer gumption of a proud storyteller and resistor of colonialism, Fanon articulates:

Let us delve deeper; perhaps this passion and this rage are nurtured or at least guided by the secret hope of discovering beyond the present wretchedness, beyond this self-hatred, this abdication and denial, some magnificent and shining era that redeems us in our own eyes and those of others. (149)

Fanon’s statement is based on empowerment. Surely, the process of decolonizing a mind depends on more than just reinforcing

old ideas or practices. Reinvention of cultural identity through storytelling is more plausible than actual restoration.

Though they are often myths, and their reality easily bent, stories are facets of human identity. They are intangible capsules of human experience carrying meaning and dialogue from the past into the present. They are plump with history and yet weighted with emotion—but they also make us look at ourselves. Developing into a self means critically evaluating our own personal experience in order to see our actions, our past, our identity in retrospect. Rather than the story engulfing the listener or reader, it becomes a palette of experience, one from which the listener can pick and choose what they find meaningful. And though stories are selective in their reiteration, the listener or reader makes a compromise in order to understand the narrative.

In a similar sacrifice, J. Edward Chamberlin writes, “the way in which people define themselves may occasionally accommodate a forgetting of some of the events in their past, but will always require a remembering of the words that constitute their history,” (127). Despite the destruction of colonialism, the difficulties of transposing a story word-for-word from one generation to the next, the issue of original cultural identity, and perhaps the near impossibility of truly reclaiming an indigenous identity, stories still contain cultural significance. Even though they are filtered through time—through a metaphorical sieve—and bring only a single perspective, the single perspective contains in it an entire world of meaning, and with that, the power of endurance to restate and restore national and cultural identity. In the short story Sembene Ousmane creates, Saer, Amoo and the

Senegalese men use the story of their past to reinvent their cultural identity and proudly wear their scars.

Stories uncover the remnants of our past. Remembered only through the cultural filter that so many mouths and hands have used to spread the tales, stories are heavy with fiction and drama, but also lifted by truth and reality. A story expresses a cultural identity. Whether it comes from a single author through a piece of writing, or stems from a community that thrives on oral tradition, a story always serves to sustain curiosity through mystery and, perhaps, deepen the enigma, making room for more accounts to be told.

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**"BEGUN BY LIVING ACTORS,
IS ENDED BY AUTOMATONS":**

A DISCOURSE OF [POST]HUMANISM AND DISCONTINUITY
IN *THE POSSIBILITY OF AN ISLAND*

*Elle est retrouvée,
Quoi? — L'Éternité.
C'est la mer allée
Avec le soleil.
-Rimbaud*

The sea has represented for humanity the concept of boundlessness, continuity—infinity. The question of sustainability never quavers within the fluidity and vastness of the sea. It was. It will be. Juxtaposed with humanity, the sea illuminates the contrast between two ideas: discontinuity and continuity. These representations are made acute and jagged with the waves of the sea dying against the shore. The images of

human and sea represent two different ideas—standing upon the shifting sand of the shoreline: the feet of humanity—contemplating the infinite. We are mortal. Michel Houellebequ in his novel, *The Possibility of an Island*, translated by Gavin Bowd, enters into critical discourse with these concepts of finitude and immortality. The sting of this conceptual theory is felt fully in the contrast of sustainability and fragility. “So this is what men had called the sea, what they had considered this great consoler, the great destroyer as well, the one that erodes, that gently puts an end to things. . . I understood better, now, how the idea of the infinite had been able to germinate in the brain of these primates; the idea of an infinity. . .” (Houellebequ, 335). Houellebequ’s characters, Daniel1 and those following, become the representation of the discourse between that of humanism and that which comes after—[post]humanism.

Daniel1 is a human living in the twenty-first century. His narrative is chronological and depicts his own life story and existence, but it is frequently interrupted by subsequent narratives of other Daniels. Daniel24’s narrative is introduced and it is implied that there have been twenty-two other Daniels living before him as a form, or copy of Daniel1. Daniel1 is a wealthy movie producer and director who obsesses about aging and sex and describes himself as “an abrasive humanist” (15). He moves from country to country falling in love with various women before finally joining the religion that promises to grant him and his beloved dog, Fox, tangible eternal life through cellular cryogenics. But it is through Daniel24’s narrative that the history (that is, the future of Daniel1’s progeny) of humanity is ambiguously and

slowly unveiled. It is bleak. It is isolating. It is a dystopia with few remnants and pieces of humanity left. Although the copies of Daniel1 are unaware of the specificities of humanity's demise, it is their narratives that transmit and assemble the only remaining fragments of humanity's history. All of the Daniels following Daniel1 are referred to as "neohumans"—they are genetically identical to Daniel1 save for the significant technological advancements added to their physical bodies; though intensely ambiguous, the bodily construction of the beings following Daniel1 never suffer from illness nor are they ever in want of food or water.

The neohumans' thoughts are chronicled through their own narratives as they read through Daniel1's autobiography in an attempt to understand their origin, and their position in the utterly deviant and [post]human world surrounding them. They spend the majority of their respective time journaling in contemplation of Daniel1's narrative and reflecting on the previous means of humanity's sustenance, especially that pertaining to sexuality and intimacy—a part of the sensations that Daniel24 and Daniel25 are unable to experience or understand.

Humanity's need for intimacy works as a validation for the establishment of a true and meaningful existence that goes beyond the superficiality of want. Daniel1's obsession is sex. It is what drives him.

Throughout my entire life I hadn't been interested in anything other than my cock, now my cock was dead, and I was in the process of following it in its deathly decline, I had only got what I deserved, I told myself

repeatedly, pretending to find in this some morose delectation, while in fact my mental state was evolving more and more toward horror pure and simple, a horror made all the worse by the constant brutal heat, by the immutable glare of the blue sky. (243)

If Daniel's "cock" is lifeless, so is the entirety of his self—sexuality is a means of sustenance for Daniel. In his book, *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality*, Georges Bataille analyzes humanity's discontinuity and examines the brief interludes of experienced continuity. Humanity, as discontinuous beings, yearns for feelings of continuity. Moments of continuity, Bataille argues, can only be established via eroticism. Bataille describes instances of fulfilled passion as "violent agitation" that leads to continuity that is felt in "the anguish of desire" (19). Continuity through sex, or eroticism, is sustenance for Daniel. Bataille writes, "The whole business of eroticism is to strike to the inmost core of the living being, so that the heart stands still. The transition from the normal state to that of erotic desire presupposes a partial dissolution of the person as he exists in the realm of discontinuity" (17). In his hours of intimacy, Daniel finds short moments of continuity and infinitude with other humans.

According to Bataille, "Eroticism is assenting to life even in death" (11). He describes the visceral experience and the point of intellectual contact where thought meets instinct:

Beyond death. . . begins the inconceivable which we are usually not brave enough to face . . . the inconceivable is the expression of our own impotence. We know that death destroys nothing, leaves the totality of existence intact,

but we still cannot imagine the continuity of being as a whole beyond our own death, or whatever it is that dies in us (141).

The aging of Daniel¹ causes the inability to participate in eroticism, meaning the end to moments of continuity and leaving only the prospect of death without his means of sustenance. For Bataille, the yearning for infinitude is only realized fleetingly throughout a human's life through shared erotic moments with another discontinuous being.

Considering Schopenhauer, Daniel¹ writes, "When the sexual instinct is dead, writes Schopenhauer, the true core of life is consumed; thus, he notes in a metaphor of terrifying violence, 'human existence resembles a theater performance which, begun by living actors, is ended by automatons dressed in the same costumes.' I didn't want to become an automaton. . . What is the point of maintaining a body that no one touches?" (Houellebequ 154). The impulse towards and obsession with sexual intercourse recorded throughout Daniel¹'s narrative demonstrates his acknowledgement of eroticism as sustenance. The "automaton" seems an ominous foreshadowing of neohumanity's lack of eroticism—an idea that entrances Daniel²⁵. His inability to comprehend the sensations associated with sex and intimacy only intensifies his fascination.

Between the interludes of eroticism, humanity craves continuity. Humanity has never been satiated in its yearning for immortality. "We are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost continuity" (Bataille 15). It is in this

hazy and unclear *post* space of the fear of discontinuity that humanity, spurred on by a relentless aversion to finitude, encounters the possibility of continuity through means of copies. The discourse between humanism and [post]humanism is realized by Daniel1's successors by means of the body. Bataille writes: "the body is a thing, vile, slavish, servile, just like a stone or a piece of wood" (150). In searching for continuity, the body becomes a tool, or "thing," that is used to experience various and brief sensations of continuity. All of the beings following Daniel1 are hyper-aware of the duality of nature that resides within them and fractures their internal subjectivities. Being surrounded by the dystopian world and de-evolved humanity, signifies the beings are in a "post" human realm.

The formulation of the word "[post]humanism" (as used here) while incorporating some elements of posthumanism as a philosophical and literary discourse, is defined in this context as the era of time coming after that of humanism; humanism being a general and broad discourse begging the question "what does it mean to be human and suffer from discontinuity?" [Post]humanism is the correspondence between the time following humanity and the philosophical and literary discourse of posthumanism and its relation to humanism. [Post]human obligates a change in the idea of sustainability and questions what is elemental to the continuation of humanity in these new realms of thought. *The Possibility of an Island* moves away from the existential crisis of the human condition as epicenter and instead examines humanity in respect to a dystopian and new, or *neohuman* future. Eugene Thacker in his essay "Data Made Flesh"

describes and more precisely classifies a particular type of posthumanism relevant to [post]humanism:

This type of posthumanism—which I will generally refer to as ‘extropianism’—is that it consciously models itself as a type of humanism. That is, like the types of humanisms associated with the Enlightenment, the humanism of extropianism places at its center certain unique qualities of the human—self-awareness, consciousness and reflection, self-direction and development, the capacity for scientific and technological progress, and the valuation of rational thought (74-75).

More precisely, [post]humanism is the time following humanity’s embrace of Thacker’s posthumanism subclass “extropianism.” It is through the character of Daniel1 in Houellebequ’s novel that [post]humanism is invoked and brought into critical discourse with the old ideals of humanism and their potential for stagnation in the future. The prophet of the religion that promises Daniel1 immortality makes the proclamation of a new future: “I am the zero point and you are the first wave. Today, we are entering a different era, where the passing of time no longer has the same meaning. Today, we enter eternal life. This moment will be remembered.” (Houellebeq 207).

Daniel24 and Daniel25 spend their bleak lives pouring over Daniel1’s narrative, attempting to comprehend their significance and existence as a *post* humanity while being in constant reference to Daniel1: “We were ourselves incomplete beings, beings in transition, whose destiny was to prepare for the coming of a digital future” (156). These “after” beings all come from the original—

they are copies of Daniel1. They refer to themselves as neohumans, but in being merely copies and originating from a being of a different age, they are more accurately defined as beings which come after humans—[post]humans. Daniel1 is represented through the copied beings that follow him. But they are all only able to mimic him and attempt to represent the man that came eons before them in an effort to imitate a continuity of being. Daniel24 writes “we no longer really have any specific objective; the joys of humans remain unknowable to us . . . Our nights are no longer shaken by terror or by ecstasy. We live, however; we go through life, without joy and without mystery; time seems brief to us” (5). Bataille addresses the fundamental problem of pursuing such a concept of copies and mimicry:

. . . try to imagine yourself changing from the state you are in to one in which your whole self is completely doubled; you cannot survive this process since the doubles you have turned into are essentially different from you. Each of these doubles is necessarily distinct from you as you are now. To be truly identical with you, one of the doubles would have to be actually continuous with the other, and not distinct from it as it would have become. Imagination boggles at this grotesque idea. (14)

The duplicity felt by these [post]humans is piercing and gradually becomes more poignant as the copies draw their understanding from their origin’s narrative. But the longer the duration of time Daniel25 spends reflecting on Daniel1’s writings, the more Daniel25’s feelings lose precise stoicism and exactitude. Daniel25 writes: “Love seems to have been for humans of the final period,

the acme and the impossible, the regret and the grace, the focal point upon which all suffering and joy could be concentrated. The life story of Daniel1, turbulent, painful, as often unreservedly sentimental as frankly cynical, and contradictory from all points of views, is in this regard characteristic” (132). The copies of Daniel1 are able to understand the world around them through the only instrument they are given—Daniel1’s narrative. They struggle to mold themselves to their only authentic human reference: “Despite my close reading of the narrative by Daniel1, I had still not totally understood what men meant by *love*, I had not grasped all the multiple and contradictory meanings they gave to this term; I had grasped the brutality of sexual combat, the unbearable pain of emotional isolation, but still I could not see what it was that enabled them to hope that they could establish between these contradictory aspirations a form of synthesis” (311). Daniel24 and Daniel25 are [post]human shadows of Daniel1. Having only Daniel1’s narrative for reference and living the duration of their lives in seclusion, they are unable to process the complexity and intricacy of their feelings. They are torn between humanism, a notion which for them represents sustenance dependent upon intimacy with other discontinuous beings and the isolation which follows.

But Daniel25’s thoughts become ever more discombobulated and hint at a fullness of sentiment that was utterly vacant in the beginnings of his narrative as he continues to dissect Daniel1’s story. Being [post]human and constantly in reference to the human that preceded him, he seeks out meaning

and validation for his existence. Like Daniel1, he turns to his body in an attempt to understand: “At every minute of my life, since its beginning, I had remained conscious of my breathing, of the kinesthetic equilibrium of my organism, of its fluctuating central state” (305). In his reflective moments and efforts to connect to someone, or something, he realizes that his only connection to the era of his life, [post]humanism, is his body. He yearns to understand humanity and the act which sustained and later caused Daniel1 to take his own life—sexuality. Daniel25 writes,

The incredible importance accorded to sexual matters among humans has always plunged their neohuman commentators into horrified amazement. It was nonetheless painful to see Daniel1 gradually come closer to the *Evil Secret*. . .it was painful to feel him gradually overcome by the consciousness of a truth that, once revealed, could only annihilate him. . . The truth, in Daniel1’s time, began to be unearthed; it became more and more clear, and more and more difficult to hide, that the true goals of men, the only ones they would have pursued spontaneously if it were still possible for them to do so, were of an exclusively sexual nature. For us neohumans, it is a genuine stumbling block. (226)

Daniel1 succumbs to the “Evil Secret,” or life lived in absolute reference to sexuality. Daniel1’s search for meaning and continuity through eroticism, is what leads him to his death upon the loss of his lover and feeling that he is too old to find another.

Daniel25 is haunted by the want of wanting. He desires to feel something towards the faded degenerate race of humanity that he observes out of his windows while attempting to comprehend the original species from which he descended. Daniel25 decides to leave the safety of his protected house and venture out beyond the barricades that enclose his small existence. Upon doing so he finally encounters devolved humanity face to face in its new form. Over the course of hundreds of years, those humans who did not look to the future or diligently work to invest their money in gene cryogenics have faded into oblivion. Though indefinite, through the narratives of Daniel24 and Daniel25 it is clear that humanity has suffered from degeneration—humanity has become animal again. The copies of Daniel1 maintain extreme levels of security surrounding their property in order to maintain distance from the “packs” of humans. In humanity’s de-evolution, isolated and with no physical contact with another neohuman, the necessity to find continuity in some *other* becomes vital for means of sustenance. Daniel25’s decision to have sex with one of the “devolved” human females is generated by his insatiable longing for understanding. Bataille writes, “There is nothing really illusory in the truth of love; the beloved being is indeed equated for the lover,—and only for him no doubt, but what of that?—with the truth of existence. Chance may will it that through that being, the world’s complexities laid aside, the lover may perceive the true deeps of existence and their simplicity” (21).

Needless to say, Daniel25 does not find what he is searching for; the outcome is nauseating and unsuccessful while leaving him more confused and distraught than before: “I knew that I

was dealing with baleful, unhappy, and cruel creatures; it was not among them that I would find love, or its possibility, nor any of the ideals that fueled the daydreams of our human predecessors; they were only like the caricature-like residues of the worst tendencies of ordinary mankind . . .” (320). Daniel25’s quest for understanding through sexual experience, like the age before him, comes to an end after this harsh and deranged event. “The stink was less unbearable but still very strong, her teeth were small, rotten, and black. I gently pushed her away, got dressed again . . . signaling to her not to come back” (319). The demise of humanity is all too severe for Daniel25 to understand humanity through means of sexuality. Thus, Daniel25 decides to press on with his journey, with only his dog Fox as his companion searching for sustenance beyond sexuality.

Throughout his narrative, the only thing that Daniel25 is able to get emotionally close to, and the only thing that makes him realize that he is capable of understanding humanity is the loss of his dog. Cora Diamond examines humanity’s relationship with animals in her essay “The Animal.” She writes, “Morality resides there, as most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals, the morality that belongs to the very finitude of life, to the experience of compassion...the anguish of this vulnerability” (396). Humanity and animal affiliation runs deeper than the feeling of protector or pity—we share a finitude, a sense of mortality with them. Along with them, we are beings that suffer from discontinuity. Daniel24 writes about his copy of Fox, “Above all, he likes me to take him in my arms, and rest like that, bathed in sunshine, his eyes closed, his head placed on my

knees, in a happy half-sleep. We sleep together, and every morning is a festival of licks and scratches from his little paws; it is an obvious joy for him to be reunited with life and daylight” (52). The obvious attachment to Fox that both Daniel²⁴ and Daniel²⁵ share is expressed liberally throughout their narratives. Daniel²⁴ begins to describe his “deterioration,” something akin to death for neohumans, and proceeds to speak of his only companion, Fox. “The advantage of having a dog for company lies in the fact that it is possible to make him happy; he demands such simple things, his ego is so limited” (5). Within each of the subsequent narratives, it becomes increasingly evident that Fox is the most crucial point and aspect in all of the Daniels’ life stories. Each description of Fox made by Daniel²⁴ and Daniel²⁵ is approached more tenderly than other philosophical and nihilistic observations. Bataille writes, “In contrast to transcendence, which designates the relation of knowledge between a subject and object “immanence” means a state of continuity between beings whose isolation and separation from each other has disappeared” (xix)¹. In Daniel²⁴’s case, his copy of Fox senses the deterioration of his master and the two creatures bond as they prepare to pass on together.

A slight cold has invaded my extremities; it is the sign that I am entering the final hours. Fox senses it, moans softly, licks my toes. I have already seen Fox die several times, before being replaced by his replica; I have known

¹ Bataille as quoted in: Van, De P.M. “Peter Atterton and Matthew Calarco, Eds., *Animal Philosophy: Essential Readings in Continental Thought.*” *Philosophy in Review* 25.4 (2005): 235-236. Print.

the closing of his eyes, the cardiac rhythm which stops without altering the profound, animal peace of those beautiful brown eyes. I cannot attain that wisdom, no neohuman will be able to attain it really; I can only get closer to it, and slow down voluntarily the rhythm of my breath and mental projections. (116)

As Daniel²⁴ describes, intimacy for the [post]human is best understood through the companionship with an animal, specifically Fox.

In Cary Wolfe's article "Exposures," he describes the thought process that has to occur in order for humanity to reach a certain understanding and meaning within the world shared with other animals: "It is not by denying the special status of 'human being' but rather, as it were, by intensifying it so that we can come to think of nonhuman animals not as bearers of 'interests' or as 'right holders' but rather as something much more compelling: 'fellow creatures'" (15). This concept of "fellow creature" can only be fully understood through the lens of the [post]human. This description of the instance of passing on shared by both Daniel²⁴ and his closest companion, an animal, is only a shadow of a critical revelation and eventual understanding in the Daniels' saga. As Daniel²⁴'s life ebbs away and as Daniel²⁵ finally makes the decision to leave his house and seek out other forms of existence, the importance of the Daniels' origins is made clear and brought into full discourse with posthumanism. Fox's existence begins to represent something deeper and far more significant than merely a companion that offers solace and company to the Daniels. In finding another discontinuous being

and subjecting himself to vulnerability, Daniel²⁵ becomes the epitome and end product of an evolutionary experience. He finally becomes that which all Daniels, especially Daniel¹ had attempted to become, a *true* [post]human. All of it is accomplished through his relationship with his dog, Fox.

This posthumanist thought is critical and reexamines the concept of the rights of animals and their treatment. The affinity between human and animal goes beyond the concept of an animal's helplessness and innocence. It is not purity that captures our attention so aggressively when met with the concept of a shared mortality. In another work by Diamond, "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy," she hauntingly describes the zenith of the comprehension between animal and human through the discourse of posthumanism:

The gaze called animal. . . 'called animal,' is important—offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man, that is to say the bordercrossing from which vantage man dares to announce himself to himself, thereby calling himself by the name that he believes he gives himself. And in these moments of nakedness, under the gaze of the animal, everything can happen to me, I am like a child ready for the apocalypse. *I am (following) the apocalypse itself*, that is to say the ultimate and first even of the end, the unveiling and the verdict. (381-82)

The gaze of the animal, like in an apocalyptic world, strips bare the remnants of what can be named "human" and redefines it

under the gaze of an animal. In Daniel25's dystopian world, he finally accepts and understands the part of himself that is human—he is haunted by the gaze of this animal and everything that it represents: mortality, love, and a deep affinity. Through reading Daniel1's history and his preoccupation with discontinuity, Daniel25 realizes that *he* is the thing that is supposed to continue. But as illumination strikes, Daniel25 chooses to reject the notion of continuity. The death of Fox generates a fullness of comprehension of the empty reality of immortality. Daniel25 embraces the distressing realization of an ultimate vulnerability, causing the full awareness of his [post]human and apocalyptic placement in time.

Georges Bataille writes, "Each being is distinct from all others. His birth, his death, the events of his life may have been an interest for others, but he alone is directly concerned in them. He is born alone. He dies alone. Between one being and another, there is a gulf, a discontinuity" (12). It is Daniel25's sense of this shared mortality which finally allows him to experience freedom within his [post]human and dystopian world. He acknowledges this haunting and ancient truth through the death of his beloved Fox. "Now I was alone. Night was falling on the lake, and my solitude was definitive. Fox would never live again. . . I now knew with certainty that I had known love, because I knew suffering" (325). This intimate connection that Daniel25 feels with this animal, this animal that shares his mortality, is what ties and associates him to humanity long past and nearly forgotten. Daniel25 laments the death of Fox: "As for me, I would continue,

as much as was possible, my obscure existence as an improved monkey, and my last regret would be. . . the death of Fox, the only being worthy of survival I had had the chance to encounter; for his gaze. . .” (336). Fox creates an axis point around which all the ideas of human and [post]human revolve. In seeing Fox as a fellow creature and something he loves, Daniel25 is finally able to accept himself as something mortal, thus, “making him human.” According to Cary Wolfe, posthumanism is an “*intensification* of humanism” (xv). This realization liberates the saga of Daniel. The epiphany of Daniel25: “Daniel1 lives again in me, his body knows in mine; his existence actually prolongs itself in me, far more than man ever dreamed of prolonging himself through his descendants. My own life, however, I often think, is far from the one he would have liked to live” (288). This is not Daniel25’s rejection of being a product of [post]humanism—he *is* human and it is the end. The suffering that causes Daniel25 to prefer death over life, causes him to embrace his mortality. Ironically, because Daniel25 embraces death, he becomes alive as a human.

The novel ends with Daniel25 floating out among the waves at sea. . . waiting for death and finitude to overtake him. Daniel25 narrates, “We had first to follow mankind in its weakness, its neuroses, its doubts; we had to make them entirely ours, in order to go beyond them” (Houellebeq 125). The discourse he represents is answered in totality through death. “A man can suffer at the thought of not existing in the world like a wave lost among many other waves. . .” (15) writes Bataille. Humanity seeks and

needs intimacy with other beings in order to experience continuity. Daniel1 finds intimacy and continuity through the fragility of sex. Daniel25, though unable to find continuity through sex, found intimacy at the fragile point of death in the “sustaining gaze” of his companion, a mere dog. The sting of fragility links both of these acts. It is only through fragility that humanity, and therefore humanism, is sustained.

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THE RED TENT

AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF EMPOWERMENT WITHIN THE
FRAMEWORK OF NIDDAH

Anita Diamant's historical fiction novel *The Red Tent* reinterprets the later half of *Genesis* by granting the women of the Bible an independent voice. While *Genesis* focuses on the experience of the Jewish patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Diamant uses *The Red Tent* to present the female perspective of these events, allowing the reader to acknowledge the matriarchs as complex characters who have

individual stories aside from being wives and daughters. To accomplish this, Diamant tells these narratives through the perspective of Dinah, the lone daughter of Jacob and one of the few women who did not marry into the patriarchal family, but was born into it, making her a direct descendant of the line of Abraham. Throughout the novel, Dinah recounts the details of her life and the lives of her four mothers, spending a substantive amount of time in an exclusively women's space called "the red tent." The red tent functioned as a place of separation where women stayed during their menstrual periods.

From a biological, physical standpoint menstrual blood keeps human life continuously moving and evolving, giving women the mechanism to produce life, and therefore families. In *The Red Tent*, menstrual blood sustains a feminine discourse inside a male-based narrative, a discourse that tends to have little voice outside of feminist scholarship. By writing their stories, Diamant calls for modern female readers to identify with Biblical narratives, which gives women a chance to feel like there is a place for them in a text that rarely grants women independent agency or personality.

While the fictional space of the red tent empowers the women in Diamant's world, it simultaneously reinforces Niddah, the Biblical laws and regulations related to menstruation. These laws are oppressive, for they imply that menstruants and therefore all women are impure. By ignoring the sexist nature of Niddah, Diamant is successful in portraying the separated, menstruating woman as empowered and simultaneously conveys the contradictory message that it is not necessary to question oppressive rituals. In addition, the empowerment that results from

this separation asserts modern feminist agency in a space that would exist in order to sustain Jewish practices, not to challenge the patriarchal system.

It is important to emphasize that the space of the red tent did *not* exist in ancient near eastern culture. While there were similar spaces in other ancient cultures most often referred to as “menstrual huts,” these spaces would not have been practical for the women Diamant writes about (Buckley et. al). As Charlotte Fonrobert explains in her study of Biblical gender, *Menstrual Purity*:

We can also observe that rabbinic literature does not anywhere indicate or allude to a practice of women’s public segregation. The literature maintains almost uniformly a careful distinction between a practice of ostracizing women or banishing them from the life of the community...this would put the menstruant into an adverse relationship to the community as a whole, and the act of separating her from the community would consequentially isolate her socially as a menstruant woman. (18)

This separation also would not have been feasible, as there would not have been enough resources in an ancient near eastern village to sustain an extra tent merely for this purpose (Fonrobert 18).

While Diamant acknowledges that her novel is classified as historical fiction, she never addresses the fictionality of the red tent in the majority of her interviews or explanations of the text¹. Therefore, many readers are left to assume that these spaces

¹ Some examples include *The Copperfield Review*’s “An Interview with Anita Diamant”, *Indie Bound*’s “Anita Diamant” and/or any of the interviews on her website AnitaDiamant.com.

did in fact exist. Because Diamant is a Jewish scholar, presumably she added this space not because she did not do proper research but rather in order to convey ideals of feminist empowerment. However, by never claiming this space as fictitious, she places 20th century feminist ideals in a space that would not have recognized these concepts.

Diamant did, however, construct the red tent as a barrier between menstruating women and the rest of society in order for women to be separated. This concept is derived from Niddah. Niddah is found in two main sources: the Bible and the Talmud. The first contains the priestly systems of purity and impurity, and the second contains the list of prohibited sexual relationships (Fonrobert 10). The word Niddah itself comes from the root נִדַּח meaning, “to depart, flee, wander,” an etymology that scholars originally interpreted as being representative of the blood itself. Eventually, however, the word came to connote the position of the menstruant herself, as someone forced to depart, flee and wander away from her husband. As Biblical scholar Jacob Milgrom claims, “Niddah came to refer not just to the menstrual discharge but to the menstruant herself, for she too was ‘discharged’ and ‘excluded’ from her society” (744-745).

The original laws that pertain to Niddah are found in Leviticus 15, the section of the Bible that contains a variety of laws on discharges and emissions such as: regulations for a man with an unclean discharge, an emission of semen that does not enter a woman, menstruation, general discharges and men who have sexual relations with menstruating women. The verses that specifically refer to menstruating women, Leviticus 15:19-23, read:

19 ואשה כי-תהיה זבה דם יהוה זבה רהבשב שבעת ימים תהיה בנדתה וכל-הנגע בה יטמא עד-הערב:

20 וכל-אשר תשכב עליו בנדתה וכל אשר-תשב עליו יטמא:

21 וכל-הנגע בהבמשכ ביכבס יובגד ורחצ במימ יטמא עד-הערב:

22 וכל-הנגע בכל-ילכ אשר-תשב עליו יכבס בגדיו ורחצ במימ יטמא עד-הערב:

23 ואם לרע-המשכב הוא או על-כלי אשר-הוא ישבת-עליו בנגערבו יטמא עד-הערב:

(*Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia* 184).

The Hebrew translates:

19: When a woman has a discharge, her discharge being blood in her body, she will be separated for seven days, and anyone who touches her will be unclean till evening.

20: Anything she lies on during her period will be unclean, and anything she sits on will be unclean.

21: Anyone who touches her bed will be unclean; they must wash their clothes and bathe with water, and they will be unclean till evening.

22: Anyone who touches anything she sits on will be unclean; they must wash their clothes and bathe with water, and they will be unclean till evening.

23: Whether it is the bed or anything she was sitting on, when anyone touches it, they will be unclean till evening.

As these verses demonstrate, not only is woman unclean because of her menstrual cycle, but she is taboo, for anyone who comes into any type of contact with her is in effect made unclean as well. Because of this, separation occurs in an attempt to have women quarantine their impurity without contaminating men. To reiterate, in the Ancient Near East women were not completely separated from their societies. but nevertheless adhered to Niddah.

They accomplished this by not touching their husbands in any form, including hand holding, avoiding surfaces where a man might sit, and sleeping in a separate bed.

Men who have an unusual discharge adhere to rituals and restrictions that to are identical to those of a menstruating woman and therefore many argue that Niddah is not sexist. These acts include polluting surfaces with their touch, being separated from their spouses for seven days and immersing in the mikveh (or ritual bath) afterwards. While this similarity does exist, there is little distinction between the rituals surrounding a woman's normal, healthy menstrual cycle and an unusual male discharge. By categorizing these two processes as similar, it implicitly states that a woman by nature is unclean, while a man can only *become* unclean.

Fonrobert claims that this idea of man becoming/women being unclean can be found in the very wording of Leviticus 15. Leviticus 15:2 and 15:19 state,

דברו אל-בני ישראל ואמרתם אלהם איש איש כי יהוה זב מבשרו זובו טמא הוא

Speak to the children of Israel and say to them, “when any man has a discharge, his discharge being from his body, he is in the status of impurity”.

ואשה כי-תהיה זבה דם יהוה זבה רהבשב שבעת ימים תהיה בנדתה וכל-הנגע בה יטמא עד-הערב

When a woman has a discharge, her discharge being blood in her body, she will be separated for seven days, and anyone who touches her will be unclean until evening.

(*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* 183-184).

With these two verses side by side, it is clear that in the case of men, the unclean substance is something unusual, a contamination that is temporary. It can leave the body, yet it is

not an inherent part of the body. For women, on the other hand, the impurity is innate, something that is in her body and inescapable.

This interpretation is also discussed in the Babylonian Talmud in Mishnah Niddah 5:1, a text of rabbinical interpretations of the Torah:

All women are in the status of impurity [when blood is] in the outer room², since it is said “her discharge being blood in her body” (Lev. 15:19), whereas the man with an uncommon discharge and the other with a seminal emission are in the status of impurity only when their impurity [appears] outside [their body].

While a menstrual cycle is a defining characteristic of womanhood as well as a necessity for survival and general health, to have an unusual discharge or a seminal emission that does not enter a woman is not essential to being a man. Therefore, to group them together under a system that calls for cleansing connotes that something unfortunate and temporary for a man is analogous to a defining characteristic of womanhood. Because of this, Jewish women who practice Niddah are taught to internalize shame and unease concerning the natural processes of their own bodies, feeling that they are innately unclean.

Using Niddah to her advantage, Diamant takes these instruments of oppression as a means to promote a female narrative. In doing so, she reshapes the way women view their menstrual cycles by reinforcing the importance of menstruation

² The “outer room” is interpreted to mean outside of the vagina. This idea of “woman as house” appears in many writings on menstruation.

to womanhood. Diamant not only makes this space a functional one, but also explains to the reader the importance of this space and the value of the menstrual cycle. The value of menstruation to the women of the red tent is depicted in a variety of different scenes, each giving the reader a sense of the importance of this process to women. For example, When Esau's daughter Tabea does not undergo a proper ceremony after getting her period for the first time, she is banished from the matriarch Rebecca's tent forever. After Rebecca screams, "You mean to tell me that her blood was wasted? You shut her up alone like some animal...I have no words for this abomination," young Dinah becomes confused, not understanding why Tabea's act was grotesque (Diamant 156). At this point, her mother sits her down and explains:

The great mother whom we call Innana gave a gift to women that is not known among men, and this is the secret of blood. The flow at the dark of the moon, the healing blood of the moon's birth-to men, this is flux and distemper, bother and pain. They imagine we suffer and consider themselves lucky. We do not disabuse them. In the red tent, the truth is known. In the red tent, where days pass like a gentle stream, as the gift of Innana courses through us, cleansing the body of last month's death, preparing the body to receive the new blood's life, women give thanks-for repose and restoration, for the knowledge that life comes from between our legs, and that life costs blood. (Diamant 158)

In this way, Diamant highlights the benefits of an act the patriarchy considers to be an impurity. Getting one's period becomes something sacred, and therefore women exclude the men from their secret, leading them to believe that women have distaste for menstruation as opposed to the true feelings of gratitude they experience.

In addition, in *The Red Tent* vaginal blood is a substance that belongs to women, one that should exist without the presence of men. Leah comments:

[Esau's women] do not celebrate the first blood of those who will bear life, nor do they return it to the earth. They have set aside the Opening, which is the sacred business of women, and permit men to display their daughters' bloody sheets, as though even the pettiest baal would require such a degradation in tribute. (Diamant 159)

In this passage, Leah is referring to an ancient Jewish practice whereby the parents of the groom would display the bloody sheets to the community after the wedding night. This was meant to prove that the woman was truly a virgin. As read, Leah views this act as vile, claiming that even the lowest of the gods would never ask for such a deed.

The women of the red tent do not only disallow their children's sheets to be displayed, but also perform a pagan ritual where they "break the lock of the womb" i.e. break the hymen of young women before the wedding night. In this ritual fashioned by Diamant, the women take Jacob's terraphim, or idols, and place one inside the vagina of the woman, allowing the woman to

experience the pain of having the hymen broken without the pressure of a man. In this way, the women of the red tent show compassion for virgins, allowing them to encounter this pain with the support and understanding of other women who have undergone the same experience. By having women take a woman's virginity as opposed to a man, Diamant reinterprets something that is viewed as a male right in Judaism as a ritual of womanhood. Similar to her creation of the physical space of the red tent, Diamant creates a ritual in which women reclaim feminine power in a male dominated sphere.

In the red tent, women form a community that educates and empowers them independently of men. The reader experiences this throughout the novel as Dinah travels from Haran to Canaan, Shechem and finally Egypt. In the majority of these settings, the red tent in that region defines her happiness and sense of belonging. For example, when Dinah was a young child, she would stay there in order to hear her four mothers' tales, anecdotes about the outside world, as well as learn practical skills such as threading wool. These stories and skills bonded women together by creating a history and culture that was particular to them. This is illustrated in a passage in which Dinah and her brother Joseph trade knowledge they have learned from the disparate traditions of men and women:

I told Joseph the story of Uttu the weaver. I told him the tale of the great goddess Innana's journey to the land of the dead, and of her marriage to the shepherd king, Dumuzi, whose love ensured an abundance of dates and

wine and rain. There were the stories I heard in the red tent, told and retold by my mothers and the occasional trader's wife who called the gods and goddesses by unfamiliar names and sometimes supplied different endings to ancient tales. (Diamant 81)

In response to this, Jacob tells her about the binding of Isaac, his father's God Yahweh, and other tales shared among men.

Because of these varied histories, the red tent creates a space where women and men inherit a specific tradition and culture completely separate from the opposite sex. For that reason, women have their own sets of oral tradition that are unpolluted by the masculine voice. Fonrobert comments:

Women may mediate it psychologically through their self-perception and their perception of other women as taught to them by the culture in which they are raised. In spite of the indirect male control, however, women's spaces may allow a consciousness of a collective gender identity to emerge. (129)

This gender identity, however, can only be recognized inside of the red tent. The minute that the women return to their husbands' tents, the secrets of the tent are not spoken of and the women again become property of their husbands as opposed to women with a unique and valuable culture. Because this history and culture can only flourish within closed spaces, the text indicates that the female voice is subsumed in the male narrative.

This gendered identity, however, is one that Dinah looks forward to, forming her self-identity most substantially within the space of the red tent. Even when she travels to other places,

such as Mamre, it is only to enter the world of female identity and to receive other sources of feminine wisdom inside her grandmother's tent. Throughout the course of her narrative, the reader sees Dinah create different bonds with this space, each reflecting not only her age but also the struggles and triumphs that women face in the world of men.

When Dinah finally becomes a woman and begins her menstrual cycle, she states, "Now I could pour out the wine and make bread offerings at the new moon [...]" (Diamant 171). For Dinah, becoming a woman is not important because she can become a bride, but because she gets to enter the world of womanhood. To a woman in the ancient near east, the event of most importance was supposed to be marriage, in which a woman transferred herself as the property of one man (her father) to the property of another (her husband). In this way, Dinah views her menstrual cycle as unlimited access to the world of women as opposed to entrance into the male social order. For Dinah, independent womanhood is more valuable than belonging to a man.

The red tent was not only a space for menstruating women, but also the site where women gave birth with the assistance of midwives. Later in the novel Dinah becomes a midwife herself, prolonging her desire for feminine bonding while assisting in the struggles and triumphs of birth. Dinah remarks:

Until you are the woman on the bricks³, you have no idea how death stands in the corner, ready to play his part.

Until you are the woman on the bricks, you do not know the power that rises from other women—even strangers

speaking an unknown tongue, invoking the names of unfamiliar goddesses. (Diamant 224)

Becoming a midwife not only continues the theme of feminine bonds, but also signifies the importance of childbirth to womanhood. It is easy to focus on the objectionable aspects of menstrual blood and ignore why women undergo this monthly process in the first place. Menstruation not only sustains health, but also provides the mechanism for new life. This is another way in which the red tent functions as a space to promote Diamant's independent agency.

Diamant's novel is successful in conveying women's empowerment because her fictional historical intervention is within an oppressive cultural context. This aspect of *The Red Tent* relates to Saba Mahmood's 2001 *Politics of Piety*, specifically the essay "The Subject of Freedom". In this essay, Mahmood analyzes the women's mosque movement, a faction of the Islamic Revival in which women taught other women the Koran and spoke about Islam inside of exclusively women's spaces. When speaking of traditional analysis, Mahmood argues:

Women's active support for socioreligious movements that sustain principles of female subordination poses a dilemma for feminist analysts. On the one hand, women are seen to assert their presence in previously male dominated spheres while, on the other hand, the very

³ In ancient times, women would give birth standing on heated bricks. These were used so that when they squatted down, gravity would assist with the birth. Also, the woman in labor would be surrounded by women who were close to her, supporting her on these bricks by chanting and reminding her that they had all gone through birth, had survived, and that she would too.

idioms they use to enter these arenas are grounded in discourses that have historically secured their subordination to male authority. In other words, women's subordination to feminine virtues...appear to be the necessary condition for their enhanced public role in religious and political life. (6)

She goes on to explain that while many feminist theorists search for how women contribute and subvert their own domination, she believes that it is important to not analyze these happenings according to the resist/subvert dichotomy, but as acts that assert their ethical agency. Citing Foucault, Mahmood writes, "Ethics is a modality of power that 'permits individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being'" (28).

Mahmood concludes that it is unreasonable to view the women's mosque movement as an act of female agency which assists women in subverting male domination. This is because even if it does create empowerment among Muslim women, they are not undergoing these rituals to upset oppressive power structures, but to manifest their own agency as pious Muslim women. While Diamant creates a space for women to express their voices and find pride in womanhood, she is doing it inside of a red tent, a structure that only exists because of the religious practices of Judaism. Even in this fictional world, women would not stay in the red tent in order to exercise defiance, they would be going in order to embody practices that assert their agency as religious Jews. The practice of going to the red tent may create a

separate, positive order for women, yet to analyze this as a power relation under the blanket of western feminist agency is to undercut the realities of the historical setting of *The Red Tent*. The red tent's purpose would have been neither to empower nor oppress women, but to grant them a space to exercise their religious devotion.

The red tent grants women independent agency within Diamant's fictional world. However, while this space serves to empower women, it simultaneously suggests that women should attempt to find positive meaning within oppressive practices without directly challenging the system of oppression itself. In addition, the all-women's space that Diamant creates in *The Red Tent* utilizes menstruation as a tool for women to become autonomous within the patriarchal system. Within this exclusively women's space, Diamant reinforces that menstruation is a healthy process which shapes cultural identity and allows women to express their voice autonomous of men. However, why should women need a separate space in order to assert their agency? Diamant's historical intervention in *The Red Tent* reclaims menstruation as an empowering practice. However, the text simultaneously endorses separation, and therefore Niddah as an acceptable, oppressive cultural practice. Because of this, *The Red Tent* encourages women to overlook and ignore the repressive implications of Niddah, reformulating them as a facet of Judaism that bonds women. Diamant's fictional historical intervention places 20th century feminist ideals inside of an ancient religious setting. It also asserts feminist agency inside of a space that would exist purely for Jewish women to piously practice Judaism, not

to upset power dynamics or create positive feminine bonds. For Diamant, this religious space is intended to create feminine bonds and sustain a female cultural narrative, yet by tacitly accepting Niddah, she condones the idea that women are inherently impure.

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Mentor: Sunayani Battacharya

FROM TYPESET TO HYPERTEXT:

STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND AND THE
FUTURE OF THE BOOK

It is difficult for even a great lover of books such as myself to describe what it is about a printed book that is so alluring. Is it the cool, planar surface of a thick hardcover, or the soft, worn edges of a favorite paperback? Perhaps the heady scent of aged paper that greets me when I walk into a used book store? It is difficult to say. But the veritable explosion of digital texts in my lifetime has given me pause. There are

both undeniable benefits and definite disadvantages that come along with converting printed materials into a digital format, which have been weighed by myself and others. Having considered this issue, I would argue that it is important for one of the primary forms of our civilization's cultural sustenance to be made available in a way that is relevant to the greatest number of its people. But by which means and with what ramifications should such a conversion take place? In order to develop an answer to this question that goes beyond mere speculation, I will undertake an analysis of a work of fiction published fifty years ago. I will use this novel to contend the following: because of the increasingly digital climate of contemporary culture, it is necessary for the book form to adapt to this changing atmosphere, just as the protagonist of Robert A Heinlein's 1961 science fiction classic *Stranger in a Strange Land* must adapt his alien cultural knowledge to human customs lest that knowledge be lost or rendered inaccessible.

As a novel written in the early 1960s, *Stranger in a Strange Land* has been situated historically by many critics among countercultural works authored by contemporaries of Heinlein. This is especially true of the novels of writers such as Jack Kerouac and Tom Wolfe, men attempting to turn the idea of the American dream on its head; the radical spirituality and social critiques present in Heinlein's work make it is easy to draw connections between it and novels of the counterculture movement. *Stranger in a Strange Land* has also been examined under the lens of contemporary spirituality, cultural consumption, and even late capitalism, and it has also been important for critics to consider

the turbulent Civil Rights atmosphere in America in the year of its publication. But just as the thematic elements of this rich text have been applied to the cultural climate of the time at which it was written, I believe it remains relevant to apply them to contemporary society. The abundance of cultural connotations that exist in *Stranger in a Strange Land*, from spirituality to prejudice to the substance of human nature, allow us to continue to pull wisdom from its pages, and its commentary on the challenges of cross cultural transmission of knowledge can be readily applied to the issue of emerging digital texts. Within this analysis, it is also possible to see the importance of iterating this knowledge and transmitting it to future generations, and I fully intend to develop that analysis throughout this essay.

Valentine Michael Smith, Heinlein's interplanetary protagonist, is raised under very unique circumstances. His parents, along with a team of fellow scientists, depart on an exploratory mission from Earth in order to better understand the Martian civilization that has been discovered. Smith is conceived during this mission, but tragically, the adult members of the crew perish during the expedition. For this reason, he is brought up by members of the Martian race and completely immersed in Martian society and culture during his formative years. Having never visited Earth, he knows nothing of humans. Therefore, when a second expedition arrives twenty years after the first, the now-adult Smith is overcome with curiosity. He returns to Earth on this second ship as a both an ambassador and as a unique specimen from Mars, but finds himself unable to understand or relate to his fellow human beings. For example, at the outset of

the novel, Smith is offered a glass of water by a nurse in the hospital where he is being held. Because water is so rare on Mars, offering water to another being is considered a solemn bonding ritual, and so the nurse, Jill, becomes a member of Smith's inner circle, and, by extension, an important character in the story. Such events occur frequently throughout the first half of the novel, as Smith consistently misinterprets normal human social interactions.

So, what does Smith's fictional story have to do with the future of the physical book? As it turns out, there is much we can learn from Smith's predicament. Although he may not understand the intended purpose of many human interactions, Smith is uniquely qualified to transmit Martian culture to humans because he is a human being himself. He has the unique perspective of one who was raised Martian, but who is capable of experiencing life in the same way that humans do, at least biologically. Those of us living in contemporary society occupy a comparable position. The digital age has come about in our lifetimes, meaning that we were alive at a time when the Internet was not most people's source of information. We have a dual perspective, just as Smith does. We have witnessed the birth of the widespread technological access that is available in Western society today, but can still identify with physical books as a source of knowledge and cultural understanding. If there is anyone qualified to predict the form that future information will take and adapt current and past knowledge to that format, it is those of us born in the early 1990s or before. We have experienced both the print and the digital world, and have established a comfortable relationship with both.

The first example of this dual perspective that I would like to bring forward from the text, though it may seem far removed from the issue at hand, is that of Smith's inability to understand the custom of human sexual encounters. On Mars, the act of sex is not a pleasurable one, and would never be engaged in for purposes other than procreation. However, as Smith spends more time on Earth, it becomes clear that sex is a very important social ritual among humans. Likewise, in our society, it has become abundantly clear that digital media is an important means of transmitting culture, and must be considered and included in any plans we make for the future. It is important for us to determine what cultural elements will be most important to digital generations, so that we may use these observations to best adapt our cultural knowledge into a form to which future societies will be receptive. In his ruminations about how best to present Martian ideology to a human audience, Smith acknowledges that sex must be incorporated, and so it is when at last he discovers the method of cultural transmission he has been searching for. Smith founds the Church of All Worlds, and one element of this church is encouraged sexual freedom among its members. This serves as a point of reference through which Smith's followers can understand the foreign way in which Martians consider philosophy; that is, as a unified whole which is mentally linked. Because they are both comfortable and familiar with their understanding of sex, Smith uses this as a gateway to mentally link his followers and bring them together into a unified group.

By using sex as a tool to reach his fellow humans, it becomes much easier for Smith to find common ground in his

teaching of Martian culture. One character, Ben, is particularly resistant to joining the body of Smith's church. It is only by having sex with one of the church's high priestesses that his eyes are opened to the potential of the "growing closer" that comes from ritualized sexual experiences in the Church of All Worlds. From there, his resistance to Smith's teachings breaks down, and it becomes easy for Smith to teach him the elements essential to the practice and understanding of Martian "spirituality". These elements include the Martian language and its inability to convey falsehoods, the discipline of patience (intoned by members of the church through the phrase "waiting is"), the benefits of ritual consumption of the dead, and even levitation and other telepathic abilities, which require an intense awareness of the world around oneself. It is crucial that we find a similar point of reference for digital generations, so that they might understand elements of *our* culture more easily. As stated previously, because those of us alive today are able to understand both digital and non-digital culture, we are in a unique position to find such a reference point. Because of their increasing popularity, emerging electronic books and hypertext may help us to match Smith's success in increasing receptivity to the most important elements of our cultural understanding.

Like Smith, as we begin to see the electronic forms the book will take in the future (e.g. Amazon.com's Kindle), it is important to observe society's receptivity to various electronic media and to incorporate the elements that garner the most enthusiastic responses into future electronic transmissions of culture. For example, in his article "Ekphrasis, virtual reality,

and the future of writing,” Professor Jay David Bolter mentions the tendency of contemporary newspapers and television news broadcasts to split up screens into multiple portions when reporting stories, displaying a website or hypertext with interactive elements in the vein of clickable links, embedded video, and Twitter feeds (Nunberg 261). News media have assumed this format in response to viewer and reader demand for a multi-faceted presentation of news, where changing graphics and/or a diverse display provide the type of information that the audience is interested in. An increased focus of news media on their websites and online content further emphasizes that hypertext, a form of electronic text that can provide links to outside sources and does not require sequential reading, is the format that readers have come to expect. Printed books, on the other hand, can only sensibly be read in sequential order and inconveniently require that the reader flip pages or switch to an entirely different text in order to access referenced content (Bornstein 53). Therefore, printed books simply cannot compete with the interactivity of hypertext. This is an area in which hypertext holds an obvious advantage over printed materials.

Returning to *Stranger in a Strange Land*, Smith’s spiritual philosophy holds an advantage similar to that of hypertext over the printed book. By breaking down the traditional hierarchy of organized religions, this philosophy offers a level of involvement that traditional churches are unable to achieve. As a prominent member of Smith’s church explains it, “We’re not trying to get people to have faith, what we offer is not faith but truth – truth they can check” (Heinlein 347). Smith achieves great success in

recruiting followers because they feel centrally involved in the life of their church. No individual feels as though they are one among a multitude of saved souls passively receiving information from some lofty authority. They are involved in a group effort to make sense of the world they inhabit, and their beliefs and what they accept to be true are formed from the combined dialogue of all the group members' voices. Solipsistic as it may be, digital media seem to be trending in a similar manner. In order to appeal to consumers of these media, it is important to provide them with a sense of being central to cultural dialogue. Like the members of Smith's church, consumers of digital culture desire not only reception of but engagement with texts, something that is lacking from traditional printed books. It is logical, then, to construct a means of cultural transmission which values the input of individuals consuming it.

As we consider the best way to create such a social environment, it would be pertinent to turn to the model of the omnipotent "Old Ones" of Heinlein's Martian race; that is, Martians who have "discorporated," or left their physical bodies, the closest idea Martians have to death. Although they have lost their physical form, they remain as a collective of telepathic voices that provide wisdom to corporeal Martians. Their areas of expertise range from Smith's expedition to Earth to art: "The discorporate Old Ones had decided almost absent-mindedly to send the nestling human to grok what he could of the third planet, then turned attention back to more serious matters...Was it a new sort of art? Could more such pieces be produced by surprise discorporations of artists while they were working?" (Heinlein

92). They also hold authority in matters of force and conquest: “The Martian race had encountered the people of the fifth planet, grokked them completely, and had taken action; asteroid ruins were all that remained” (93). The phrase “grokked them completely” summarizes the role of the Old Ones well. The word “grok,” which will be discussed in more detail later, means roughly “to understand.” It is their responsibility, therefore, to acquire a complete understanding of issues facing Martians and to judge, take action, and provide knowledge accordingly.

A common concern about the digitalization of culture, expressed by French intellectual Régis Debray, is that too many voices will have the ability to exert their influence over digital texts, and that this will cause the texts themselves to be stripped of their authority (Nunberg 145). Such a conflict has played out in the debate over the legitimacy over Wikipedia entries, which may be altered by any registered user. A similar situation is encountered in the overwhelming abundance of comments left by users on YouTube videos or blog posts. However, if we follow the example of Heinlein’s Old Ones, the presence of a multiplicity of voices will, in fact, prove beneficial. By making texts available to a global audience via the Internet, collaborators can come forward who would otherwise be excluded from the writing process.

Though it is true that not every online user can be relied upon as a legitimate source of information, the critical eye of a wide pool of trustworthy users would make errors in hypertext much more unlikely even than in the case of a printed version of a book or document. In fact, it is possible for the book to be seen

as fundamentally unsound because it is so finite (Ayers 767), whereas hypertext is in a constant state of revision and evolution in reaction to the most current information available (McGann 385). Thus Wikipedia articles that have been falsified or contain out-of-date information are flagged and almost immediately revised by its community of editors, and wildly outrageous comments can be reported and/or removed from blogs and online videos. In the same way, the Old Ones in *Stranger in a Strange Land* work as a collective whole in order to make decisions and proclaim truths that have been considered from every viewpoint. Their collective advice therefore offers much more wisdom than any one individual could provide.

Another device employed by Heinlein that supports the argument for an electronic group collective is the word “grok.” The literal Martian translation would be “to drink,” but a conceptual definition would be something more like “to understand in full/in every aspect.” It is only truly achieved by Smith and other characters in the novel once they have been receptive to multiple viewpoints and have considered an issue from every angle. Without consulting a great number of people outside themselves, it would be impossible for each individual to appraise every possible positive or negative aspect of a concept or action. This consultation is very important to Smith’s decision making process and influences his and his companions’ choices. For example, if Smith or one of his followers “groks” that a person’s behavior is malicious or morally unjust, they simply cause them to disappear. Because this action causes the wrongdoer

to cease to exist, it is not a decision that should be made lightly, and so the consequences must be understood in full before it is carried out. Group consensus is therefore very important in such decisions.

Though matters of culture may not be a matter of life and death, if we truly wish to “grok” in the way that Heinlein’s characters do, we should make use of the Internet and electronic communication as a means of sharing thoughts on, and through texts. If the outcome of *Stranger in a Strange Land* is any indication, consultation of such a collective mutually benefits all of its members by contributing to their enlightenment and ensuring they are fully informed on the issues they are considering. Further, collective dialogue stimulates interest in cultural matters, and therefore it becomes much more likely that culture as we know it now will continue to be discussed and be transmitted to future generations. This will enable our progeny to “grok” historical elements of our culture just as Smith’s followers “grok” Martian culture by allowing them to interact directly with works that had previously been made up of impenetrable blocks of text. For instance, the emergence of online forums allows not only commentary on cultural products and events, but promotes active, real time dialogue between users who would otherwise be unable to communicate due to geographical distance. The ease of communication that forums and other online spaces provide encourages the continuation of cultural dialogue. In addition, the likelihood that items such as digital texts will remain in discourse will increase, and therefore they will continue to be circulated.

In the novel, Smith experiences great difficulty expressing Martian ideology in a way that humans are able to comprehend. After years of struggling, he at last realizes that religion is the human concept that most closely mirrors what he is attempting to intimate. In this respect, in our shift from printed to digital culture, we have an advantage over Smith; we can already see what form of culture will be accepted by the culture we are attempting to reach. We already know that electronic media and texts that incorporate interactivity will become the best way to transmit our existing cultural knowledge. But like Smith, we have to determine the best way to transfer our current knowledge into this new form. His solution is to create a religion that functions as a group collective, the way the Martian race does, and it would be wise for us to form a similar, though secular, collective.

This collective structure enables the members of Smith's church to interact in such a way that no one person holds any more importance than any other. All members are invited and encouraged to engage in the group consciousness. This engages them in a way that would not be possible in the typical hierarchical structure that religious institutions employ. Similarly, allowing online users who view themselves as far removed from original authors to engage in texts in a critical way will actively engage them in cultural dialogue (Scholes 71). This widespread engagement with and discourse about texts not only has the benefit of a wider critical audience discussed previously, but will also generate new interest in texts traditionally seen as unapproachable. The information presented in books can only remain relevant if there is someone who cares to read it, and

allowing a wider pool of users to contribute to critical dialogue through electronic and online publication will make it much easier for digital generations to maintain an interest in such matters. With continued interest, a higher demand for these texts will be created, and, ideally, their circulation will continue.

There is also a real potential for the creation of new cultural artifacts from electronic sources. With the removal of the physical limitations of printing one's work, possibilities for publication open up tremendously for readers, especially in regards to works that comment upon previous publications. Every individual has a unique perspective and contribution to make to the group collective proposed previously, and the inclusion of these diverse voices in cultural dialogues can only broaden the horizons of the community as a whole. As Robert Boenig observes in his essay "Nicholas's Psalter," recorded texts are reflections of the ways in which their authors see the world (Boenig 96). With the increased production of texts via electronic mediums, this profusion of voices will reach a wider audience, and will contribute greatly to cultural knowledge as a whole. If everyday people feel as though they are able to comment on existing works or contribute to existing canon, they will be better able to relate to these texts and to provide interpretations that reach wider audiences, drawing them into cultural dialogues as well. Not every work will be of exceptional quality, of course, but if people are engaging with texts, the texts retain their cultural relevance, and continue to sustain not only the cultural knowledge they provide, but the inspiration and cultural context from which new texts are created.

Despite popular interest in digital texts as a means of transmitting culture, there exists a perception that online texts are inherently inferior to printed materials. A similar conflict arises in *Stranger in a Strange Land*, as Smith's church is seen as an inferior imitation by those belonging to traditional human churches. It is not a legitimate religion, as they see it, but a blasphemous mockery. For his supposed transgression against the sanctity of religious institutions, Smith is martyred at the conclusion of the story. He is stoned to death by an enraged mob, who object to his use of phrases such as "Thou art God". What Smith has done is taken the concept of evangelical religious practices and applied it to his own philosophy. In addition, he takes the idea of an all-knowing creator and applies it to the unified body of the members of his church. This adaptation is perceived as perversion by members of traditional Christian congregations, and they see in Smith's church a contempt for religion as they know and respect it. Heinlein uses this scene to provide commentary on the violent resistance to change that human beings exhibit, and indeed the malevolence of this angry crowd is as frightening as it is disturbing.

Though they are not known to exhibit acts of violence, similar outraged claims and resistance to change are heard from proponents of printed texts. But there was a point in time, as Provost of Georgetown University James J. O'Donnell points out, where printed texts were considered suspect as well (Nunberg 41). Because Gutenberg's printing press made books so widely available in such mass quantities, they were viewed as of a lesser caliber than a handwritten edition. The same conflict has emerged

today. Just as leather and vellum were seen as having greater permanence than a paper edition, printed materials are seen as more veritable than electronic texts. But the ease with which the information contained in books becomes obsolete, coupled with the fact that the paper they are printed on has a shelf life of only 200 years (Nunberg 43-44), makes suspicion of electronic texts unfounded. A fear of change resulted in the disastrous loss of Smith's life in *Stranger in a Strange Land*; we could face a similar loss of valuable information if we do not continue efforts to ensure current knowledge is available in electronic forms that can be stored, backed up, converted, and therefore shared among countless generations without fear of deteriorating paper. If an original printed book or document is allowed to disintegrate without being saved in another format, there will be no text to refer back to. Any discussion about the cultural information it provided will be nothing more than hearsay, and so that source of knowledge will be disregarded and lost permanently.

Of course, there are concerns about the corruption of electronic data as well. The popularity of digital formats is extremely volatile, changing and renewing as technology does every few months. Take, for instance, Apple's iPod, which has popularized mp3 devices and greatly reduced the market for CDs. Further, it is impossible to know if the data forms we use now will even be readable with future technology. Just because a digital copy has been produced does not mean it will be accessible indefinitely; digital formats are also subject, in their own way, to decay, with a typical DVD having a shelf life of only 100 to 200 years in perfect storage conditions (Bornstein 45). This loss of

access is a lesson that Smith's followers learn well: they have to face the reality of life without their primary source of knowledge, because Smith is violently removed from the form in which they have access to his mind and cogitations. But a record of his knowledge and understanding remains in his collective following, because of the telepathic link the group shares. Electronic copies of texts should function in a similar way. New versions of texts need to be frequently presented in new formats, before the old formats become unreadable, just as new generations of Smith's followers must adopt his Martian teachings before older followers disincorporate. This is comparable to the way old books must be printed in new versions before their pages crumble and their ink fades to a state of illegibility.

There is no need for society to have a fear of technology in relation to publication. The inclusion of computers has already made the jobs of publishing houses easier and more efficient. Because of the integration of technology into the publishing world, from Gutenberg's press to modern software, books have become available to an increasingly wide audience (Nunberg 299). The more easily accessible a text becomes, the more people will be able to read it. With further advances in technology, especially electronic texts, books and the knowledge they contain will continue to increase the size of their audience. But this is not to say that physical books will cease to exist, or that there will be no room for them in a digital era. It is better to think of electronic texts as University of California Berkeley history professor Carla Hesse does, as a new mode of communication that can exist alongside traditional printed books (Nunberg 32). This can already be seen with the e-books that have exploded in popularity in the

last several years. While there are those such as author E. Annie Proulx who protest that the high aesthetic value of a page in relation to a “twitchy little screen” will prevent the mass digitization of books (9), the ease with which portable e-readers such as Barnes and Noble’s Nook and Amazon.com’s Kindle can be transported by readers and the convenience of having access to dozens of volumes on one device spreads the appeal of reading to a wider audience.

Although it is impossible for anyone to predict the future, it is clear that the role of the book is changing, and will continue to change with the advance of technology. Books themselves will always have advocates, from the eager collector to the passionate scholar, and as has been discussed are in no danger of disappearing altogether. But the tastes of contemporary society have certainly acclimated themselves to a diet of digital culture, and the book form is no longer the foremost embodiment of cultural sustenance. In order to maintain the historical and cultural value of books that currently fill library shelves, we must digitize them to cater to modern society’s methods of taking in information. While it may not be an aesthetically or sentimentally appealing notion to those of us who love books as they currently exist, it is a logical one from the standpoint of cultural transmission. The technological age is already upon us; returning to a print-dominant culture is no longer an option, if ever it was. Like Smith, we must do our best to accommodate the cultural needs of a society that will share information in a way fundamentally different than our own. And like Smith, we have our inherent humanity in common with this future society that will allow us to adapt our knowledge to a form they will gladly accept and pass on.

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Jozhua Zirl is a sophomore English major who stumbled into this comparative literature program after being shown the secret handshake by a favorite professor. His extensive knowledge and love for the hardboiled and noir genres have been of absolutely no help in the writing of this paper.

Mentor: Jacob Barto

FLICKERING REALITY:

ILLUMINATING DELUSIONAL SELF-SUSTAINMENT USING
NABOKOV'S *PALE FIRE*

The seemingly harmless and essential question of what sustains a person is often the catalyst for fierce debate. Debaters, who are firmly convinced of a particular answer, rally together with like-minded colleagues to form the different factions which argue over which single reply is the most important. From these many groups, a few opinions have gained greater respect than others. Often, the realist will answer

shelter; the romantic, love; the politician, social stability; and the nihilist, that there is no answer. Rarer is the passing psychoanalyst or philosopher that suggests delusion as an important aspect in the sustenance of a person. While this interpretation may seem counter-intuitive, it is equally, if not more, valid than any of the others. Delusions can help a person feel at home anywhere, persevere through hard times, and find a place in society by giving him a sense of purpose, causing him to think he has the answer. The major flaw with delusion is that, if left uncontrolled, it can increase a person's difficulty in differentiating between internal and external realities. In Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Pale Fire*, the ability of the characters to control their respective delusions is directly proportional to the effectiveness of their self-preservation. The better each person is at maintaining his delusions, the longer he lives. Delusion, or illusion, as the two terms will be synonymous in this context, is a false and incredibly persistent belief of sometimes overwhelming conviction that is not substantiated by sensory evidence (Shengold 29).

Though there are many classifications of delusion, the characters in *Pale Fire* exhibit three distinct types as identified by Dr. Leonard Shengold, a Freudian psychoanalyst and clinical professor of psychiatry at New York University Medical School, in his book *Delusions of Everyday Life*. Aspects of narcissistic delusions, malignant envy and paranoid feelings are all exhibited in various ways by the characters in the novel and act as coping mechanisms for the difficulties that they face.

Though Nabokov would certainly not appreciate this perspective on his work, having said, “Freudism and all it has tainted with its grotesque implications and methods appears to me to be one of the vilest deceits practiced by people on themselves and on others” (*Strong Opinions* 24), the characteristics of these three Freudian delusions strongly resemble those evinced by Nabokov’s characters. However, I seek to go beyond a mere textual diagnosis of the different psychotic traits. By analyzing both the clinical and philosophical components of these fictional characters, it becomes possible to trace the characters’ shared psychological tendencies, gauge their representational significance, and determine the role language and literature have on the characters’ delusions. It is through Nabokov’s revelations of the different types and intensities of delusion that *Pale Fire*, which begins as a seemingly straightforward story, quickly increases in complexity.

Pale Fire is an experimental novel that is, ostensibly, centered around a 999-line poem of the same name written by professor and poet John Shade. Providing a foreword and extensive commentary for the poem is John’s friend and fellow professor, Charles Kinbote. The brief prologue hints at Kinbote’s eccentricity and his obsession with himself, John and Zembla, a fictive foreign country resembling Russia.

The poem, on the other hand, is John Shade’s deeply personal and emotional autobiography that also includes brief biographies of his wife, Sybil, and their only child, Hazel. Though Sybil is presented as loving and supportive, Hazel is identified as insecure and unstable. John laments that his daughter

was not gifted with an attractive appearance or self-confidence, and thus was always a social outcast despite her impressive intellect. These characteristics are what make Hazel the most volatile and short-lived character in the novel. Though she is aware of her social ineptness and poor looks, she utilizes narcissistic delusions in order to make these disadvantages seem insignificant. Narcissistic delusions can take many forms, but the purpose is always the same: to increase one's sense of self-importance, usually at the cost of respect for others. Hazel has three distinct narcissistic delusions that she uses to shelter herself from the harsh truths of her life.

The first, as Dr. Shengold describes, is "that no one really counts outside the family" (Shengold 40). Since Hazel does not have any friends, her parents comprise her entire world. John recognizes this in his poem, saying that Hazel made her nuclear family "a triptych or a three-act play / In which portrayed events forever stay. / I think she always nursed a small mad hope" (*Pale Fire* 46). By building her parents up as the only people whose opinions matter, Hazel trivializes the rest of society in order to change her perception of herself from an outcast to an idol. This excerpt also reveals the second delusion that Hazel holds. By believing that things would never change, Hazel denies her own and, more importantly in this situation, her parents' mortality. This refusal to accept one's mortality is a trait that she shares with her father, but, unfortunately, she does not use it as effectively as he does. In this instance, her inability to accept the possibility of death is merely a manifestation of her dependency on her parents.

Unlike her first two narcissistic delusions, Hazel's third is an elaborate production stemming from her fabricated supernatural encounters. As a child, she pretended to haunt her home as the ghost of her aunt by secretly moving furniture or other inanimate objects and feigning ignorance when asked if she had done it. Though her parents coerced her into giving up the ghost, as it were, she tries to convince them of another paranormal confrontation that she experienced during an investigation of an old and supposedly haunted barn for her college newspaper. Hazel uses these events to reinforce within herself the idea that she is special and someone to be envied in spite of her looks and reclusiveness. When she tries to show her parents this new ghost, however, they refuse to play along.

Their refusal is doubly devastating for Hazel. Not only is her delusion of uniqueness shattered, but the forceful disillusionment is perpetrated by her parents, the only two people she respects. Thus, the simultaneous rejection by her heroes and collapse of her delusions mean that she is no longer able to take solace in either of her fantasies. Shortly after this incident, the reality of Hazel's situation overwhelms her and she loses the will to continue living, which culminates in her suicide. Hazel's demise deeply affects John and darkens the tone of the rest of his poem.

However, once the poem concludes and the commentary begins, quite a different story emerges. While Kinbote's commentary pretends to analyze and clarify certain lines of John Shade's poem, the annotations gradually reveal themselves to be an attempt to adapt John's autobiography into Kinbote's own. At

first, Kinbote presents himself as a good friend of John's despite his wife Sybil's best efforts to keep them apart, but as Kinbote starts divulging more about himself and his relationship with the Shades, cracks in his narrative begin to show. Kinbote insists that the stories he told John about Charles Xavier, the current king of Zembla, who fled the country due to a coup, were the impetus for the poem. Eventually, Kinbote's impossibly detailed and increasingly lengthy digressions about King Charles and his escape expose Kinbote's true identity as the king himself.

Halfway through the commentary, Kinbote introduces Gradus, an incompetent Zemblan assassin determined to kill the ousted king. The specifics of Gradus' search and eventual success in catching up to his target are recounted by Kinbote, again with suspiciously intimate details that suggest an inside knowledge. Kinbote characterizes Gradus as having a deep-seated malignant envy, or hate for people whom he sees as having something that he wants. He is a man of very low intelligence who lacks the ability to comprehend the distribution of power, and "called unjust and deceitful everything that surpassed his understanding" (*Pale Fire* 152). As Freud said, "The king or chief arouses envy on account of his privileges: everyone, perhaps, would like to be a king" (Freud 33). This certainly explains why King Charles, who is above all others in rank and power, is the person that Gradus loathes most. This hatred is the reason that Gradus' malignant envy is able to sustain him with a much greater degree of success than Hazel managed to achieve with her narcissism. While Hazel was forced to rely on other people to help her maintain her delusions, Gradus has no such requirement. He

only needs someone to act as prey for his malicious obsession, and for a man of his low station and intelligence, enviable targets are plentiful. In spite of his many setbacks and dead ends, Gradus' jealousy of King Charles is what motivates him to pursue his purpose relentlessly.

In the climax of the novel, Gradus, armed with a pistol, confronts Kinbote while he is with John. Gradus opens fire and kills John, despite Kinbote's best efforts to shield him. Gradus is then overpowered and detained until the police arrive. After assessing the situation, the police file a report identifying Gradus as Jack Grey, an escaped patient of a mental institution who mistook John Shade for the judge that sent him away. Kinbote, of course, dismisses this version of events as a cover-up.

In the ensuing panic and grief over John's murder, Kinbote secures the rights to publish *Pale Fire* from Sybil. The novel ends with Kinbote pondering his next action and suggesting that he might find another town and start the whole process over again. Even after the book ends, Kinbote's delusions make it impossible to discern the truth that lies beneath his words.

Not only does Kinbote incorporate both narcissistic delusion and malignant envy into his personality, he also goes one step further and adds paranoid delusions to his already considerable list of psychotic traits. This is not entirely surprising, however, as Dr. Shengold states, "Narcissism, envy, paranoid mechanisms often occur together and, indeed, are most often blended together" (Shengold 99). This tendency for delusion to build on itself and branch out is an important characteristic. While multiple delusions can reinforce each other and act in tandem to

shelter a person from a reality that he does not want to face, it is easy for the delusions to propagate and obscure his external reality entirely, as they do in Kinbote's case.

The strongest delusions that Kinbote has are narcissistic. They drive him to steal John's autobiographical poem and turn it into what Kinbote calls "'my' poem" (*Pale Fire* 182). The commentary reveals his self-obsession to be truly all-consuming. Even on the most superficial level Kinbote is unable, or perhaps refuses, to identify with Shade's subject matter, as evidenced by his interpretation of Shade's admission of having "never bounced a ball or swung a bat" (117) as referring to playing soccer and cricket. Kinbote's inability to think of anything in terms of how it relates to anyone besides himself leads to some incredibly egregious statements. In regards to the lengthy section of John's poem in which he talks about Hazel, Kinbote is critical and dismissive, saying that it is "maybe a little too complete, architectonically, since the reader cannot help feeling that it has been expanded and elaborated to the detriment of certain other richer and rarer matters ousted by it" (164). He further proves that his delusions have overwritten his ability to empathize when he says, "What I would not have given for the poet's suffering another heart attack [...] leading to my being called over to their house" (96). It is this need to be the center of attention at all times that brings about his malignant envy.

Dr. Shengold states, "The feeling of having been deprived of what was promised – and by someone else [...] are largely those of malignant envy" (Shengold 65). The jealousy and resentment Kinbote expresses for Hazel because of her

prominence in her father's poem is one such instance. However, the prime target for Kinbote's envy is Sybil, because she has what he does not: control over John. There is no mention of Sybil in Kinbote's commentary that is not either connected to a wrong that he perceives her having committed against him or to a slight against her character. This hatred of Sybil also has close ties with his persecution complex.

Kinbote's paranoid delusion is a natural extension of his malignant envy. Since Sybil occupies the position that he covets, he views her as an antagonist. He constantly charges her with the crime of placing herself between himself and John and preventing them from speaking. While these accusations are not entirely unwarranted, he often blames her for actions for which John is solely responsible. The most overt example of this is when he claims, "She made [John] tone down or remove from his Fair Copy everything connected with the magnificent Zemblan theme" (*Pale Fire* 91). Kinbote's reliance on and obsession with John do not allow him to admit that the two of them are not as close as Kinbote believes. Therefore, any faults that Kinbote sees in John are transferred to Sybil in order to maintain the delusion of John's poetic perfection. However, Kinbote's delusions of persecution are not limited to John's family alone.

The creation of the back story for Jack Grey as Gradus the assassin is a combination of both narcissistic and paranoid delusions. Because Kinbote could not cope with the idea that he was not the target of the attack, he created a paranoid delusion in which he was. Despite his best efforts, though, Kinbote's delusions begin to wane in the face of honesty.

In the latter half of the novel, Kinbote admits with increasing frequency that his beliefs are delusions, though they come across as vertical splits in his reasoning, which occur when an isolated and sterile part of one's brain recognizes that one is not seeing reality, but lacks any ability to effect or integrate with the delusional part (Shengold 16). While Kinbote cannot reconcile his delusions with reality through these vertical splits, their increasing frequency and intensity suggest a gradual collapse of his delusions.

This deterioration begins when he admits that one of the earlier, tenuous ties he made between John's poem and Zembla is "on the brink of falsification" (*Pale Fire* 228). By questioning his strongest delusion, he weakens his entire belief system and begins a snowball effect that quickly smashes through multiple layers of his constructed reality. Shortly after this acknowledgement, Kinbote bitterly examines the fact that he was only invited to dine with the Shades three times during their friendship and was almost completely ignored each time. Then, Kinbote relates a story in which he, in jest, adds to a discussion about a delusional man, to whom Shade refers as "a fellow poet," by ironically saying, "We all are, in a sense, poets" (238).

Kinbote does attempt to rally his beliefs one final time near the end of the novel. In order to convince both his audience and himself of the validity of his story, he defends his delusions by preempting future detractors' arguments against the accuracy of his account. His delusions of persecution again show through as he claims that people will say that events happened differently

from his version, such as his assurance that Sybil will deny that some of the variations of John's poem are accurate (297).

However, in the concluding paragraph of the novel, Kinbote borders on disillusionment. He explores the idea of staging a play based on "a lunatic who intends to kill an imaginary king, another lunatic who imagines himself to be that king, and a distinguished old poet who stumbles by chance into the line of fire" (301). Though it is arguable as to whether his tone is serious or playful, the fact that he refers to Gradus as wanting to kill a king, rather than Shade, and uses his wishful adjective of "distinguished" for Shade, a minor poet, demonstrates one final vertical split in his reasoning in which he both recognizes yet still retains his delusions.

Unfortunately, while Kinbote does live to complete his commentary of *Pale Fire*, his life beyond the pages of the book is bleak at best. Since many of his delusions required the presence of John Shade as a screen for him to project them on, John's murder means the death of Kinbote's delusions as well. At certain points in the novel, Kinbote strongly defends the act of suicide and hints at committing the act himself. Shortly after Kinbote visits Gradus, or Jack Grey, in the insane asylum to which he has been returned, Gradus commits suicide with a razor. Kinbote claims that "he died, not so much because having played his part in the story he saw no point in existing any longer, but because he could not live down this last crowning botch [of killing the wrong man]" (*Pale Fire* 299).

While the latter part of Kinbote's reasoning is just another example of his ever-present narcissism, the first part is much more

telling. Not only is it accurate in regards to the true reason for Gradus' suicide, but it reveals Kinbote's recognition of the emptiness that comes with a loss of purpose. The belief that there is no point in existing after one's story is over is a strong indication that Kinbote actually does end his life after completing *Pale Fire*. Of course, Nabokov himself claims that "Kinbote committed suicide (and he certainly did after putting the last touches on his edition of the poem)" (*Strong Opinions* 74), and I would think, given Nabokov's relationship with Kinbote, that he knows best.

Thus far, the characters of *Pale Fire* have shown delusion to be a double-edged sword. Despite its ability to sustain a person through hard times, the dependency on these delusions can have catastrophic and even fatal consequences, should the delusions fail. Fortunately, this is not always the case. Hazel, Gradus, and Kinbote all represent delusional extremes. Instead of using delusions to only create a barrier between themselves and the harsh truths that they could not face, these three characters allowed their delusions to take over in an attempt to break with reality entirely. Once the tremendous sensory evidence of the outside world inevitably broke their delusions, they were completely overwhelmed by the simultaneous assault of their denied truths, like a village downstream from a failing dam.

The only character to handle his delusions effectively, and thus avoid depression and suicide, was John Shade (though his murder does mean that he was not given this option). John embraced only moderate delusions and did not try to bend his reality unnecessarily. Whereas Kinbote always tried to present

him as a famous poet, John said that his first collection of poetry “was ‘universally acclaimed’ / (It sold three hundred copies in one year)” (*Pale Fire* 58). He also refused to sugar-coat his daughter’s imperfections and bluntly related the circumstances regarding her suicide. Overall, he believed in only one obvious delusion. Like Hazel, John held the narcissistic delusion that he would not die. In his poem, he gives the aphorism, “*other men die; but I / Am not another; therefore I’ll not die*” (40). This is, generally, society’s most prevalent delusion.

As Dr. Shengold states, “We all retain differing degrees of delusional claim to personal exemption from what we also know as the universal fate” (Shengold 29). The delusion of immortality allows a person to find a purpose or significance in life that might otherwise be extinguished by the weight of knowing that his life is fleeting, and therefore, that anything that he accomplishes will have no lasting meaning. In this regard, John succeeded where Hazel failed. Hazel’s mistake was that she built her delusion of immortality on something over which she had no control and was transient by its very nature: her family. John, on the other hand, put his faith in something that he could control that had permanence: his poem.

This final, personal delusion leads into a much more universal delusion that affects all of the characters. Friedrich Nietzsche’s ideas about the necessity of illusions as a coping mechanism for the cruel honesty of life are incredibly applicable to the characters of *Pale Fire*. Nietzsche’s illusion, however, is

not merely clinical, like those previously exhibited, but one that is more inescapable, beneficial, and philosophical.

Nietzsche sees the way in which people understand the world as illusory at its core. He explains that the way people create a common language and name objects in order to communicate is arbitrary and prevents a person from truly seeing his own reality. Unlike Freud and his psychoanalysis, this comparison would have also been much less offensive to Nabokov, because this is a belief that both of them share. When asked how he viewed reality, Nabokov answered that, “You can get nearer and nearer, so to speak, to reality; but you never get near enough because reality is an infinite succession of steps, levels of perception, false bottoms, and hence unquenchable, unattainable” (*Strong Opinions* 11). However, neither Nietzsche nor Nabokov present these illusions as detrimental. On the contrary, Nietzsche often refers to them as essential. He often exhibits a fear of honesty or reality, claiming that the inability of a person to handle either one would lead to “disgust and suicide” (*Gay Science* 90). This holds true not only for Nabokov’s tragic creations, but for Nabokov himself.

Nabokov admitted that he, like John Shade, had delusions regarding his own death. In his autobiography, he “links his capacity for personal love with his need for immortality” (Shengold 33), stating: “I have to have all space and all time participate in my emotion, in my mortal love, so that the edge of my mortality is taken off, thus helping me to fight the utter degradation, ridicule and horror of having developed an infinity of sensation and thought within a finite existence” (*Speak,*

Memory). For Nabokov, love, such as his love of writing, is what allows him to delude himself into avoiding an existential crisis. Nabokov uses his delusions to expand his perception artificially and force himself to believe that all of space and time are within his control. He manages to establish and maintain this delusion through his writing because his authorial power fulfills this desire to be an omniscient and omnipotent controller.

This coping mechanism is transferred into his characters as well. Kinbote's love for Zembla, and by extension, himself, and John's love for poetry and his family are transcribed into literature in an attempt to use each character's respective obsessions to immortalize themselves in print and fend off thoughts of their own death. Kinbote's struggle to adapt John's poem into his own demonstrates this narcissistic need to have everything relate to himself in some way. This ability of literature to aid in the creation and perpetuation of one's delusions is the reason that Nietzsche finds merit in aesthetic creations, especially poetry.

Nietzsche often refers to humanity, or more specifically people who create art, as poets. He lauds their work and says, "Our honesty has a counterpoise which helps us to escape [disgust and suicide]; namely, Art, as the *goodwill* to illusion" (*Gay Science* 90). Thus, art is shown as an opposite and balancing force to reality. Professor Lanier Anderson of Stanford explains that Nietzsche understands that "art is valuable *because it creates illusions*" (Anderson 194) and references Nietzsche's belief in *The Gay Science* that art can make "things beautiful, attractive, and desirable, when they are not so" (146). However, this balance

between “objective truth” and art, or lies, must be kept in equilibrium.

Nietzsche does not advocate a complete rejection of the truth but he realizes that one cannot comprehend the entire truth of existence. A person would be crushed under the knowledge of his own insignificance long before he reached this goal. Therefore, illusions must be maintained in order to shield oneself from the general truths while at the same time providing the strength required to reach a specific truth. As Nietzsche tells the reader in his book, *The Will to Power*, “It is necessary that you should know that without this form of ignorance life itself would be impossible, that it is merely a vital condition under which, alone, a living organism can preserve itself and prosper: a great solid belt of ignorance must stand about you” (235).

Professor Alexander Nehamas of Princeton expands on this idea by saying, “[The will to ignorance] must also turn upon itself and become the will not to know that one is failing to know many things in the process of coming to know one.” (Nehamas 69). Though awkwardly worded, this quote does reveal the sustaining quality of delusions. By hiding in one’s delusions and ignoring certain truths, one can take shelter from the immensity of one’s ignorance. Thus delusion becomes a kind of curtain that one can draw in order to make oneself believe that one knows the whole truth, thus allowing one to take comfort in one’s limited knowledge and understanding.

However, if a person’s delusions are too strong, as they were for the characters in *Pale Fire*, it can be just as harmful as having delusions that are too weak. When a person stops searching

for the truth and withdraws further into the comfort of his delusions, he ends up alienating himself from society. Although a person can sustain himself in a completely delusional world, the allowance of any truth through that barrier of illusion is catastrophic. The solution to this problem lies in moderation.

Nietzsche “suggests a way to do justice to both sides—*balancing* the demand for truth against the need for illusions, as ‘counterforces’” (Anderson 205). With the right balance of delusions, one can gain enough strength and confidence to search for a specific truth without being cowed by the crushing weight of one’s ignorance. Kinbote, when discussing suicide, asks, “What can prevent us from yielding to the burning desire for merging in God? We who burrow in filth every day may be forgiven perhaps the one sin that ends all sins” (*Pale Fire* 222). The answer is found in delusions.

While the positive and negative affects delusions can have on one’s sense of self-preservation has been shown in a variety of cases, it must be admitted that the people that have been studied, with the exception of Nabokov himself, are all fictional. But one should consider Nietzsche’s question: “Of what account is a book that never carries us away beyond all books?” (*Gay Science* 129). Though the characters’ ties to the real world are nonexistent or tenuous at best, that does not mean that their actions and reactions are inapplicable to a person of flesh and blood. These characters exist in fiction, a type of literature that is, in turn, a form of art.

To Nietzsche, Nabokov, Shade, and Kinbote, the written word (particularly one produced by a poet) is the strongest facilitator of delusion. Nietzsche uses poets to describe his ideal

artists because the layers of meaning in poetry allow for readers to consciously extract their own meaning. As Anderson says, “Nietzsche is attracted to art partly because it is especially honest in recognizing its illusions as such” (Anderson 208). In *Pale Fire*, Kinbote represents an absurd combination of this idea with Nabokov’s delusion of immortality. Kinbote’s obsession with twisting John’s poem into his own embodies Nabokov’s need to include “all of space and time” in his love, but at a certain point, even Kinbote realizes that his interpretation is a mere delusion. However, while Nabokov, Shade, and Nietzsche are writing to preserve themselves, Kinbote is using the words of another to protect himself.

After Shade’s murder, Kinbote actually wears the cards on which Shade had written his poem, both symbolically and literally taking shelter in the delusion created by the literature. Kinbote describes himself as being “plated with poetry, armored with rhymes, stout with another man’s song, stiff with card-board, bullet-proof at long last” (*Pale Fire* 300). In this situation, it is not the poet who is drawn into the delusion of his art, but his reader. This ability to create delusions from literature is fortuitous. A reader can draw on work that has been written by another and receive the same benefits as the author. It becomes possible to forget one’s troubles by immersing oneself in the lives of others or incorporate literary interpretations into one’s own illusory perception, thereby strengthening it. Another important aspect in this relationship between the reader and literature is the irrelevance of both the writing’s type (fiction, non-fiction, poetry or prose) and source (from the current bestseller to the first man

to put ink to paper). Nietzsche's view of words as metaphors for reality means that reading is a personal, interpretive act, because although the words may originate from someone else, the reader understands and relates to the words based on his own experiences. However, one last word of caution. A person must be careful if he is to use literature to enhance his delusional self-sustainment. If he loses control of his delusions and engages in flights of fancy in the vein of Icarus, then he risks becoming a Kinbote.

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WITHOUT A HAND TO HOLD:

THE EXPLORATION OF BRAZILIAN CHILDREN'S FAMILY REALITY IN *CHILD OF THE DARK* AND *CIDADE DE DEUS*

Desperation, hunger, violence, murder and prostitution are some of the everyday occurrences that children experience in the favelas, shantytowns created outside the city of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. These favelas initiate the children into violence since they see and experience the manner in which the struggle for survival takes a toll on people due to the change of behavior they experienced as they enter it.

As outcasts of society, favela children become alienated from the city and as a result they have limited resources such as access to education and employment. In the autobiographical diary *Child of the Dark*, and in the film *Cidade de Deus* (City of God), children become central in the examination of the favela since they are the ones most involved in its everyday chaos. The development of the characters as gang leaders through violence is sustained by *Cidade de Deus*. *Child of the Dark* reflects the cruel reality of poverty through the eyes of Carolina Maria de Jesus, a single mother, who struggles with her children to survive the favelas in Sao Paulo. In both, the deconstruction of traditional family models and the formation of new family structures are shown through the evolution of favelas. In particular, the evolution of the characters' personalities as they take leadership roles in the gangs and spend more time in the streets separates them from their families since they do not have a connection with their parents and rather prefer the streets as their source of shelter.

The evolution of the favela can be found within the descriptions in the first scenes of *Cidade de Deus* and *Child of the Dark* and thus provide a historical context within their narrative. In both novel and film, their characters are the effect, according to their narratives, of the development of the favelas since as the favela increases its population, the violence becomes greater. In the 1960s, "Rio [had] 200 favelas with a population of 333,500 souls, a 99 per cent increase over the 1950 census. In Sao Paulo, there [were] only seven favelas, with 50,000 living there" (Maria de Jesus 8). The increase of population in these two cities was the impact of the population boom that occurred in

Brazil during the 1950s and 1960s and the increase in employment opportunities that these cities offered.

For Carolina Maria de Jesus, who migrated at an early age from “Sacramento, Minas Gerais in the interior of Brazil” (Maria de Jesus 9) to Sao Paulo, the favela represented salvation from the economic chaos that she faced. However, as she arrived to the city searching for better opportunities, her dreams were crushed as she saw the reality of the city. There were limited employment opportunities and thus immigrants found themselves alienated from the city culture. Their only alternative was to create for themselves a place where they could be accepted and that is how the favelas began. As Carolina Maria de Jesus describes in *Child of the Dark*, “The work wasn’t there. Not for all anyway, and those who couldn’t find work settled on low unwanted swamplands in Sao Paulo or on high hills in Rio [de Janeiro] and built their shacks. Thus the favelas, the slums, began” (Maria de Jesus 8). The favela was and still is the physical symbol of poverty in Brazil. This symbol is powerfully illustrated in *Cidade de Deus*, which depicts children playing soccer in a desolated area in the beginning scenes of the film. Around them, there are shacks that served as houses for families. The precarious conditions of the favelas do not permit families to establish themselves in such a way that they might thrive.

The juxtaposition of tone and image within both works brings to light the manner in which the favelas and its children learn to cope with their reality. Their reality is full of poverty and abandonment; and though they have adapted to it, it does not mean that it is invisible or non-existent. The opening of *Cidade*

de Deus is full of vibrant *samba*, a popular Brazilian form of music and dance, which sets the tone for the first images of the film, the chasing of a rooster. However, the music is juxtaposed to the reality of the favela: It is a place where a child needs to always guard him or herself from the violence that exists. The chasing of the rooster is a symbol that represents the constant chase that gang members must give, running after each other and innocent people who stand in their way. Just as the rooster needs to avoid capture, the characters of the film have to be always in motion since they want to escape their reality and create their own, and thus must constantly fight the odds of getting caught and being brought back to a reality that they want to reconstruct and avoid.

Carolina Maria de Jesus, the autobiographical subject of the memoir, *Child of the Dark*, lives in the expanded modern city of Sao Paulo, whose its luxurious buildings and prestigious citizens are out of reach for people like her. She comments in her diary, “It was Sunday and people were shocked to see beggars crowding on the *Bom Retiro* bus” (65). Carolina mentions the fact that people from the city do not really believe in the existence of people like her, who are the outcasts of society.

At the same time, children like Jose Carlos and Joao, Carolina’s sons, are the most affected under the reality of favela conditions. In her story, her children become very vulnerable to the surrounding environment. They understand that in order to survive they need to do whatever is in their power to obtain money to pay for food. As Carolina describes: “[Vera] said that she and Jose Carlos had gone out begging. He had one of the [begging] sacks on his back” (Maria de Jesus 77). In this sense, Carolina’s

children have the same experiences that other children have in the favelas; although their mother tries to protect them, they are not immune to the influence of the streets.

The anthropologist Tobias Hecht, in his book *At Home in the Street: Street Children of Northeast Brazil*, analyzes the attitudes of favela street children and hence realizes that the streets provide them with experience. One of his interviewees, Edivaldo, a street favela child, states the following: “I think I have way too much experience now. The street doesn’t have anything to offer you except experience. In the street we learn how to live because at home we get spoon-fed everything. It’s not like that in the streets” (Hecht 28). Applying Hecht’s testimonies to my exploration of both works, the fictional characters of *Cidade de Deus* have this similar behavior since their lives are in the streets. Their jobs, which for the majority are robbery and drug trafficking, transform the characters into a product of the streets rather than a product of their home environment. The home environment becomes absolute since each of its members leaves either temporarily or permanently to seek better opportunities. Also, this type of behavior is expressed within Carolina’s narrative, since children experience these reactions since they spend most of their time in the streets, and thus find themselves learning more from them than at home. The contradiction between the desire of mothers like Carolina to create a safe environment for her children and the attraction children have for the streets creates a tension that is exacerbated by the re-structuring of family systems in the favelas.

Carolina's family challenges the manner in which traditional families are viewed since she parents three children by herself and thus challenges social norms. Traditional families in Brazil tend to have either one parent working or two parents working while children go to school. In both *Cidade de Deus* and *Child of the Dark*, the child characters also contribute to the family's income since they go into the streets to work.

In this way, these creative works mirror the actuality of life in Brazilian favelas. As described in *Child of the Dark*, families undergo a transformation within their environment in order to survive. According to the narrator, "Sometimes families move into the favelas with children. In the beginning they are educated, friendly. Days later they use foul language, are mean and quarrelsome. [...] They are transformed from objects that were in the living room to objects banished to the garbage dump" (Maria de Jesus 39). The family structure breaks down within the chaos of the favela society, which means that there are no rules or a set behavior for the children to follow. Rather, they are immersed in an ambitious reality. Economic stability becomes children's and parents' number one concern, leaving the family as the last priority. Children are required to go in the streets and support their families since all incomes are necessary in order to survive. In *Cidade de Deus* and *Child of the Dark*, all of the young characters go to the streets in order to find some type of income and thus reflect the reality of the working class favela members in both cities.

Because they are also breadwinners for their families, Vera, Joao, Jose Carlos, from *Child of the Dark*, and Lil Ze, from *Cidade*

de Deus, are able to create their own world. In Carolina's diary, her children have an independent life separate from their mother. As she goes into the streets, her children Vera, Jose Carlos, and Joao have a completely different conception of the world around them. They see violence in every instance of their lives and this violence becomes part of who they are. Joao, for instance, has been accused of sexually abusing his two-year old neighbor. As she narrates, "She told me that Joao had hurt her daughter. She said that my son had tried to rape her two-year-old daughter and that she was going to tell everything to the Judge" (Maria de Jesus 79). Throughout the narrative there is no clarification about this statement. Rather, Carolina accepts that in fact he has attempted rape. The matter is handled as part of normal daily life occurrences as if were almost natural that this type of event were to unfold.

This specific moment in the story can also be translated into research done about the type of character that favelas create in the children. As explained by Hecht, children who grow up in the streets do not distinguish between the levels of violence that exist; rather, they follow their instincts because they see themselves as adults (Hecht 12). There is no distinction for them between childhood and adulthood since the first has not really existed for them. In the same manner, in *Cidade de Deus*, the children involved with gangs seem to see gangs as part of a natural progress due to the lack of connection to their families. These children do not have a stable family system; and thus, find refuge in the streets. In both works, the reflection of the struggle of families to preserve their connection in the favelas becomes tainted due to the lack of economic stability. Through the literary

lenses of these two works, children become disconnected and thus find a connection in the streets since the favela streets gives a place to develop and grow. They receive instruction in order to how to perform in the real world; something that their parents have not been able to provide them.

A “favela personality” as explored in detail in *Cidade de Deus*, consists of a rebellious attitude and desire to obtain power within the favela. This applies especially to the people living in *Cidade de Deus*, who are surrounded by an environment that prohibits them from accessing resources necessary for their development as members of Brazilian society. As explained by Janice Pearlman in her book *Favela: Four Decades of Living on the Edge of Rio de Janeiro*: “For the children, born in the city, the quest was for higher education, for getting out of the favelas, and for a sense of recognition and respect...Their particular challenges are finding work, avoided being killed, and finding respect” (Pearlman 339). Yet these children are forced to create their own environment with the lack of means that society has granted them. This problem is reflected clearly in Rio de Janeiro, where the hidden reality of the favelas (Muir, *Studying City of God*) is not commented on in mainstream society. The film *Cidade de Deus* thus becomes a window through which the narrative of favela children comes alive. Though fictional, the film accurately documents their loss of innocence at the hands of violence as well as reshapes the manner in which the family is portrayed. The traditional family model becomes fragmented and reconstructed and leaves space for children to seek another refuge to call home.

In both works, the constant theme of alienation does not only explain the favela as being a world of its own but also explains the alienation of the family concept in the minds of children. This alienation becomes complex as children explore the possibilities of “making” it in the streets. There is a powerful dichotomy that exists within favela children: family vs. street. In *Cidade de Deus*, the character of Shaggy struggles to find his place at home since he feels that the streets provide him with more opportunities to become economically stable. However, when the streets become rough, he believes that home is his place to go. As such, it is very difficult to differentiate these two themes since children spend their lives going back and forth between the two. As described by Hecht, favela children stay in the streets because they feel that they have more possibilities there. As one of his interviewees responded: “On the one hand it’s better because I eat. I fill my belly, and there’s still more left over, but not at home. At home I even gobble up the plate” (Hecht 55). In that sense, being in the streets provides children a better home where they can have a better opportunity to fulfill their necessities.

On the surface, the disappearance of the paternal figure within the favela children’s daily lives does not affect them since their parents do not provide them with any of the resources for their survival. In *Cidade de Deus*, there is a similar situation with two of the main characters, Bene and Little Zé, who belong to the most powerful gang of the Cidade de Deus favela. These two do not have a sense of family unity, except for each other, since they have worked in the streets together from an early age. They do

not have a connection with their families, and there are rarely scenes with their families in the film; rather, their sense of family unity stems from each other.

In contrast to the narrative of Carolina Maria de Jesus, the narrative of Rocket in *Cidade de Deus* offers an inside view of the cycle of violence and its impact on children who belong to the gangs. Rocket is the eyes of the story since he reports the events that have unfolded in the Cidade de Deus favela. The younger brother of Shaggy sees the destructive path that children go through due to the violence that exists in the favelas since his brother fell into the hands of the favela gangs and died trying to leave it. Children in this film learn how to survive the favela, yet once outside, they are not considered to be *gente*, people. In a society that is supposed to provide shelter, its most fragile and defenseless members are not protected; rather, they are transformed into the enemy. As Pearlman discusses, favelas and its inhabitants are not in themselves “problematic”; what becomes problematic is the lack of intervention of the government and its laws that prevent the favelas from being part of society. In this way, *Cidade de Deus* becomes a pathway for understanding the problems that exist in Brazil, in the inequality that prevents people from integrating into the larger society, especially children. The rupture of traditional family structures is a consequence of the dehumanizing conditions of the favelas, in which people are not ‘suficiente gente’. The fact that parents and children are both described as parasites of society creates a separation between these two, since their parents are also trying to figure out their place in society.

Unconsciously, in *Child of the Dark*, Carolina describes the way her children become attracted to the dangers of the street as she observes that they spend the vast majority of their time there. The children of Carolina Maria de Jesus go to the streets out of necessity, but once there, they find themselves attracted to what they find there, despite dangers. She describes a moment where her son, Jose Carlos, breaks the window from a factory. “I went to see the window. It was broken [...] I asked Jose Carlos what he was doing there, walking around like a tramp looking for trouble” (Maria de Jesus 150). Carolina fails to realize the exposure that her children experience in the streets while they collect paper. In her mind, she believes that her children ought to behave with dignity; they ought to be respectable “poors.” However this is not the case, since she also remarks: “favela children of fifteen stay out as late as they want. They mess around with prostitutes and listen to their adventures” (Maria de Jesus 24). Carolina is critical of the way favela children grow up without realizing that her children also run the risk of becoming like them. There is an attraction towards the freedom that exists within the streets, that children find alluring.

Cidade de Deus shows a different side of favela children that involves self-corruption in order to survive the violence and stay alive. A confrontation between the characters of Blacky, one of the most prominent gang members in the Cidade de Deus favela, and Lil Zé, unravels as part of Lil Ze’s plan to take over Blacky’s drug business. Lil Zé, who “always wanted to be the boss of Cidade de Deus,” (Muir 67) decides to confront him by ambushing him in his apartment, shooting him in the leg and letting Blacky live

with the condition that he will work for Lil Zé. In this moment, the character's personality transforms. He becomes tainted through the power that he obtains within the streets. As Rocket describes, "He was prepared for anything" (*Cidade de Deus*). His self-dignity is overshadowed by his thirst for more power and money. Lil Zé constructs a drug empire and begins to kill everyone who stands in his way. The streets have taught him that in order to "get what he wants" the ends justify the means. He recruits children in order to serve him as messengers, and trains them to commit murder and perform robberies; in that way he preserves the essence of the favela, a place where children do not have an established home or family, but they have the streets to serve them as parents.

The fact that, in the streets, children can control their lives empowers them to continue living there. Favela children are aware of their position within society through the marginalization that they experience. In a society that is supposed to provide shelter for its children, we see that the favelas reflect the opposite, and so the children create a separate world: a favela society. As described by Janice E. Perlman's *The Myth of Marginality*: "Paradoxically, the characteristic way to handle the dread of these masses is to profess a desire to integrate them into the very system which is producing the social and economic situation called 'marginalized'" (Perlman 92). Children seek the freedom that society does not give them. The story of Little Zé, who is barely eighteen, is a story of power and control. As mentioned earlier, Little Zé has committed many murders and robberies, and passes down these crimes to other children. His thirst for violence comes from the fact that he sees it as the only path for people to realize

who he is. For instance, he kills in front of the public “for people to respect him.” (Muir 66). Yet this respect is only gained through fear. As a consequence, Little Zé believes that he can control his life and the people around him because his status as a favela gang member provides him precisely that. His thirst for violence is the result of marginalization and he sees it as the only way that he can be the king of the favela and continue to manipulate people.

Child of the Dark can be understood as providing background for narratives and films like *Cidade de Deus* because it creates a platform for understanding why there is a permanent stage of violence in Brazil in the 1970s. *Child of the Dark* unfolds during the 1950s through the 1970s in Sao Paulo when the city was experiencing a population growth in the favelas, which continued to increase throughout the next decades. From below a 1% percent increase from 1950-1960 to a 5.24% increase from 1964-1971, the favela became the most prominent place where immigrants would come to start a new life in the city (Lloyd-Sherlock 291). Because of this, *Child of the Dark* illustrates not only the stage of poverty in Sao Paulo, but also the problems poverty will create in the future, such as the increase of street children, child gangs, and the increase of drug trafficking, which spreads to other parts of Brazil, such as Rio de Janeiro. All these future occurrences will happen in *Cidade de Deus*, in which all its characters are involved directly and indirectly with the violence that exists in their favela. The characters of Lil Zé, Bene, and Rocket have either committed crimes or have been exposed to violence; violence that has gradually developed as a consequence of population growth. This has affected the manner

in which favela families survived since their children must leave their homes in order to become emancipated from the burden of being poor.

The children in the favelas endure the hardships that their lower class status has given them. During this time period, second, third and fourth generations of favela children found themselves challenging this pre-determined life of economic misfortune. They do not accept their destiny to become paper collectors, as previously seen in *Child of the Dark*, and they want to have access to more than their parents can provide. Though they are marginalized in society and are described as a “public scandal and public nuisance” (Scheper-Hughes 240), these children become the face of the favelas. In *Child of the Dark*, Carolina’s children live in the midst of the violence and crimes that happen right in front of them, and even though they are young, their lives are often tied with these types of occurrences. Their attraction to the streets, due to the freedom that it provides, leads them to become involved in gangs and slowly earn the respect of other favelas, as in the case of *Cidade de Deus*, through the crimes they have committed and the fear that they impose on others. Their families are in the streets, where they find the economic security and can obtain the goods that their other family cannot offer them. In that sense, both *Cidade de Deus* and *Child of the Dark* are narratives that tell the stories of children who are prevented from being children since the care and shelter that families ought to provide for them are sacrificed by the struggle for survival. These children are abandoned because their families cannot compensate for a society that has failed to help the favelas and its children.

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