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The Criterion

**An Undergraduate Journal of Literary Criticism
The 2021-2022 Academic Year**

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***The Criterion* and Sigma Tau Delta Advisors**

Professor Kyle Frisina and Professor Jennifer Reed

The Criterion

Acknowledgements

The Criterion is a small journal, open to all English majors and published following the spring semester of the Academic year. This year, we are excited to feature a much wider range of essays. Because of the extenuating circumstances of the pandemic, we are to feature unpublished essays from the 2020-2021 academic year in addition to new essays accepted in this year's submission period. Therefore, this edition of *The Criterion* represents papers from as early as Spring 2020 to as recent as Fall 2021. This year, we also opened submissions up to any student in any literature course, including English and Studies in World Literatures. Further, for this edition's cover, we wanted to create something collaborative that was representative of the English department, the role of community, and the impact that literature has had on all of us. We solicited words and phrases from English professors and students that represented what studying literature meant to them and arranged them into a word cloud in the shape of a book.

The editorial board is staffed by English students who are members of the Nu Chi chapter of the Sigma Tau Delta honor society. We extend our thanks not only to this year's editorial board but to those who staffed the journal last year. But, as with most endeavors, publishing this journal would have been impossible without the help of many people. In particular, we extend our thanks to Professor Frisina and Professor Reed for ensuring that the journal continued for another year. We also thank all the professors of the English Department, who not only continually foster an environment of excellence and academic inquiry, but who encouraged students to submit their essays to *The Criterion* as well. Even in such unprecedented years, their tireless guidance and support ensured that English students could produce works of quality, which consequently made the process of selecting entries such a hard task. We are grateful for Elise Saad, who advertised the publication within the department. We also extend our thanks to all the students who submitted work this year, without whom, this journal would not exist. Additionally, we thank Lisa Villa of Dinand Library for all her help in uploading the journal onto CrossWorks, allowing the journal to be published online.

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Abstracts

Gawain, Women, and the Hunts: How the body influences human-animal relationships in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

Meghan Gavis

College of the Holy Cross Class of 2022

In the narrative poem, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, women and animals appear, on the surface, to function in a quintessential medieval sense — as physical objects to bolster Sir Gawain’s chivalric image. However, the dynamics between women, animals, and Gawain in this text challenge the human hierarchy presented by other medieval standards. By reading the ritualized hunts as devolving in honorable attention to the animal body and mapping their language onto the Lady’s temptations in Gawain’s bedroom, a feminine reclamation of the body appears. Though Gawain undercuts the Lady and Morgan by reducing them to physical presences, the women conversely use the girdle trick to trap Gawain into selfish regard for his own body and permanently mar his image. By emulating the hunt and butchering of the animals, instead of their associated virtues, the women not only heighten the narrative’s sense of physicality but dissociate the female and the animal with the virtuous knight. Instead of firmly placing the chivalrous identity above the body, this text depicts, in tension, marginalization and power derived from both female and animal bodily forms — a human-animal hierarchy in flux.

Women, Writing, and Storytelling in Medieval England and *The Canterbury Tales*

Sadie O’Conor

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For a woman to succeed in an academic sphere, it is never enough for her to be clever-- she must be brilliant. “The Second Nun’s Tale” in Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* explores the metaphorical brilliance (in sexual purity, intelligence, and faith) of St. Cecilia. The tale is also a mechanism for the Second Nun to advocate for her own vocation of “holy work,” for the sake of the learned religious women who preserved such writings. The themes of her tale are quite different from those espoused by the Wife of Bath, but the Wife also argues to have her voice heard using similar narratorial techniques. The worldviews of these characters are strikingly similar to two real women who gave us some of the earliest known English literature: mystics Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe. This essay explores the Second Nun and the Wife of Bath, using in-depth analyses of their descriptions and tales to connect to the real world. In medieval England, educated women could take charge of their narratives, but often only by navigating cultural bounds of sexual purity and spiritual knowledge could they prove their true brilliance. I draw parallels between Julian of Norwich and the Second Nun/Cecilia, who exemplify education and spiritual authority via a pure religious life, and between Margery Kempe and the Wife of Bath, who are boldly grounded as women of the world. Though their education and writings are different, they are proof as bright as day that medieval women had something important to say.

Shakespeare's Staging and the Self in the Sonnets

Xiani Zhu

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This essay examines the theatricality of Shakespeare's young man sonnets and how he uses the "stage" as a shortcut to deliver abstract ideas such as the concept of beauty, time, and love that are otherwise difficult to express. On a micro level, he frames each individual sonnet as a stage, where each specific setting and scenario allows dramatic tension to arise between the characters on stage, and from there, abstract ideas and emotions are naturally presented without being directly stated. On a macro level, the entire young-man sonnet sub-sequence—being in love with a beautiful young man—itsself is used as a stage. On this stage, Shakespeare's poetic self-consciousness and anxiety as a poet naturally reveal.

18th Century Theater and the Legitimacy of the Lower Classes

Nina Masin-Moyer

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18th century theater developed alongside the expanding role of the lower and middle classes. George Lillo's working-class tragedy *The London Merchant* and John Gay's comedic satire *The Beggar's Opera* exemplify how both drama and comedy can bring awareness and legitimacy to the struggles of working-class people. *The London Merchant* uses cultural references and religious language to elevate the struggles of its titular merchant's apprentice whereas *The Beggar's Opera* uses language of honor and nobility to draw parallels between the criminal underground and high society, both in service of using the medium of theater to acknowledge the middle and lower classes' power.

Letting the Cat Out of the Wall: Irrepressible Perversity in Poe

Kelly Gallagher

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This paper examines several short stories by Edgar Allan Poe that feature the motif of immurement, the practice of imprisoning a victim within walls. Poe uses immurement in "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart" to suggest psychological suppression as the narrators physically hide their victims while simultaneously hiding their own self-destructive natures, which he refers to as "perversity." His stories "The Imp of the Perverse" and "The Cask of Amontillado" convey that attempting to suppress one's capacity for self-destruction only guarantees self-destruction. Poe's motif of immurement demonstrates how human beings tend to ignore their inherent perversity, but his stories reveal how this denial of perversity leads to self-destruction.

“His own was ampler:” Dickinson and Whitman’s Sunset Poetry

Devyn Forcina

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Although they are utterly dissimilar poets, Dickinson and Whitman made sunsets frequent subjects of their work. Dickinsonian sunset poetry attempts to imitate the natural phenomena and evokes tension and competition. A kind of closure is forced upon her unwilling speaker, who struggles against the inevitable ending of the day. In contrast, Whitmanian sunset poetry sings and celebrates the finale of the setting sun and delights in the cyclical nature of time. While Dickinson acknowledges the temporary quality of a single sunset, Whitman rejoices in their immortal occurrence. Both poets preserve the imagery of sunsets as photographers would, while imbuing them with intimate meanings.

The Author of a Fictional Slave Advertisement

Nathaniel Jablonski

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Colson Whitehead’s 2016 novel, *The Underground Railroad*, describes the adventures of Cora, a runaway slave from a Georgian plantation. Although a historical entity, Whitehead’s railroad deviates from history’s figurative railroad to a physical one. While Whitehead’s interpretation of the underground railroad is divergent from historical fact, he still grounds his work with the inclusion of all but one authentic runaway slave advertisement. My focus within this essay is centered on Whitehead’s final advertisement, which is for Cora. In examining the poster and the unique characteristics of Ridgeway (the slave-catcher), Homer (Ridgeway’s companion), Cora, and Terrance Randall (owner of the Georgia plantation), I attempt to determine the author of the final slave advertisement in *The Underground Railroad*.

Injustice in Childhood: *Jane Eyre* and the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

Christian Barkman

College of the Holy Cross Class of 2023

Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and Frederick Douglass’ *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, are autobiographical novels narrated by the fictional Jane Eyre and the very real Frederick Douglass. Both stories evoke an outpouring of pity for their respective narrator: Jane, for the unmerited abuses dealt against her by family and school administrators, but most of all Douglass, who reserves the greater portion of lament on account of his dreadful persecution under the evil of slavery. The environments Jane and Douglass inhabit throughout their childhood inflict an immense burden on their physical body and psyche. This essay specially examines the violent and alienating childhood trauma endured by Jane and Douglass. In this unlikely comparison, the rottenness of injustice remains universally palpable.

Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* Read through the Conceptual Prism of "Tethers"

Sarah Street

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Marilynne Robinson's novel, *Housekeeping*, follows her central protagonist, Ruth, her sister Lucille, and her aunt Sylvie as they work to establish their place up against a greater surround. This paper attempts to read the novel through the conceptual prism of the word "tethers". I argue that the characters' relationship with the surround shifts as they work through their trauma and grapple with the notion of impermanence by reconciling with both those things that tether them, those tethers that do not exist or have been released, and the tethers from which they want to break free. Ultimately I argue that the "tethers of need" that make the characters human is fundamental to how they understand their position and relationship with an unsympathetic environment.

Gawain, Women, and the Hunts: How the body influences human-animal relationships in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

Meghan Gavis

College of the Holy Cross

▲ s Sheila Fisher bluntly puts it, “women can make and unmake men” in medieval texts (“Women” 161). In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, it seems animals help “unmake” men too. This “unmaking” manifests in subverting Gawain’s famed chivalry, defined by honesty and selflessness. The three hunts of the doe, boar, and fox, while fortifying the masculinity of the huntsmen, indirectly threaten Gawain’s honor. Though the bedroom and hunt scenes occur simultaneously without explicit communication between them, the Lady borrows from the hunts to model her temptations and coax Gawain into behaving with dishonorable self-interest. The relation between the bodies of the women and of the beasts allows for Gawain to reduce the presence of women as well as for the ladies to fortify their power over the masculine sphere. In aligning with the increasing individual attention and diminishing ceremony of the animal hunts, the women of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* undermine Gawain’s chivalric identity. The simultaneous marginalization and power of the body — female, male, and animal — present a human-animal hierarchy in flux and grounded in associations between human and animal forms.

A prominent reading of the text, that the hunts directly correspond with Gawain’s evasion techniques, is flawed, and the animals can be more reasonably related to the Lady. Though some readers see a connection between Gawain’s behavior and that of the hunted animals, a clear parallel between each bedroom scene and hunt does not exist. As Avril Henry puts it, “Gawain does not seem to manifest the terror of the hunted hinds, or the ferocity of an embossed boar, however appropriate the fainting of the fox” (187). Peter McClure suggests that the animal’s behaviors are models of what Gawain is meant to ignore. This can be seen, as Gawain resists the impulse to “quiver with dread” like the doe and chooses to “openly ask” the Lady’s purpose in sneaking into his room (McClure 377). In fact, it is easier to see the Lady borrowing from the hunted animals as opposed to Gawain. She enters the knight’s bedroom with a “slyly made sound, . . . most quietly and craftily closing the door,” demonstrating a foxlike approach (1982-88). In the third temptation scene, the Lady’s seductive dress shows her more daring and physical flirtation, “her neck was naked,/ and her

shoulders were bare to both back and breast” (1740-1741). In a weird similarity, the boar’s “impenetrable shoulders” are his best defense against the advancing hunters, while the lady’s naked shoulders aid in her pursuit of Gawain (1456). Again though, the Lady’s emulation of the animals does not exactly align with the simultaneous hunts, prompting the texts to be analyzed in a different way.

As Henry proposes, reading the text “vertically” reveals the hunt’s progression from collective to individual effort. According to Henry, reading “vertically” signifies evaluating the progression of the hunts instead of focusing on the virtues or behaviors attributed to the animals (188). When read in this manner, the hunts progress from a group affair to a more individualized relation between a single animal and hunter. In the most obvious sense, the hunts begin with hundreds of huntsmen and hounds rounding up herds of does. The second hunt features a more singular relation between the hunter and hunted, as only one particular beast is pursued, rather than a species. Though remains the detailed imagery of many hounds descending upon a single beast, the boar is killed personally by Lord Bertilak, “the moment they clashed the man found his mark,/ knifing the boar’s neck, nailing his prey,/ hammering it to the hilt, bursting the hog’s heart” (1592-93). Not only is the boar dispatched by a single blow from Lord Bertilak, but is referred to as “his,” prey, emphasizing a personal (as opposed to collective) relationship between hunter and animal. This individualized relation is made more prominent by Bertilak’s dismount and unhanding of his horse (Henry 190). The final hunt displays acute attention to the fox, as he is named “Reynard” after the “trickster hero of the *Romance of Reynard the Fox*” (Badke). Not only is the fox named but haggled, “Here he was ambushed by bushwhacking huntsmen/ waiting with a welcome of wounding words;/ there he was threatened and branded a thief,” (1723-25). Far from the mass prey of the first hunt, the fox seems targeted specifically, through physical and verbal pursuit.

The regression of individual attention to the animal bodies presented by the “breaking” scenes marks the diminishing ceremony of the hunts. The first hunt concludes with the extraordinarily detailed butchering (or breaking) of the hinds, “Then they clasped the throat, and clinically they cut/ the gullet from the windpipe then garbaged the guts.../ Then the beasts were prized apart at the breast,/ and they went to work on the galloching again,” (1335-40). Though this hunt was understood as an emblem of collective pursuit, the precise carving of the hinds suggests a focus upon the individual corpses of the does. While there are hundreds of hinds being butchered by as many huntsmen, at times individual bodies are described as being broken by several men, seen in the short phrase “*they clasped the throat.*” Though a mass butchering is undertaken for the hinds, their skinning is wrought with individual, clinical attention. The butchering of the boar displays a reduction in ceremony, even as the physical hunt is more individualized. The widespread precision of the breaking of the hinds is replaced

by a single butcher acting with markedly less care, “First he hacks off its head and hoists it aloft,/ then roughly rives it right along the spine” (1607-08). The words “hacks” and “roughly” denote a more haphazard method of butchering. In a formal sense, the number of lines dedicated to describing the boar’s flaying is ten to the does’ nearly forty, tracing a diminishing sense of importance. The final hunt of the fox demonstrates the most unceremonious depiction of butchering yet. The only mention of the breaking fails even to show the meat or body of the fox, “Then red fur rips — Reynard/ out of his pelt is prized” (1920-21). The noticeable lack of exactness in the fox’s breaking apart clashes with the increased specificity of the hunt. Though the fox is given a name, there is no specification of the butcher, completely lacking a pronoun to denote the identity or even number of hunters.

The regression from a highly ritualized to imprecise butchering demonstrates a shift from honorable to dishonorable focus upon the animal body. The initial hunt of the hinds depicts a properly ritualized hunt that “recruits all present as active participants” (Crane 104). Within this ritual, the fallen prey is cut up with collective precision (Crane 106). However, as the sense of cooperation breaks down, and emerges greater connection between a single hunter and beast, the butchering process loses its ceremony. It seems attention to the individual body is honorable when in a collective, ritualized frame. As the hunts become increasingly specific between hunter and animal, focus upon the body becomes dishonorable.

Mirroring the hunts, the Lady progresses from general flirtation to a focused attack upon Gawain’s character, attacks deflected by Gawain’s courtly speech. Upon first entering the bedroom, the Lady showers Gawain with praise of his “princely honor” and offers the prospect of sex, “You’re free to have my all,/ do with me what you will” (1228,1237-38). The knight deflects these advances by politely diverting attention to the Lady. He counters, “I’m not nearly such a noble knight/...you are kind and the fairest of the fair” (1242, 1264). The first bedroom scene closes with the Lady’s questioning of Sir Gawain’s identity saying, “I know that Gawain could never be your name.../ A good man like Gawain, so greatly regarded,/... could never have lingered so long with a lady without craving a kiss,” (1293, 97, 99). Here the Lady begins to transition from courteous flirtation to a more focused approach. Though she calls Gawain by name, her remarks read as more good-natured than an attack upon his character. The following day, though, the Lady begins her visit with more direct doubt of Gawain’s identity, “If this is Gawain who greets me, I am galled/ that a man so dedicated to doing his duty/ cannot heed the first rule of honorable behavior,” (1481-83). While again the Lady only speaks of a kiss, her questioning is focused upon his adherence to chivalrous virtues in her mention of “duty” and “honorable behavior.” She again invokes chivalry when asking the knight to

teach her of love, directly challenging Gawain's failure to proffer education on the subject:

...yes, how can it follow
that twice I have taken this seat at your side
yet you have not spoken the smallest syllable
which belongs to love or anything like it.
A knight so courteous and considerate in his service
really ought to be eager to offer this pupil
some lessons in love, and to lead by example. (1521-27)

Her speech instead of flattering becomes more inflammatory. Her use of the word "ought" implies a sense of duty, duty that Gawain has failed to fulfill. She pairs claims of Gawain's virtue against disbelief of his chivalry, seen by the words "courteous and considerate" succeeded by her doubtful "ought," and exemplified in her question "Is he actually ignorant, this man of eminence," (1528). The adjacent placement of contrasting evaluations targets Gawain's character and throws it into uncertainty, mimicking the sharp attention of the second hunt. However, the knight continues to use courtly speech to deflect the focus from himself, asserting the Lady "has more insight and skill/ in the art" than he does (1542-43).

Through the individualized progressions of her temptations, the Lady coaxes Gawain into focusing first upon his character and then upon his body, ultimately causing him to act dishonorably. In the final bedroom scene, the Lady succeeds in getting Gawain to focus upon his own image. She so challenges him, the knight is forced to defend his identity with words akin to vanity, "But I would not wish upon you a worthless token,/ and it strikes me as unseemly that you should receive/ nothing greater than a glove as a keepsake from Gawain" (1805-07). Though this comment is certainly flattering to the Lady, Gawain's use of the third person implies an underlying self-importance (Henry 191). At the end of the scene, the Lady succeeds in pushing Gawain into acute focus upon himself by tempting him with physical protection. By presenting an allegedly magical girdle that grants the wearer immunity from physical harm, the Lady traps Gawain into the self-importance she had projected upon him throughout the temptations. When read parallel to the hunts, the Lady echoes the animals' increased individualization by targeting Gawain's identity. He had artfully escaped these attempts during the first two temptations, but slips into concern about his body. This slip mirrors the de-ritualized breaking of the fox. As his responses become less informed by chivalry, less deflective to the lady, the knight follows the "narrowing of focus and reduction in dignity" presented by the hunts (Henry 191). In the parallel scenes, the individual — as opposed to the ritual — denotes dishonorable attention to the body, the fox's coat and Gawain's concealed girdle acting as symbols of this disgrace.

In many medieval texts, women and animals function as underlying devices to strengthen the image of knighthood, but work in this text to undermine Gawain's honor. Stories of knights are often defined by animals and women. As Susan Crane points out, the knight and his steed often become conflated and inseparable. She describes the horse as a "prosthetic" piece that enhances a knight's performance while going largely unnoticed (Crane 144). Animals affirm male identity in the hunts, as the ritualistic style fosters a masculine "dominion over animals," both over the hounds and prey (Crane 111). Knighthood is also typically defined by the presence of a "damsel in distress," as a knight's chivalric trials often involve acting in the service of a needy woman. Like animals, the emotional or intellectual presence of women is rarely necessary, as their physical presence is enough for the knight to perform his grand rescue. According to Sheila Fisher, "[w]omen often figure significantly not so much for their own sakes, but in order to become involved in the construction (and at times, the destruction) of men's chivalric identities ("Women" 152). Though women seem to underscore this text, they act according to Fisher's parenthesized motivations, to undermine Gawain's virtuous identity. In conjunction with the women, the animals, too, serve to destruct Gawain, in the lady's use of their figures and in the more obvious way of highlighting an emasculated Gawain that lays in bed rather than hunts.

Though women, specifically Morgan le Fay, are the catalysts for the narrative plot, they are marginalized by both Gawain and the form of the poem. Upon first seeing the Lady and Morgan, the narrative lapses into textbook "objectification." The *Gawain*-poet, presumably voicing the knight's impressions of the women, offers detailed descriptions of the respective pleasing and ugly qualities of the Lady and her old companion, "[t]he body of the beauty seemed to bloom with blood,/ the cheeks of the crone were wattled and slack" (952-53). In his focus upon their appearance, Gawain reduces the ladies to bodies, much like typical medieval females, and much like the hunters' reduction of the beasts from living prey to dissected corpses. According to a recent psychological study, Gawain also participates in "animalistic dehumanization" by sexually objectifying the two women (Morris, et al. 1303). His assessment of the Lady's "upper breast and bright bare throat" and Morgan's "buttocks [that] bulged and swelled," arguably veiled sexual observations, serve to marginalize the ladies by underscoring their sexual or reproductive value (957, 967). Gawain ties the women to their physicality in a way that likens them to animals.

Gawain's angry speech, widely deemed an "anti-feminist rant," works with the poem's form to silence the Lady and Morgan. After the Green Knight reveals his identity as Lord Bertilak and his lady's role in testing Gawain, the knight embarks on a slanderous speech:

Adam fell for a woman
and Soloman for several, and as for Samson,

Delilah was his downfall, and afterwards David
 was bamboozled by Bathsheba and bore grief.
 All wrecked and ruined by their wrongs; if only
 we could love our ladies without believing their lies. (2416-21)

Though his speech is generally regarded as a commentary on all females, Gerard Morgan argues that “Gawain is not in the first place offering a statement of universal feminine nature, but invoking the fact of personal experience” (277). While this critique is supported by Gawain’s invocation of specific men and women, Morgan (and Gawain himself) weakens the argument in stating the knight is “not the first man.... to be undermined by a woman he *loves*” (Morgan 277, my italics). The audience would be hard-pressed to find any evidence of love (not lust) between the Lady and Gawain, making the knight’s outburst read more as a critique of the broader “wily womankind,” specifically attractive females possessing a “womanly guile” (2426, 2415). This attack on female deceivers serves, like his objectification, to marginalize the Lady based upon her body. While this speech comes before Morgan’s reveal, the form of the poem aids in diminishing the sorceress, as she is mentioned only a few lines from the end. This formal, almost literal marginalization mimics Gawain’s variety as the few lines physically constrain Morgan’s presence — making her scheme to test Arthur’s court and scare Guinevere to death seem trivial rather than powerful. This physical marginalization is bolstered by the poet’s “refrain[n] from quoting the old lady though direct speech” as she is limited to the instances where the poet chooses to insert her name or body (Haruta 209). As Gawain used courtly conversation to evade the Lady’s physical advances, his speech and the absence of Morgan’s binds her to the physical realm.

Though Gawain and the poet attempt to dismiss the Lady and Morgan by limiting their bodies, Morgan subtly resists marginalization. Because Gawain’s speech was only focused on attractive female manipulators, and uttered before his enlightenment of Morgan’s involvement, it excludes the sorceress. Due to her renowned magical abilities, some scholars suggest that Morgan purposefully chose a more unsightly form to execute her plan (Haruta 211). If the sorceress was able to transform Lord Bertilak into an immortal green knight, it seems plausible that she altered her figure to appear old and ugly. Compared to the still “berdles” (“beardless”) youth of Arthur’s court, Morgan seems suspiciously old (280). Though the *Gawain*-poet does not explicitly support this analysis, the discrepancy (clear to a medieval audience) subtly combats Gawain’s objectification and implies that the women’s reduction to bodies is more significant than it appears. Like how the Lady uses the bodies of the prey to inform her temptations, Morgan may use her own appearance to resist verbal marginalization.

Morgan upsets the effects of her physical marginalization by altering the physical appearance of Gawain and Arthur's court. After Morgan's reveal as the catalyst of the plot, she is quickly glossed over, leaving the audience to question her relevance and the totality of her power. Though it appears that Gawain is reintegrated into the masculine society of Arthur's court, Morgan seems to leave her mark on the knight. Gawain's insistence on wearing the girdle and its adoption by the rest of Arthur's court could be interpreted in a few ways. The universalization of a symbol of Gawain's failure could be seen as erasing the severity of the knight's self-interest. By extending the symbol of Gawain's focus upon his body to be worn on all bodies in the court, the girdle and Gawain become "re-ritualized," and again honorable, in the courtly scene. Of course, the prevalence of the girdle could also function as a sign of Morgan's enduring presence in the masculine sphere. Though the girdle becomes a symbol of honor, of "the tested man," it remains a woman's article that is (allegedly) wrought with magical powers, intrinsically connecting it to Morgan le Fay ("Leaving" 150, Ashton 69). The girdle displays a tension between Morgan's presence and erasure, but Gawain's scar represents a permanent marker of Morgan's test. The scar is unable to be borne by the rest of Arthur's court, so its personal value seems more intact than the girdle. It is also a "physical deface[ment]" reminiscent of not only the heightened physicality of the women and animals, but of Gawain's failure in concerning his physical body over his contract with Lord Bertilak (2507). By leaving Gawain with a scar, Morgan again draws on the physicality of the animal bodies and echoes their sliced necks. Though the knight attempted to marginalize women by demoting them to mere bodies, Morgan manipulates Gawain's body in a stamp of feminine power.

The dynamics between women, animals, and Gawain in this text challenge the human hierarchy presented by other medieval standards. Like most medieval depictions of knighthood, this poem includes figures of women and animals used in conjunction to the knightly image. However, instead of a clear delineation from man to woman to animal, the knight and the ladies display power in flux. Gawain undercuts the Lady and Morgan by reducing them to physical presences, but the women conversely use physicality to trap Gawain into dishonor and permanently mar his image. By mirroring the sharp individualization and simultaneous dishonorable regressions of the hunts, the Lady fosters "a consciousness so subtly modified and corrupted... that Gawain remains unaware of what has happened until instructed by the Green Knight" (Henry 192). Instead of firmly placing the chivalrous identity above the body, this text depicts, in tension, marginalization and power derived from bodily form, functions grounded in their association to animals.

The human-animal hierarchy in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* evades definition by its dual marginalized and empowered physical forms. However, important to consider is the women's conflation with the animal group and use

of animal bodies. Morgan and the Lady are defined by traditional medieval physicality, but they draw on animal forms to dismantle the knight. By emulating the hunt and butchering of the animals, instead of their associated virtues, the women not only heighten the sense of physicality, but dissociate the animal with the virtuous, articulated knight. Though it would be difficult to argue that the prey displays overt power in their mutilation, the women repurpose animal bodies to combat the chivalrous image of knighthood. Women and animals, even while belittled for their physicality, together demonstrate an empowered reclamation of the body, resisting their portrayals as static — static as in devoid of significant character or, in the beasts' case, static as corpses. Whether the body functions as a marker of marginalized women or empowered ones that alter the image of a knight, animals are aligned with women far more closely than with Gawain. It seems Susan Crane is correct in stating, “the wild animal cannot be as fully recruited into the rules as humans can be” (106). In this poem, the women do not ask animals to participate in a ritual; they align themselves with animal bodies to deconstruct the ritual neither of them aims to be a part of.

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Women, Writing, and Storytelling in Medieval England and *The Canterbury Tales*

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▲ The Second Nun is one of the few characters in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* who is portrayed almost completely unironically. Her tale does not exist solely for entertainment, but rather to provide a moral example. Her account of St. Cecilia is a labor of “holy work,” designed to use the art of words and rhetoric to become closer to divine understanding. This philosophy is quite different from that of the Wife of Bath, but both women use their unique educations to preserve their voices in their prologues and stories. The literary impact of real medieval women can be used as a lens with which to better understand these characters and their tales. Religious life enabled education for women, in the name of God. Furthermore, a mystical connection to the divine influenced how these women were perceived by medieval English society. The education, mysticism, and legacy of author Julian of Norwich stands in contrast with that of her contemporary, Margery Kempe. These female mystics made lasting literary contributions to English history, and they are both products and witnesses of their times. Parallels can be drawn between Julian and the Second Nun/Cecilia, and between Margery and the Wife of Bath, when it comes to their views on women’s education and storytelling. Understanding the questions surrounding women’s writing, especially how it was then perceived by the world, provides context that clarifies the significance of the Second Nun and the Wife of Bath.

There is little to no description of the Second Nun in *The General Prologue*, so her characterization must be drawn from the prologue and text of the tale itself. Her tale comes as a response to the Canon Yeoman’s irreverent portrait of priests and alchemists, and depicts instead the life of St. Cecilia as a way to teach the value of virtue over idleness. The Second Nun is clearly an educated storyteller, for she begins the tale’s prologue with an explanation that this is a tale she has “doon [her] faithful bisnesse, / after the legende, in translacioun / right of thy glorious lyf and passioun” (Chaucer ll. 24-25). As noted by V. A. Kolve in notes about the tale, the words “legend,” “lyf,” and “passioun” (the third chosen deliberately to evoke a connection to the

passion of Christ) are all words used to describe the genre of a Saint's Life. The only available accounts of St. Cecilia's life in the 1380s would have been abridgments that were written in Latin, and several centuries old (Kolve in Chaucer 307). Not only does the Second Nun have enough of a grasp of written Latin to understand an account written centuries ago, she has spent enough time with the original texts to understand the language, word connotations, and moral messages well enough to be able to consolidate the accounts without adding or glossing the story. From there, she faithfully converts the tale into English. Therefore, it's likely that copying Saints' Lives from Latin manuscripts is one of her duties in the convent where she lives.

Given this context, the Nun has a very conscious approach to her writing. She declares to "yow who reden that I write" that she does "no diligence / this ilke story subtilly to endyte" (78-80). Other learned characters have drawn from literary or Latin sources before, and she is aware of this. Other pilgrims like the Clerk and the Prioress use the elevated Rhyme Royale form, as the Second Nun does, to tell elevated tales (and also to highlight their own perceived intellectual or moral virtue). However, in these other tales the original story is often changed to better fit the teller's message. In contrast, the Nun's aim as a storyteller is to give a "faithful" account in all senses of the word. Only she can do this, by virtue of her resources, skill, and education. While there may not be many other pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales* who see writing in this way, the Nun's philosophy of storytelling does parallel another medieval woman who used her education and skill in writing for moral instruction, and in doing so immortalized her literary voice.

Julian of Norwich (1343- unknown, but after 1416) was a mystic and anchoress¹ who experienced visions or "shewings" of Christ, and preserved them in writing. Her book *Revelations of Divine Love* is the first recorded book in the English language written by a woman. It was likely finished around the year 1373, and Julian was one of the most well-known mystics in England by that time, so it is not inconceivable that Chaucer would have been familiar with Julian's work by the time he wrote *The Canterbury Tales* between 1387 and 1400. There are striking parallels in the historical literary work of Julian of Norwich in comparison to Chaucer's Second Nun, and by extension, St. Cecilia as she appears in the Nun's tale.

Our first clue, as mentioned above, is the attitude of the woman toward

¹ Julian never took vows to become a nun, but as an anchoress she intentionally withdrew from society to live a life of seclusion, devoted to meditation, prayer, asceticism, much like a women in a consecrated religious community would.

her audience. There is a kind of openness to Julian of Norwich's narratorial voice in her *Shewings*²; by this point in her life she had already dedicated herself to a life of seclusion as an anchoress, so there is no secular reason for her to write her story down. In her own words, she is recording her visions because she feels like people can learn about the divine from what she has experienced, much like she learned from it. In Chapters VI-VII of the *Short Text*, Julian writes, "dysregarde... the synful creature to whom it was shewn [herself]... it schulde be to euery ilke manne the same profytte that I desyrede to my selfe & perto was styrryd of God ... for yt comoun & gene" (Julian qtd. in Duran 555 and Windeatt 6). Jane Duran analyzes this passage as an affirmation that "the ultimate Teacher is God, and Julian wants us to know this," but adds that just the fact that she is writing it, and will eventually write more from a theological view later in her life, proves that Julian is also claiming her mission of teaching. She does not seem to trust others to tell her story; she always intended to tell it in her own words, so she could be sure the message was clear. In her later *Long Text*, also known as the *Revelation of Divine Love*, this vocational idea is amended to "but I sey it to you that be simple for ese & comfort, for we arn al one in comfort" (Julian qtd. in Windeatt 6). In the *Long Text*, there is less of a moral distance between Julian and her audience, and she seems to genuinely want to help them (herself included, for she counts herself among the sinful) rather than elevate herself as the witness of these visions. To scholar B. A. Windeatt, the changes in the descriptions and rhetorical devices between the *Texts* reflect Julian's "commitment to the validity of her original experience, as vindicated by subsequent meditation" (Windeatt 17). Windeatt endeavors to show through comparisons of Julian's *Texts* that the *Long Text* was designed deliberately to better connect to the reader rhetorically and spiritually, so Julian's aims in sharing her holy visions (spiritual affirmation, theological discussion, and moral instruction) can be fulfilled.

The Second Nun also seems to have enlightenment on her mind, given that her tale is, on multiple levels, a defense of theological enlightenment and education, especially for women. The Nun's role in society, and her convent, is associated with *scriptoria*, a type of holy work focused especially on reading, copying, and writing. Her translations are a part of her vocation, and she considers it, as Julian does with her writings, to be a sacred labor by virtue of its subject matter. When she addresses the Virgin Mary in the Tale's prologue, the Nun's references to her own sin and the benefit of the audience mirror Julian's

² Also known as *Showings* or the *Short Text*, this manuscript was the way Julian initially documented her visions as she experienced them. The *Long Text*, commonly studied today as the *Revelation of Divine Love*, was a more theological meditation on her visions, adapted from the *Shewings* but further interpreted after years of spiritual contemplation.

aforementioned language in the *Short Text*:

And though that I, unworthy sone of Eve,
 Be sinful, yet accepte my bileve.
 And for that faith is deed withouten werkes,
 So for to werken yif me wit and space,
 That I be quit from thennes that most derk is. (62-66)

With her tale, the Second Nun defends her work of writing and translation as holy, because of its intellectual focus on the Lord and its intention to serve as an example of virtue.

Virtue connected to enlightenment is the prevailing theme in this account of St. Cecilia, since Cecilia is an exemplar of holy work, and brilliance in every sense of the word. Before she even begins the Tale, the Nun applies Jacob of Genoa's gloss to Cecilia's name to reflect this (85-112). Among other images of guidance and purity, she is described as a bright white "hevenes lily" for her chastity (in Latin, "celi" + "lilia," 87), and "wanting of blindnesse, for hir grete light" ("cecitate"/ blindness + "carens"/ missing, 100). Throughout her life and martyrdom, Cecilia is a beacon for the people around her, literally and figuratively. Most of the imagery surrounding her and her faith has to do with light. It is often directly linked to intellectual enlightenment by pointing back to the study of scripture as guidance. There are multiple references to "this maydens name *bright*" in the opening gloss, connected with the figure of Leah, who has symbolic connections to light and to work in the Bible, and images of Heaven drawn from Revelation and the Old Testament (102, 112, 118). The Nun even says that Heaven and Cecilia were "brennynge" (burning) with this light (114). In the first line of the tale itself, Cecilia is also called "this mayden bright" (120). She gets her "brightness" from God, who is the source of light and enlightenment in the tale and for the Second Nun, and He is the one in whom she puts her faith. When she confronts Valerian on their wedding night, Cecilia urges him not to risk the wrath of the angel by touching her lecherously, but says that if he will "in clene love [her] gye, / [God] wol yow loven as me... And shewen yow his joye and his brightnesse." (159-161).

On the night before their martyrdom, the "light" of her faith gives Cecilia courage, which she then shares with her companions by telling them to "cast alle away the werkes of derknesse, / And armeth yow in armure of brightnesse" (384-385). In this scene, we see enlightenment and faith acting not just as a way of bringing the individual soul closer to God, but engaged in a soldier-like love for others, even to death. This is the kind of steadfast, active

kindness that the Nun supports as indicative of true virtue, for she declares in the prologue that “faith is deed withouten werkes” (64). Cecilia is the least passive figure in the tale, but like other female saints of the time, she gets her strength through a gentle kind of courage, rejecting sin and instead embracing her own faith, purity, and intellect.

The Nun’s secondary aim with this tale, besides offering a moral guide, is to defend holy learning, especially by women. Not only is Cecilia a figure of faith, she is a model of intellectual holiness built on an educated understanding of the scriptures. She is more educated than most of the men in the story, to whom she frequently has to explain miracles and moral teachings. Her defense of her virtue in ll. 425-430 is also an insult to the judge’s gentility and intelligence, retorting that Almachius has asked his questions “folily” and “lewedly.” Folly, in the medieval era, was not only a lack of good moral sense; it was also personified as an antithesis of Virtue and Wisdom in morality plays and allegories, who deliberately lures the protagonist into making mistakes. Even when threatened with death, Cecilia defies Almachius’ strength and pride, reducing it to “nycetee” (foolishness) because of his ignorance in believing that death is the end for her (463). In contrast, most of Almachius’ attacks are against the young woman’s “boldness” in speaking out about her faith (487), and his shows of brute strength are intended to intimidate her (445-8, 458-60, 470-473). Cecilia stands firm, saying in l. 478 that she speaks “by right”—meaning both with sound reason, and with an authority given to her by her identity, virtue, or her relationship with God.

In many instances throughout “The Second Nun’s Tale,” Cecilia’s sexual purity, moral virtue, and intellectual “brightness” are tied very closely together. The references to her as “white” (89, 115) are intended to reflect her spiritual purity and her physical virginity. Cecilia’s virginity does not change any element of her character, but it does impact the way she can interact with the world. It is only after she convinces Valerian to respect her vow of chastity that he can begin to undertake a journey to conversion with her. In her charitable work, her chastity gives a credence to her holiness, since through her “The world hath wist what it is worth, certeyn, / Devocioun of chastitee to love” (282-3). The Second Nun’s argument regarding chastity is directly related to the virtues of the mind and soul that she emphasizes in her tale: by choosing to keep her body pure and devoted to God, a woman can elevate the mind. In a similar way, through the enlightenment of the mind and a commitment to holy work, the body is in turn sanctified. This is a prevailing idea throughout medieval monasticism, and can be found in the writings of Sts. Benedict of Nursia and Augustine. There is also an element of the denial of the earthly body in Julian of Norwich’s writings: “For we are all in part denied, and we ought to be denied, following our master Jesus until we are fully purged... until we have

completely denied our own mortal flesh and all our inward affections which are not good.” (Julian qtd. in Duran 556). But how does this idea stand against traditional feminine stereotypes, which are implicit in any medieval discussion of the sins of the flesh?

There was another female mystic of the late 1300s who took England by storm, with a very different point of view based neither in formal education nor consecrated virginity. Born in 1373 and living until after 1438, Margery Burnham married John Kempe, and shortly after the birth of her first child, she experienced eight months of visions of Christ and Heaven. After these visions, she dedicated herself to a life of travel and preaching, all conducted with very public devotion. She was not literate, but enlisted a scribe to write down her dictation of her life story, which was eventually circulated as *The Book of Margery Kempe*, the first autobiography in English. Although Kempe’s *Book* was published after *The Canterbury Tales* had been written, her view of the world is quite similar to Chaucer’s Wife of Bath, hinting that the ideas they have in common were not entirely unheard of during the late 14th and early 15th centuries. The Wife acknowledges in her prologue that “virginitee is greet perfeccioun / and continence eek with devocioun” but declares that she is not called to that particular brand of perfection. Therefore, she intends to “bistowe the flour of [her] age / in the actes and in fruit of marriage” (105-6, 113-14). The Wife of Bath is not a religious character in the way that the Second Nun is, but her understanding of virtue linked with sexuality is quite similar to Kempe’s. In contrast to the denial of sexuality in order to reach God employed by Julian, the Second Nun, and Cecilia, sex is one of Kempe’s primary subjects. It has been argued that her discussion of sex and marriage are intentional, much like Julian’s rhetorical strategies and the Wife of Bath’s arguments for mastery. Drawing from her visions and her knowledge of the world, Kempe consciously crafts a role for herself in her *Book* as “a... spiritual authority that is modeled on the Virgin Mary but incorporates the material of Margery’s worldly life” (Williams 529). It has also been noted that this identity as a chaste wife and mother may have aided Kempe by granting her more freedom to travel and preach, as a male religious figure would have naturally been free to do (Hall 65-66).

The freedom to seek and share knowledge is a common thread between Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, and it is seen in Chaucer’s works as well. In a convent, women could learn to read and write Latin, the language of academic writing, theology, and medicine. The Second Nun, who spends her days as a copier of Saints’ Lives and other religious texts, and who can interpret scholars such as Jacob of Genoa for theological glosses, is clearly educated in Latin and literature. Julian’s manuscripts are written and copied in vernacular English, but her theological discussions

make it clear that she had some kind of learning in the most important Christian theological texts. A member of a consecrated religious order and a lay anchoress in seclusion would both have had access to educational opportunities not always available to women in the middle and even upper classes of secular society. There is no historical or textual evidence that Margery Kempe ever received a formal education. She draws her wisdom mostly through experience, just like the Wife of Bath whose “experience, though noon auctoritee / were in this world, is right ynough” (1-2). Like the Wife, Kempe learned texts and prayers not by reading them, but by hearing them aloud and possibly memorizing them, and then drawing her own interpretation from what she heard and understood. However, writing about theology in particular was strictly a male discipline in the medieval Church, whether you were a religious or layperson. Preaching was explicitly forbidden for women, under pain of being charged with heresy. Unless, of course, your words came directly from God.

The question of divine authority is present in the texts of Julian of Norwich, the *Book of Margery Kempe*, and “The Second Nun’s Prologue and Tale.” Because their visions were said to come from Heaven, female religious mystics like Cecilia and Julian possessed an authority which, though it functions within the order of the day, could not be limited by other figures of earthly authority who might have sought to discredit or limit the women. A divine connection allows Julian, Cecilia, and to a certain extent, the Second Nun (she is preserving the will of God in the sense that she is a literary “witness” to a Saint’s Life), to write honestly and openly about theological matters, which otherwise would have been an academic domain reserved for men.

In fiction and history, the idea of an educated and independent woman speaking from a place of authority can be a threat to the patriarchal hierarchy of the medieval Church and secular society. Because they cannot escape the gendered elements of medieval religious life, each of these women seeks out her own way to a kind of transfiguration. They master the aspects of their lives that might have otherwise been vilified by the male-dominated world they were joining. All of them possess courage, intelligence, and faith in what they believe, though it certainly manifests itself in different ways. Why? Their unique but equally powerful impact has to do with the different roles the various women occupy in society. If women like Julian of Norwich and the Second Nun (and by extension, Cecilia) are going to be taken seriously, they cannot be seen as sexual objects. They deny that element of who they are not because they want to banish their femininity, but so they can focus on a different facet of themselves. Their power comes from a choice of chastity and intellect, which endows them with a courage to speak as God wills them to speak. Margery Kempe and the Wife of Bath, in contrast, live fully in the secular world and all

it entails. Kempe would eventually become a mother of fourteen children, and remain a laywoman all her life. For her, spiritual growth is connected to sexuality; she is both a physical and spiritual mother, and sees no need to differentiate the two parts of herself. In the *Book of Margery Kempe*, she uses the role she has in secular society as a way to affirm her connection with God and with the world. This connection in turn helps her to take ownership of her own story, just like the Wife of Bath, and further justifies that story's preservation in writing. Through a conscious reclaiming of their minds, their bodies, and their right to a connection with God, all of these women were able to partake in literary and theological life just as a male religious figure could. Their work preserved in their writings allowed their voices to be heard, and taken seriously.

Each pilgrim in *The Canterbury Tales* is acutely aware of their place in society. This is reflected in the tales they tell; that is one reason why we the readers are able to infer satirical criticism in a tale based on the pilgrim who tells it. Every pilgrim has been assigned their tale based on who they are, how they interact with the world, and what ideas are most important to them. *The Canterbury Tales* as a whole operate like this because they are a fictional microcosm of medieval society. The Second Nun's tale works because of who she is. It reflects her own education with its rhyme royale stanza structure and its elevated subject matter, and just like her, the tale prioritizes virtue founded on intellectual understanding and sexual constancy. The Wife of Bath's tale pokes fun at her status among husbands, and champions her quest for sovereignty.

Women like the Second Nun and Julian of Norwich exemplify the education that medieval women could receive in religious life, and this is reflected in the way they construct and write their tales. In contrast, women like the Wife of Bath and Margery Kempe are grounded in an awareness of the world, which perfectly prepares them to tell their stories aloud, so they could be recorded by another. The Second Nun and the Wife of Bath are both independent women with their own ways of claiming a right to their minds and bodies. They do this in relation to their personal values, their environment, and the role they play in society. Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe occupied similar roles in real life, but in different contexts, reflecting the different spheres of medieval life. A different kind of education was needed for each, but the brilliant women of both backgrounds clearly had something worth saying.

Shakespeare's Staging and the Self in the Sonnets

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People observe, and people say. They find different ways to say — to bring out what one sees that stays within oneself and to transform and express it into a consensual idea that is understandable for others. When faced with abstract ideas and human emotions, saying it directly becomes difficult, sometimes even impossible. Genres of literature are experiments that explore different ways of expressing the inexpressible. Shakespeare explores the various possibilities of saying human experiences on beauty, time and love in his sonnets. On a micro level, he frames each individual sonnet within the young man sonnets as a stage, where each specific setting and scenario allows dramatic tension to arise between the characters on stage, and from there abstract ideas and emotions are naturally presented without being directly stated; on the macro level, the entire young-man sonnet sub-sequence—being in love with a beautiful young man — itself is used as a stage. Using this stage, the speaker praises the young man, which reflexively praises Shakespeare the poet who creates such beauty, and eventually reveals Shakespeare’s poetic self consciousness and anxiety as a poet.

In Sonnet 5, Shakespeare’s first impersonal sonnet in the sequence, contains “actors” that interact on the stage even without any human characters. Shakespeare makes Time concrete by assigning it the role to frame beauty: “Those hours that with gentle work did frame/ The lovely gaze where every eye doth dwell” (1-2). The role of time can be defined as the rhetorical device of personification, though what this device actually does, is to give lifeless abstract concepts lives and actions so they can interact with others on the “stage.” Immediately, Shakespeare assigns another role to Time: “Will play the tyrants to the very same” (3). Not only is Time the tyrant, it also is “never-resting” and “lead[ing] summer on” (5). “Never-resting” is a direct and neutral adjective that describes the quality of Time, for it is in constant movement from humans’ point of view. However, because of the virtual stage the sonnet contains, “never-resting” as a quality of the Tyrant is framed into a negative persona along with the implied seductive nature of “leading summer on”. The first couple lines are used to create the scene, where the audience will naturally expect an upcoming conflict with the “tyrant” — he leads summer to “hideous winter and confounds him there,” where beauty “o’ersnowed and bareness every where” (6-8). Shakespeare frames Time and its changing seasons from an abstract linear progression into a visual confinement on stage, for summer is confounded and trapped in winter. Then, the dramatic resolution for preserving time and its framed beauty is “summer’s distillation” — “a liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass” (9-10). Confinement after confinement. The imagery of a

“liquid prisoner” in glass forces the audience’s imagination to stay in the visual and concrete realm. Beauty, “the lovely gaze,” now has changed into the costume of a liquid prisoner and the scene changes to walls of glass. Only in this way of framing a virtual stage that Beauty and its temporal and confounded condition become visual and tangible like a “liquid prisoner”, which gives the abstract line “Beauty’s effect with beauty were bereft” some concrete grounding for imagination and thinking. The central theme and idea are revealed in the final couplet: “But flowers distilled, though they with winter meet, / Leese but their show; their substance still lives sweet” (13-14). Now, after beauty has played the role of “summer’s distillation,” it is assigned to another role of the “flowers,” for the purpose of expressing the compromising idea that distillation sacrifices beauty’s “show,” but preserves “their substance” (14). Sonnet thus ends in this conclusion.

However, there is another actor that is on the stage throughout the whole scene but never notifies his existence: the speaker himself. The speaker plays a crucial role of a narration, a monologue, which makes the audience wonder why the speaker is in such a scene that seems irrelevant with the rest of the sonnet sequence. As Helen Vendler predicts in *The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, there is an implied vocative ending of this sonnet addressing the young man: “so you too, must be distilled before your winter comes” (66). This sonnet, like most ones in the young-man sequence, explores ways to fight against the tyranny of time on account of beauty, which directly translates to “you should continue your beauty by having a child before you die.” However, the concept of Time and Beauty themselves are abstract terms that are otherwise impossible to express if not because of the virtue stage that is set up by Shakespeare for the speaker to make a monologue, where Time and Beauty serve as actors to carry out the central idea with concrete interactions and scenes.

Above is a close demonstration of how Shakespeare forms a virtual dramatic stage to express the central idea—the urgency of beauty faced with time—of his individual sonnet, even when he is not writing a play. In Sonnet 15, he frames another, more grand stage to repetitively address the same concern of beauty, time and decay, though this one creates more distance between the actors and the audience, for there is less immediate action and therefore less dramatic. This sonnet would be a “dramatic meditation” of the speaker, as Giorgio Melchiori defines in his *Shakespeare’s Dramatic Meditations*, where the meditation “implies a transcendence of the particular case, the private persons, and the specific circumstances, in order to reach out towards first principles, to the roots of human motivations” (63). The speaker begins the sonnet by meditating, “When I consider every thing that grows” (1). When he says he “considers,” he is inviting all the audience to consider. Therefore, this is not only an individual meditation, but rather a hortatory one for everyone viewing the “show.” When considering “every thing that grows,” the span of

the scene widens to the entire world. From there, the speaker summarizes the consensual universal pattern: “Every thing that grows/ Holds in perfection but a little moment”(1-2). This universal truth is what Melchiori calls the “first principles, the root of human motivation” that “transcends” this little stage of the sonnet. Then, the speaker explicitly points out “this huge stage presenteth nought but shows,” constantly reminding the audience of the stage itself (3). The speaker then narrows the focus from “every thing that grows” to “men,” and from there, another universal truth: every thing and every man “at height decrease,” all but an “inconstant stay” (7). The idea of an “inconstant stay” is presented visually in the sonnet, due to its repetitive use in the poem. “*In*” as into some state, *in* existence yet *in*constant. “*In*” never stays at one place; it jumps around the whole sonnet. Such repetition of “in,” almost seems to say that by writing it, he attempts to carve these lines *into* memory, time, and history. At the same time he feels insecure, so he keeps repeating it:

When I consider every **thing** that grows
 Holds **in** perfection but a little moment,
 That this huge stage presenteth nought but shows
 Whereon the stars **in** secret **influence** comment;
 When I perceive that men as plants **increase**,
 Cheered and checked even by the selfsame sky,
 Vaunt **in** their youthful sap, at height decrease,
 And wear their brave state out of memory:
 Then the conceit of this **inconstant** stay
 Sets you most rich **in** youth before my sight,
 Where wasteful Time debateth with Decay
 To change your day of youth to sullied night,

And all **in** war with Time for love of you,

As he takes from you, I **ingraft** you new.

Towards the end, it returns to the central topic of the sequence, that “wasteful Time debateth with Decay” and “all in war with Time for love of you” (11, 13). This time, with the previously framed concrete role of Time in other sonnets, it is easier to express the idea of time’s tension with decay, for each sonnet in the sequence serves to set up the stage, creating concrete roles. Additionally, these concrete roles formed in one sonnet is used in other sonnets, interacting between sonnets. The speaker, referring to Time’s concrete role developed in Sonnet 5, offers a solution to fight with Time and his consequences: “As he takes from you, I ingraft you new” (14). The line “I ingraft you new” suddenly shortens the gap between the speaker-actor on stage and Shakespeare the poet, for what Shakespeare does is also “ingrafting” while the sonnet sequence is written about continuing the existence of the things that might be taken away by time.

In the young-man sonnet sequence, the idea of framing and staging is somehow explicitly indicated in several sonnets; for example, in the previous Sonnet 5, “gentle work did frame,” “will play the tyrants,” and in Sonnet 15, “this huge stage presenteth nought but shows”; in Sonnet 23, “as an unperfect actor on the stage”; “mine eye hath played the painter” in Sonnet 24. In these explicit hints, the conflict between the speaker and Shakespeare the poet arises. On the one hand, the words of staging constantly remind the audience of the show, thus creates a conscious distance between the audience, actors, and the playwright. On the other hand, in lines such as “I ingraft you new,” the distance between the two almost closes up, thus “breaks” the stage occasionally, allowing both the readers to see Shakespeare’s poetic self and Shakespeare himself to have some personal space in the sonnets. Regarding this distance between Shakespeare and his speaker, Michael Cameron Andrews explains in his essay “Sincerity and Subterfuge in Three Shakespearean Sonnet Groups” that poets do not write autobiographical sonnets, even when the sonnets reflect their lives; Shakespeare’s “poetic presentation of the self is in some measure the freeing of the self, the translation of life to art. One becomes a character in a poem, and Shakespeare, dramatist as well as poet, is native and induced to this kind of imaginative activity” (315). However, even if Shakespeare does attempt to turn himself into a role and his life to art in order to have some freedom, why is it that the self is still inevitable and unavoidable in a poet’s writing, regardless of how hard one attempts to hide and stage it?

One possible explanation of the question raised is that Shakespeare’s

self is naturally revealed in the speaker's praise of the young man. The overarching purpose of this sonnet sub-sequence is to praise, from the speaker praising the young lover, to praising his youth and beauty, to beauty itself, and to his own writing which continues such beauty. Just as Joel Fineman summarizes in his book *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye*, "praise, poetical or rhetorical, is what happens when mimesis and metaphor meet" (3). Mimesis as resemblance and imitation of reality, just like an actor acting by imitating someone else; metaphor as "the likeness of figural comparison and similitude;" praise "joins the two likenesses together as though the likeness of one were confirmation of the likeness of the other," just like when the speaker praises the young man, he confirms the young man's beauty by describing him, even if the young man is not inherently beautiful (3). The praising carried out by writing confirms and assigns beauty to him. According to Fineman, as early as Aristotle, "it is recognized that the rhetorical magnification praise accords its object also rebounds back upon itself, drawing attention to itself and to its own rhetorical procedure" (9). Applying this idea to Shakespeare's sonnets, even though the object of the speaker's praise is the young man, the "itself" that rebounds back from the object, would be the praise itself and the medium through which this praise is carried — the art of sonnet-writing. "Its own rhetorical procedure" eventually comes down to Shakespeare the poet, for he is the agent of the writing. Both Sonnet 62 and 39 point out the rebound of the praised object being from "thee" to "me": "'tis thee (myself) that for myself I praise, / Painting my age with beauty of thy days"; "What can mine own praise to mine own self bring? / And what is't but mine own when I praise thee?" In this logic, the speaker confirms not only the young man's beauty when he praises him, but also Shakespeare's writing itself. This is where Shakespeare the poet meets the speaker of the sonnets: Shakespeare's own creation turns towards him and compliments his writing. Such interaction can be read as Shakespeare's poetic self-consciousness, for the speaker simply does not exist without Shakespeare creating him.

The nature of praising, switching from the praise of "thee" to the praise of "me," explains the necessary and inevitable enclosure of the distance between the speaker and Shakespeare the poet in the sonnets. However, in order for the praising to happen, a bigger stage is needed. One cannot praise anything out of nowhere. For Shakespeare, the entire sonnet sub-sequence forms such stage, where the speaker and the young man are actors in the scene of being in love in the midst of the fleeing time. On the macro stage, the praise re-focuses Shakespeare to his poetic self-consciousness and leads the audience's attention to writing itself. Then, through the lines, Shakespeare's poetic self-consciousness and anxiety are naturally revealed.

In Sonnet 59, the speaker looks at the young man and the beauty he has as: "If there be nothing new, but that which is/ Hath been before, how are our brains beguiled" (1-2). When the first line is read at the first line break without

the second line — “If there be nothing new, but that which is” — the speaker pessimistically imagines the future beauty as “if there is nothing new in the future, but only inventions that are currently invented and existing now.” The beauty created by people of the present would be a disappointment for the future creators, just as how the beauty recorded by the past has disappointed the present, because there is “nothing new, but that which is/ hath been before.” This line implies the speaker’s concern for lack of creativity of portraying beauty, or just originality in general, for what he labors now has been already labored in the past — “bear amiss/ The second burthen of a former child”(4)! This metaphor of bearing a former child suggests both the illusionary joy of a newborn, and the pain that goes along with the labor. Useless pain exchanged with no gain.

Even though the sonnet is still addressing the young man on the topic of portraying his image, the topic has been reduced to simply an excuse, a reason, a stage that provides a scenario for Shakespeare to think about his sonnet writing itself retrospectively, through the “five hundred courses of the sun” (6). Is what he is writing currently just bearing “the second burthen of a former child?” For this reason, he is curious about “what the old world could say/ To this composed wonder of your frame” (10). However, he does not refer to the young man with his natural beauty, but rather as “composed wonder of your frame.” “Composed,” a passive participle that modifies the “wonder,” which does not attribute the wonder to “your frame,” but rather the active agent that composes “your frame,” namely, Shakespeare himself. “Your frame” can be the image, the external which holds the image, the beauty, but it can also indicate a sort of intricate planning: without the framing, there is no you, no wonder, no beauty. Therefore, “composed wonder of your frame” essentially is referring to the writer that frames and composes such wonder: what “I” am curious about is what the past writers and judges would say about “my” writing. At this point, the young man is no longer significant for the grander show, for he and the speaker’s admiration for him have been used for Shakespeare to have this reflection, from which his poetic anxiety arises: “Whether we are mended, or whe’er better they, / Or whether revolution be the same” (11-12). Interestingly, the first-person plural form and the first person singular form are both used in this sonnet: “how are *our* brains beguiled” and “whether *we* are mended,” comparing to “that *I* might see what the old world would say” and “O sure *I* am the wits of former days” (2, 11, 9, 3). Ambiguity doubles, and characters complicate. In *The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, Helen Vendler reads the first-person plural as “steady-state intellectual portions,” whereas the first person singular represents the “infatuated self” who refuses to “credit himself as one of a transhistorical band of writers,” for “speaking as *we*, he is a mind; speaking as *I*, he is a lover” (282). Such reading is reasonable in the context of the sonnet; however, its interpretation only remains on the surface level of the show on the stage with the speaker and the lover as actors — drawing a distinction between

the speaker himself and the literary background of “us” writers from the speaker’s point of view—but neglects another layer of the “self” revealed by Shakespeare the poet. I read the “we” as a subtle way for Shakespeare to reveal his own poetic self-consciousness and anxiety: by saying it in the name of “we,” the attention is drawn away from his individual anxiety, but rather a shared one. Another possibility is that he might have used the “we” to refer to himself and the speaker he creates as a union, instead of other writers of his age. In this case, the “we” becomes a clue of such interaction and conversation mentioned previously between Shakespeare the creator and the speaker creation. In both cases, Shakespeare leaks his “self,” allowing the audience to peek inside of his mind for a short moment.

Even though the sonnet ends with the couplet that goes back to indirectly praising the young man with the voice of an ancient writer: “O sure I am the wits of former days/ To subjects worse have given admiring praise,” the two lines sound rather insincere and forced, because the speaker speaking on behalf of the past poets is simply unconvincing: no poet would be willing to admit that their praised subject is worse than someone else’s (13-14). Although the final couplet seems to conclude the sonnet and the concern that it raises by affirming the young man’s beauty again, “to subjects worse have given admiring praise,” Shakespeare the poet’s poetic anxiety is not resolved (14). The only compromised resolution Shakespeare has, is to continuously write about such anxiety, though not directly, but with the covering of staging in a completely “irrelevant” setting of the speaker falling in love with a beautiful young man. Slightly revealing his self-consciousness behind the “stage”, Shakespeare shows his genuine vulnerability. When the speaker describes the anxiety and insecurity that a writer faces, the voice is genuine; whenever the speaker offers the perfect solution that disappears all of these pains and concerns at the end that fits the plot of the show — like the ending couplet, the voice becomes ingenuine and unconvincing. With the pursuit of the young man as a stage, Shakespeare is able to have some personal space to express his anxiety as a writer through the actor speaker, facing the competition from the past and the judgment in the future, which maintains his dignity.

All the 127 sonnets in the young-man sequence attempt to describe one condition — love in war with time for the sake of beauty — but explores different ways to reveal such a condition. Shakespeare speaks those inexpressible abstractions and the consensual human conditions. He does so by framing a stage for each sonnet, where the speaking is implied in the show. Shakespeare speaks himself, regardless of how much he attempts to hide it. He tries to hide any signs of himself in the sonnets by using the speaker’s framed love for the framed young man as a stage, though his self-consciousness still shows through, because he cares about his writing, his creations. If he knew that years and generations later, there is still a constant audience for his shows on the “huge stage,” his anxiety might ease. Peeking

through the curtains of his backstage and seeing Shakespeare's anxious self makes his life vivid and him human.

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18th Century Theater and the Legitimacy of the Lower Classes

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George Lillo's 1731 play *The London Merchant* and John Gay's 1728 *The Beggar's Opera* both equate the struggles of the middle and lower classes with those of the elite through elevated language typically associated with the drama of the wealthy and powerful in order to legitimize the plights of the non-elite through theater. As a tragedy, *The London Merchant* uses historical and contemporary references as well as religious language to elevate merchant's apprentice's experiences to an almost mythical status to valorize his struggles. *The Beggar's Opera* similarly uses cultural references as well as language of honor and nobility as satire as one strategy to liken the actions of the elite to the criminals. Both plays use the juxtaposition between elevated language and base actions to take the stories of the lower and middle classes as seriously as those of the wealthy and powerful. By comparing how tragedy and satire work in differing ways to draw attention to the middle and lower classes, my essay will argue that these 18th century plays reflect similar goals of using the medium of theater to acknowledge the power of the middle and lower classes.

The culture of 18th century theater audiences provides important context for the increased influence of the middle class. The space of the theater can be conceptualized as a collective experience shared by an economically broad range of Londoners. Critic Jim Davis quotes the scholar John O'Brien who describes theater as "an ideal "mimic state" that resembled the political state not only in its frequent dramaturgical focus on dynastic affairs but in its material form" (Davis 57). The theater itself, as well as the action on stage, was a space in which people from varying backgrounds could come together as a collective and watch a mirror be held up to the society in which they all lived. O'Brien states that the theater had been concerned with "dynastic affairs" of royalty and the elite. However, the 18th century sees a shift in a concern with middle-class values being depicted on stage, which is evidenced by events off-stage that promoted the accessibility of theater to the working class. There were violent protests in the decades shortly after these two plays were published against policies that barred access to performances: the removal of free gallery seats to footmen, the ending of half-price tickets for arriving late, and raising pit seat prices, to name a few (58-59). These instances of riots against higher ticket prices throughout the mid to late eighteenth century reflect not only the general concern over financial accessibility to theater, but also shows the ability of the working classes to exercise their right to a place and display their investment in the theater.

Keeping those emerging concerns in mind, *The London Merchant* begins with a Prologue that serves to justify the scope of Barnwell's tragedy as equal to those of royalty and myth. The speaker references theatrical tropes and rhyming verse in order to legitimize the story he is about to tell. The Prologue opens with an explanation of how "The tragic muse, sublime, delights to show/Princes

distressed and scenes of royal woe” (Lillo Prologue 1-2). The speaker begins with “The tragic muse” a goddess associated not just with storytelling, but with elevated, even mythical, stories of “royal woe”— the emotion being modified and specified by status. The speaker establishes that tragedy as a concept is typically reserved for royalty. Additionally, the entire Prologue is written in rhyming verse, giving it a sense of older forms of theater that these references to the muse recall.

However, as the Prologue continues, the speaker quickly dismantles the assumption that tragic stories are exclusive to the elite. He goes on to cite a shift in theatrical practices, that “Upon our stage indeed, with wished success,/ You’ve sometimes seen her [the goddess] in humbler dress,/ Great only in distress...,(13-15) going on to note the contemporary playwrights Southerne, Rowe, and Otway. These stories are still from the “tragic muse”, but in a more modest appearance. Despite that humility, though, her distress is still just as “Great.” The “distress” in the middle of line 15 rhyming with the end words of lines 13 and 14 further draw attention to the importance of the emotion alongside material “success” and “dress”. These plays retain that sense of morally high status regardless of the more superficial aspects like class because tragedy goes beyond the material. Further, by making specific references to contemporary playwrights, the Prologue displays what O’Brien calls a “mimic state”, showing the audience that tragedy can be reflective of the audience, not just a distant class of nobility. Similar to how ticket price-related riots of the 18th century reflected the social power of the working class to have a place as theater patrons, this Prologue also justifies their right to be subjects of theater. The Prologue’s awareness of its own theatricality mixes older tragic tropes associated with royal and mythological drama with references to contemporary playwrights in order to preview how the tragedy of a merchant’s apprentice can be simultaneously equated to both the humble audience and the elite tragedies of older tradition.

Moving on to the play itself, the tragic gravity with which Barnwell’s moral dilemmas are depicted reflect the play’s investment in the significance of the middle class. In his speech after murdering his uncle, Barnwell self-aggrandizes his actions by using historical references and religion, which mirrors the equation of elite ideas of honor to working-class people established in the Prologue. After stabbing his uncle, Barnwell cries out “Expiring saint! Oh murdered, martyred uncle” (III.iii.36)! “Let Heaven/ from its high throne, in justice or in mercy, now/ look down on that dear, murdered saint” (52-54). To Barnwell, his uncle being a father figure makes him a saint as well as a martyr because his life is a sacrifice in the dark destiny that Millwood has set into motion. He uses alliteration on “murdered, martyred uncle” to continuously emphasize the pedestal that he is placing him on, along with the repetition of “murdered” as he tries to express his inexpressible guilt — these are likely the biggest emotions Barnwell as ever felt and uses the only language available to

him (religion) that matches the scale of his guilt, even if it is incongruous with the literal scale of impact.

Further, because Barnwell sees his uncle as this high figure of a saint, he sees himself as an equally evil villain. Filled with regret, he laments that “Cain, who stands/ on record from the birth of time and must to its/ last final period as accursed, slew a brother favored/ above him. Detested Nero, by another’s hand, dispatched a mother that he feared and hated.../This execrable act of mine’s without parallel. Oh may it ever stand alone, the last of/ murders as it is the worst” (58-67). The murder is so horrible in Barnwell’s own mind that he compares himself to the likes of the biblical Cain and emperor Nero, using historically mythologized references to elevate his acts. But again, to Barnwell, his uncle was “a brother,/ mother, father, and friend” (63-64), meaning so much to him that the level of evil he felt by killing him can only be fathomed by comparing himself to these cultural figures. The murder is nowhere near the “worst” nor will it be the last, but it is the worst thing Barnwell has ever done. Turning back to this antiquated form of soliloquy by ending the speech in rhyme, Barnwell is furthering this sense of grandeur by recalling back to older theatrical traditions that deal with kings and gods. Big ideas like evil and sainthood have a sense of scale that Barnwell’s status as a merchant’s apprentice does not afford him. Much in the same way that the Prologue draws together the seemingly oxymoronic image of a humble Muse, Barnwell’s agony over the murder of his uncle, which has little impact besides his own guilt, is raised to royal and mythical status. Barnwell’s dilation of his own emotions should be taken seriously because even though he himself is just a blip on the map, all of these actions and feelings are huge and justified from his point of view. By emphasizing these contradictions between the scale of Barnwell’s story and the language used to depict them, Lillo highlights the right of the working class to be depicted on stage by affirming the legitimacy of their struggles.

The Introduction to *The Beggar’s Opera* serves a similar purpose as the Prologue of *The London Merchant* in that it sets up the idea of class as a central concern of the play and establishes the premise of a lower-class comedy told through classical and contemporary references. The Introduction opens with a Beggar and Player on stage. As the first person to speak, the inclusion of the Beggar as a dramaturgical equal to the Player recalls the instances of protest that Davis cites, demonstrating the ability of the non-elite to make their voices heard in the world of theater on and off-stage, much like the Prologue of *The London Merchant*. The Beggar says to the Player, “If poverty be a title to poetry, I am sure nobody can/ dispute mine. I own myself of the Company of/ Beggars, and I make one at their weekly festivals at/ St. Giles’s” (Gay Introduction 1-4). In the first line, the Beggar draws a relationship between “poverty” and “poetry,” establishing from the start that the lower classes are fully capable of being the subject of art. He mentions a line later a “Company of Beggars” performing at “St. Giles’s,” which is glossed as a parish for the patron saint of beggars and

lepers as well as a hub of crime and poverty. Similar to how Lillo cites specific contemporary playwrights, Gay's *Beggar* makes locational references that the audience will be attuned to, further drawing a connection between the stage and life of the non-wealthy patrons. The title of the group is capitalized, giving it the sense of being official and calls their gatherings a "festival." Similar to how the *Beggar's* and *Player's* stage presence are equal, the *Beggar* equates criminal activity with a kind of theater, giving it an air of validity through the language of drama in order to demonstrate how theater has this legitimizing power. When the dialogue switches to the *Player*, he mentions humble Muses, just like in the Prologue of *The London Merchant* to similarly draw together the seemingly opposing forces of beggars and classical artistry. He says that "The/ Muses, contrary to all other ladies, pay no/ distinction to dress and never partially mistake the/ pertness of embroidery for wit, nor the modesty/ of want for dullness" (9-12). Just like Lillo's "tragic muse," the *Player's* Muses are ignorant to class because poetry and art can be represented by anyone regardless of status or wealth. Poverty does not mean that their stories are any less rich, nor does wealth make others' lives any more worthy of depiction.

Similar to how Barnwell exaggerates the scale of his actions through language of classical tragedy, Macheath exemplifies the values established in the Introduction when he creates a kind of code of honor for himself and his band of thieves in order to draw parallels between the criminal underground and legitimate business. He satirizes the heroic mythical status of the highwayman, similar to how the *Beggar* equates criminal activity with theater. When Macheath enters the tavern to address his men, he asks them, "Is there any man who suspects my courage?/...My honor and truth to the gang?/...In the division of our booty, have I ever shown the/ least marks of avarice or injustice?" (II.ii.12-18). Macheath specifically asks his men about his "courage," "honor," and "truth", fishing for confirmation of these noble qualities, qualities that would not be associated with a criminal. He tells his men, in reference to his dispute with Peachum, that "Any private dispute of mine shall be of no ill/ consequence to my friends" (33-34). He sees himself as the king of this gang and that elite status he assigns himself makes him bound to the same codes of honor as a true hero of romance, even if it is all a show. Macheath falls into the trope of the dangerously handsome highwayman that is built on the contradictions between his criminal behavior and gentlemanly appearance. Revealing insincerity in Macheath's and his followers' honor illuminates the same qualities in the rich and powerful who are as surface level in their honor as him. As opposed to Barnwell who exaggerates the scale of his actions out of the sheer extremity of emotion endemic to tragedy, Macheath uses his exaggeration as a way to draw out the satire of the lower classes being taken less seriously despite how similar they act to the glorified elite. Although *The Beggar's Opera* uses the lower-class to satirize the upper-class, it does so by drawing attention to the incongruent parallels between noble language and criminal actions, one's appearance and

one's true qualities. Those opposing forces ultimately illuminate how the wealthy are no more worthy of being depicted on stage than the poor.

George Lillo's working-class tragedy *The London Merchant* and John Gay's criminal satire *The Beggar's Opera* use opposing genres of tragedy and satire to respectively draw out the shared themes of the two plays — the investment in the working and lower classes and their right to be depicted on stage. In each Prologue and Introduction, the speakers use cultural references to history and mythology to argue that class should not be a distinguishing factor of whose stories deserve to be on the stage. Further, both Barnwell and Macheath use heroic, historical, and noble language that makes their rather base and small-scale actions seem grandiose. For Barnwell and his tragic fall from mercantile grace, this expansive language reflects how deeply and intensely he feels his guilt, adding to the sense of tragedy of his tale. Macheath, on the other hand, uses this language to reflect his disingenuousness, adding to the comedic satire. What both these plays display in different ways is 18th century theater's deep investment with class and the access of the non-wealthy to the theater. Working class patrons were making their voices heard and these plays work in tandem with those off-stage events to create a larger picture of an interest in how the middle classes have every right to consume and be portrayed in theater.

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Letting the Cat Out of the Wall: Irrepressible Perversity in Poe

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— any readers of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Cask of Amontillado” remember with horror the scene in which Montresor seals the unwitting Fortunato within the walls of his family vaults. The scene is uniquely hair-raising, yet the events of the 1846 tale serve as the culmination of the seeds which Poe had spent years planting. “The Fall of the House of Usher” introduces Poe’s fascination with immurement, which is the practice of imprisoning a victim in walls. Poe expands the motif in “The Black Cat” and “The Tell-Tale Heart,” where the act of immurement suggests psychological suppression as the narrators physically hide their victims while simultaneously hiding their own self-destructive natures. Poe’s stories consider self-sabotage - which he calls “perversity” — to be an inherent human quality, an assumption which lays the foundation for him to criticize contemporary thinkers in “The Imp of the Perverse” for refusing to accept its existence. An analysis of the relationship between immurement and perversity throughout Poe’s stories suggests that Poe considers the widespread suppression of perversity dangerous. As “The Cask of Amontillado” indicates, unawareness of the human capacity to self-destruct only guarantees self-destruction. However, another tale, “The Premature Burial,” provides an alternative approach toward perversity, exploring the fate of a narrator who escapes being ruined by his perversity by accepting his nature. Poe’s motif of immurement demonstrates how human beings tend to tuck the pesky topic of perversity out of sight, but his stories reveal how ignoring the inherent quality of perversity leads to self-destruction.

Immurement in Romantic Gothic Fiction

The verb “immure” means “to enclose within walls; to imprison” and to “entomb in a wall” (*OED*). Immurement wasn’t simply used as a wonderfully terrifying form of punishment in the Gothic fiction popular throughout Poe’s lifetime, but was also associated with a particular interpretation of European history. As Clare A. Simmons writes, there is no evidence that immurement was routinely practiced during the medieval era, yet the idea of such punishment was accepted as fact and had a strong hold over the Gothic imagination in the Romantic period (Simmons 148). Immurement was associated with the Spanish Inquisition and “oppressive Roman Catholic law,” so Gothic tales invoked it to

explore “the effect of oppression upon individuals” (Simmons 147, 145). Women, especially nuns who had broken their vows, were often victims of immurement in Gothic works such as Frances Trollope’s *The Abbess* and Walter Scott’s *Marmion, A Tale of Flodden Field*.

Poe was not immune to the public’s fascination with immurement, though he employed the trope in a unique manner, preferring to focus on perpetrators rather than sufferers. The immured victims in Poe’s tales play very different roles from those in other works of Gothic fiction. In Poe’s works, the victims are typically male and, as even a novice Poe reader can confirm, nuns are never the target of immurement. Though a few perpetrators of immurement in Poe, such as Montresor in “The Cask of Amontillado,” might argue that their victims are being justly punished, the victim’s atonement is never the story’s focus. Rather, the immurement reflects the psychological state of the actor, usually the narrator. In “The Black Cat,” for example, the narrator walls his wife up “as the monks of the middle ages are recorded to have walled up their victims,” a description which suggests how the popular misconception influenced Poe (604). Yet aside from the victim’s gender, the rest of the story swerves from the usual tropes. The narrator’s wife is “uncomplaining” and “patient,” an innocent figure suffering at her husband’s hands — not a deviant in need of reformatory punishment (603). Perhaps, as Ed Piacentino indicates, her good-naturedness is actually what provokes the narrator’s rage, rather than the cat’s irksome presence (Piacentino 161). Even so, this interpretation raises the question of why the narrator finds her good nature so repulsive, placing the story’s focus on his motivation instead of the victim’s supposed crimes.

Even in “The Cask of Amontillado,” where Montresor punishes Fortunato for the “insult” he inflicted on the former, the story’s concern is not so much about Fortunato’s punishment as it is about the narrator’s vengeance (848). The narrator emphasizes that the offense he endured would be “unredressed” if “the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong” (848). Montresor’s goal is for Fortunato to know that he has avenged himself - he doesn’t care about making Fortunato understand the error of his ways and instead focuses on making Fortunato feel his indignation. Fortunato’s crimes are not specified in the story, though scholars such as Elena V. Baraban have offered compelling explanations³ which demonstrate that Montresor’s actions are sufficiently motivated. Yet the story focuses on the effect of Fortunato’s deeds, rather than condemning the deeds directly, a decision which indicates that unlike typical Gothic works, Fortunato’s horrifying fate will reveal more about Montresor than himself.

³ Guided by Poe’s technique of including every detail with intention, Baraban analyzes subtle clues in the text which suggest that Montresor is offended because Fortunato insulted him, even though the former “probably has a better aristocratic lineage than him” and is thus “equal or superior to him” (51, 56).

Poe's unique approach to the motif of immurement may have been influenced by a contemporary account of the practice. John Gruesser traces Poe's inspiration for "The Cask of Amontillado" to another text, "A Man Built in a Wall," written by his acquaintance Joel T. Headley about a skeleton walled up in an Italian church. Headley, like Poe, diverges from the typical Gothic tale of immurement as he concocts a story of "vengeance" explaining the dead man's fate (Gruesser 158). Gruesser excavates Poe's relationship with Headley, whom he knew from 1844 to 1846 (160). Headley's literary reputation skyrocketed in 1846 while Poe struggled, arguably making Poe resent the other's success and driving him to channel his frustration through the plot of "Cask." This scenario may suggest Poe's possible identification with Montresor, and thus his decision to explore how immurement affects the narrator rather than the victim, but Gruesser reminds the reader that Poe likely did not view Headley as his own Fortunato. Poe "was often his own worst enemy," and his attacks on others only hurt himself (162). Indeed, Poe's own tendency to self-sabotage may explain why he associated this particular Gothic trope with harmful behavior to oneself, which he identifies as a key component of what he calls "perversity."

The three stories in which Poe describes scenes of literal immurement — "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Black Cat," and "The Cask of Amontillado" — differ from the standard Gothic approach not only by emphasizing its effect on the villain, but also by speculating about the perverse inclinations driving his behavior. Poe first began exploring immurement and perversity in "The Fall of the House of Usher," published in 1839. Evidently Poe was concerned with the perpetrator's psychology from his very first story on this topic, since "Usher" focuses on Roderick's perverse concealment of the fact that Madeline has been buried alive rather than Madeline's experience. "The Fall of the House of Usher" is narrated by an observer, however, whereas in subsequent stories Poe became more and more interested in how the vicious narrators represent their own experience. Some of the first-person narrators tell the tales of their perverse crimes from prison. Their confinement within the four prison walls can be interpreted as immurement, which strengthens the association between immurement and perversity. The question, then, is how and why immurement and imprisonment are so closely linked to perversity?

Perversity and Immurement

Poe's "The Imp of the Perverse," published in 1845, identifies many of the qualities essential to understanding perversity in Poe's tales. The narrator notes that people who aim to define the human soul "have failed to make room for a propensity" despite the fact that this propensity, perversity, "obviously exist[s] as a radical, primitive, irreducible sentiment" (826). Perversity is an inherent, observable human trait, but has been overlooked because it is not beneficial. Indeed, it drives humans to act not only "without comprehensible object," but "for the reason that we should *not*" (827). Perversity is a puzzlingly

self-destructive instinct, but Poe's narrator argues that its role in human behavior cannot be ignored. He details a variety of acts, ranging from trivial procrastination to suicide, to prove that perversity can be clearly observed in human behavior despite the general reluctance to admit its existence.

"The Black Cat" presents a similar definition of perversity, although the destructive behavior manifests differently. As he struggles inwardly with "the spirit of PERVERSENESS," the narrator brings up many points also raised in "Imp," such as how "philosophy takes no account" of this spirit despite its innate presence in mankind and how it drives everyone to perform "vile or silly action[s]" (599). The narrator of "Cat," though, emphasizes self-destruction as a quality of perversity. In "Imp," the narrator's perverse confession is conveyed as something harmful to him, but he implies that he did not inflict this situation upon himself by blaming "some invisible fiend" for striking him on the back and causing him to spit out his secret (831). The narrator of "Cat," however, takes responsibility for injuring himself. The narrator's mutilation of Pluto's eye echoes "Imp" in describing how "the fury of a demon instantly possess[e]s" the narrator and "a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured, thrille[s] every fibre of [his] frame" (598). The narrator's experience of possession suggests the "invisible fiend" who forced the narrator's confession in "Imp," and he has the opportunity to blame his actions on the external forces of the Imp or even on the intoxicating gin he has drunk. Yet the narrator of "Cat" ultimately takes ownership of his actions by describing how "malevolence... thrill[s] every fibre of [his] frame," indicating that he embraces his vicious inclinations. He goes on to turn this violence against himself, which he demonstrates when he credits his soul's desire "to offer violence to its own nature" as the primary motivation for him to hang his pet, Pluto, with "the bitterest remorse at [his] heart" (599). His genuine remorse indicates that, in truly perverse fashion, he acts with the *intention* to hurt himself, rather than acting impulsively and happening to hurt himself, as the narrator of "Imp" does.

The self-destructive nature of Pluto's hanging explains the narrator's actions at the end of the story, which link the irrepressible nature of perversity with immurement. The narrator, tormented by the presence of Pluto's replacement, kills his wife for protecting the cat and hides her body in the basement wall. The cat fails to reappear after the murder, so the narrator feels absolutely peaceful, admitting that "[t]he guilt of [his] dark deed" disturbs him "but little" (605). Unlike Pluto's hanging, his wife's murder is not a perverse action, because he experiences no remorse. Perversity instead rears its ugly head once the narrator is perfectly secure and content. The police visit his house to investigate his wife's disappearance, but even in their presence the narrator feels calm. No guilt eats at him, and he is certain they won't find his wife's corpse. Ultimately, it is the "glee at [his] heart" that overwhelms him (605). The phrase "at [his] heart" echoes the description of his remorse when hanging Pluto, signalling that another moment of perversity has arrived. The narrator sabotages

his happiness and confesses to his wife's murder - not out of guilt, but out of perversion. His perversity drives him to knock "upon that very portion of the brick-work behind which stood the corpse of the wife of [his] bosom," which gives him away (605). His actions reveal not only his crime, but also his perverse inability to preserve himself.

Similarly, in "The Tell-Tale Heart," the narrator's confession reveals his immured victim as well as the very perversity that drove the narrator to murder the old man. The narrator has no "[o]bject" for murdering the old man whom he "love[s]," making the murder an act of self-destructive perversity (555). As in "The Black Cat," the narrator feels "perfect triumph" and twice gloats that he has nothing to fear (559, 558). However, the narrator's confession itself doesn't seem to be an act of perversity. An overwhelming anxiety shatters his ease as the sound of a beating heart torments him until he feels "anything [is] better than this agony!" (599). He makes his confession in order to relieve his suffering. The narrator's agony could be seen as perverse, since his secret was secure and the police didn't seem to notice anything; but even if that were the case, he still ultimately confesses in order to alleviate his torment. His confession itself, then, isn't an act of perversity, as is the case in "Imp" and "The Black Cat." It's more accurate to read his outburst as a confession of having acted perversely. The narrator commands the police to "tear up the planks" in order to find the immured corpse of the old man, thus identifying the victim of his earlier perverse action (599). The narrator's confession, in other words, is not motivated by a sense of guilt but instead reveals his inability to suppress his perversity, symbolized by the immurement of the old man.

Significantly, the narrators of "Imp" and "The Black Cat" both write their stories from prison on the eve of their execution. This setting reinforces each story's definition of perversity, demonstrating that it is truly irrepressible and incorrigible. The narrator of "Imp" pens his tale from a "cell of the condemned" after perversely confessing himself to be guilty to a murder of which no one suspected him (830). In a sense, he and the narrator of "The Black Cat" are both figuratively immured in their cells, confined within four tight walls. Neither of them experience guilt over the murder he committed, yet they both feel compelled to write confessions. In each case, the actual secret they divulge is their own perverse behavior. Despite their immured states, their stories have been presumably made available to the public. Their unreliable narrative accounts are like the various immured bodies scattered across Poe's tales, which are discovered because evidence of perversity cannot be contained. "Imp," "Cat," and "Tell-Tale" demonstrate why so many of Poe's reflections on perversion include the motif of immurement. Just as no body can remain hidden out of sight, the presence of perversity cannot remain unacknowledged.

The Cost of Ignorance

“The Cask of Amontillado” is the outlier among the four tales that explicitly combine perversity, immurement, and first-person confession. In this case, perversity doesn’t drive the narrator’s downfall; instead, his masterful manipulation of *other* people’s perversity secures his victory. When Montresor lures Fortunato to his palazzo, he knows none of his servants are present because he had previously given them “explicit orders” to not leave the house, wryly remarking: “These orders were sufficient, I well knew, to insure their immediate disappearance, one and all, as soon as my back was turned” (849). Montresor could have just given them permission to join in the festivities but instead he forbids them to leave the premises, precisely because this will guarantee their flight to the carnival. His reasoning relies on one of Poe’s tenets of perversity, describing how people are driven to do what they are not supposed to do, precisely because they’re not supposed to. Montresor uses this same tactic on Fortunato with equal success. Montresor could simply lure Fortunato deeper into the catacombs with the promise of amontillado, but instead he provokes Fortunato by imploring him to give up the excursion for the sake of his health. He reminds Fortunato of the reasons he should take care of himself, for “[his] health is precious,” he is “rich, respected, admired, beloved,” and “happy, as once [Montresor] was” (850). The final statement isn’t merely self-indulgence on Montresor’s part, but a warning that one should be careful to protect one’s fragile happiness. Just as Montresor expects, the warning ensures that Fortunato will take his chances. Montresor’s feigned concern could also be read as an opportunity to introduce Fortunato to the Medoc, ostensibly for the sake of his health, but actually in order to intoxicate him and to make it easier to lead him into the catacombs; however, Montresor doesn’t offer the Medoc until after Fortunato affirms that “the cough is a mere nothing” and that he will continue (850). Clearly, Montresor questions Fortunato’s health in order to exploit the latter’s perversity.

Unlike Poe’s other tales, “The Cask of Amontillado” doesn’t operate as the narrator’s confession of perversity. Baraban rejects the theory that Montresor kills Fortunato out of perverseness through her analysis of Montresor’s final words, which affirm that his motive was revenge. Furthermore, she argues that he does not share his story because he regrets his crime. Baraban points out that “[i]f Montresor’s narration is his last confession, he should look forward to being forgiven,” yet he instead “subverts his role as a repentant sinner” and forgives Fortunato (57). In this light, “The Cask of Amontillado” isn’t even a confession. Indeed, Leland Person characterizes it as “an anti-confession - an example of *braggadocio*,” which “play[s] with the irony that committing murder isn’t as much fun if you’re the only one who knows you did it” (260-261). The question, then, is what Montresor prides himself on. It’s clear that he’s pleased with himself for successfully carrying out his crime, but he seems most proud of the *manner* in which he executed it. When Montresor traps Fortunato, he mocks him: “Once more let me *implore* you to return” (852). His earlier entreaties were formulated

to spur Fortunato's perverse response, and Montresor's taunts now reveal how much he prides himself on his ability to manipulate other people's propensities to self-sabotage.

Montresor's narrative demonstrates the cost of ignoring one's inclination to perversity. As Poe points out in "The Black Cat" and "The Imp of the Perverse," perversity has been overlooked by philosophers despite being an innate human trait. "The Cask of Amontillado" demonstrates the deepest danger of this attitude - not only do people remain perverse despite their unwillingness to admit it, but their ignorance of their inherent self-destructive behavior can be used against them. If, as this paper argues, Poe uses immurement to demonstrate how people cannot truly suppress their perverse habits, "The Cask of Amontillado" most vividly warns that an unawareness of perversity — the immurement of perversity — will result in a reversal of fortune. At the beginning of the story, Fortunato cannot recognize his own perversity, which causes him to end up replacing it as the thing which is hidden. Baraban points out that carnivals present an occasion where "identities are destabilized and traditional social hierarchy and etiquette collapse" (Baraban 54). "Cask" certainly plays around with the inversion of social identities, but the less obvious inversion of positions is that of Fortunato and his perversity.

It wasn't enough for Poe to simply depict perverse characters in his tales, but he also seemed determined to dredge up the very propensity which his readers may have themselves suppressed and thus force them into the same positions as his characters. Person argues that in his tales of confession, "Poe plays with his readers, getting us to identify with and even sympathize with his murderous narrators under the guise of hearing them confess," thus luring "the reader into a perverse identification" (253). Poe's ability to draw out the reader's perversity takes his crusade against self-ignorance a step beyond identifying the overlooked propensity. He forces readers to confront their own irrational inclination to self-sabotage and makes it impossible for them to deny its existence any longer. They *will* be perverse, whether they accept it or not, and their ignorance will only guarantee their destruction.

Accepting Perversity

"The Premature Burial" offers readers hope for a happier ending than the one Fortunato experiences. In this story, the narrator avoids being doomed by his perverse nature through confronting it. The narrator, who suffers from catalepsy, is consumed by his terror of being buried alive. He awakens one day to find his greatest fear has come to pass - only to realize that he is merely confined within a narrow bunk on a ship, where he had fallen asleep after taking shelter from a storm. After his scare, the narrator turns his mind away from his habitual terror, claiming, among other reforms, to no longer read "bugaboo tales - *such as this*" (679). He implicates his own tale as the kind that he now attempts to avoid, calling himself out for acting perversely. It makes the reader wonder

whether he has truly ceased to obsess over the topic of being buried alive, but perhaps acknowledging his perversity is actually the key to his success. He knows that he should not engage in behavior that might augment his fear, but his self-awareness protects him from significant harm. After all, perversity may be inescapable, but this narrator suggests that it is manageable, if acknowledged. As he concludes, “the grim legion of sepulchral terrors cannot be regarded as altogether fanciful - but... they must sleep, or they will devour us - they must be suffered to slumber, or we perish” (679). The narrator accepts that “terrors” cannot be dismissed, because they do exist. The narrator cannot escape his perverse inclinations, but he recognizes this inevitability. He expresses his perversity through the composition of his tale, without allowing it to overwhelm him as his terror once did.

Poe’s tales have thrilled and mystified readers and scholars alike in their accounts of how ignoring the human quality of perversity, which Poe symbolizes through immurement and other forms of confinement, leads to self-destruction. Piacentino notes that “[f]ew critics [of “The Black Cat”] seriously accept the narrator’s own dubious rationalizations” that his behavior is motivated by perverseness, but though there are certainly a variety of ways to interpret the narrator’s actions, it is a mistake to assume that perversity in Poe’s stories simply deflects attention away from the real issues at hand (Piacentino 153). Instead, the perverse actions in Poe’s tales invite an analysis of how when humans can’t easily understand their perplexing, irrational behavior, they prefer to simply ignore it. An unawareness of the human capacity for self-sabotage can have dire consequences, which Poe emphasizes through the motif of immurement. As the narrators of “The Imp of the Perverse,” “The Black Cat,” and “The Tell-Tale Heart” demonstrate, characters are unable to truly hide their own self-destructive tendencies, which are revealed alongside their immured victims. “The Cask of Amontillado” deals more directly with the consequences of self-ignorance when Montresor uses Fortunato’s weaknesses against him. “The Premature Burial,” however, gives readers hope that by actually engaging shortcomings such as perversity, rather than hiding it from view, one can avoid their destructive potential.

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"His own was ampler:" Dickinson and Whitman's Sunset Poetry

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Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman both admired the “splendor of ended day” (LOG 414) appearing as “A Slash of Blue! A sweep of Gray!” (F233) and were inspired to make sunsets frequent subjects of their poetry. The coincidence that these dissimilar poets wrote about sunsets presents an opportunity for exploration and comparison. Dickinson and Whitman both wrote about sunsets, but they conceptualized them differently. This conceptualization does not refer to the actual display in the sky, for both poets described striking colors and light. Rather, the way each poet portrays sunsets is what distinguishes sunset poetry as being Dickinsonian or Whitmanian. Dickinson tries to capture the sunset in her poetry: she imitates the sun’s performance. Obvious tension is prevalent in her poems, as her speakers struggle to control the fleeting event while simultaneously honoring it. Whitman is not so easily frustrated by finales, and he celebrates the closure the setting sun ends the day with. In his characteristic style, he sings the emotions the experience provokes within him and delights in the cyclical nature of time. Even as they deemed the same phenomenon extraordinary, Dickinson and Whitman saw something different in their own sunsets.

Emily Dickinson wrote 406 poems featuring the word “sun,” 182 poems featuring the word “sky,” and 60 poems featuring the word “sunset” (Emily Dickinson Archive). Less than 40 of her poems chronicle sunsets with a focus on their progression and imagery, as the term “sunset poetry” implies (Forcina Appendix A). Sunsets, reminding Dickinson of fleeting time and inevitable endings, were a natural occurrence she strove to emulate in her poems, “each of her sunset poems was a ‘sketch’ or ‘study from nature’...local character and color without sacrificing the imaginative quality that separated an effective composition from a mere servile imitation” (St. Armand 268). In poems such as “Sunset that screens, reveals –” (F1644) Dickinson depicts the “local character and color” (St. Armand 208) of “Amethyst” (Dickinson 3) sunsets while still using her imagination: “Sunset that screens, reveals – /Enhancing what we see/ By menaces of Amethyst/ And Moats of Mystery” (Dickinson 1-4). This nuanced sunset, which “screens” and “reveals,” emphasizes the progression of a sunset that casts light and shadow over “what we see” (Dickinson 2). The rhyme of “see” and “Mystery” suggests the elusive quality of sunsets and connects the opposite concepts of visibility and invisibility. Dickinson recognizes aspects of the sunset that she saw, but never fully grasped.

Like Dickinson, the speakers of her poems occasionally experience tension as they try to simulate the sunset or to understand it, but they ultimately revere sunsets, which simply exist:

The sunset, then, is a curious amalgam of triumph and defeat, an experience that robs as much as it bestows. One cannot *tell* it, one can only reproduce its features as faithfully and as humbly as possible, hoping that the effect, character, or likeness of the hidden spirit will be evoked by corresponding poem or painting. (St. Armand 272).

Dickinson's efforts to portray her beloved sunsets are ultimately humble recreations. "I send Two Sunsets" (F557) witnesses her endeavor to recreate sunsets; as an admirer of sunsets, she imitates them, yet feels strained in her competition with nature. The speaker's joking tone is somewhat contradicted as the poem exposes their desire to manufacture sunsets. Personification allows the speaker to view "Day" as their enemy: "Day and I – in competition ran –/I finished Two – and several Stars – / While He – was making One" (Dickinson 2-4). The idea of the speaker "send[ing] Two Sunsets" and "finish[ing]" them is nonsensical, despite the speaker's triumphant voice and their assertive "I" statements: "I finished Two –" (Dickinson 3). It is impossible to experience "Two Sunsets" simultaneously since there is only one sun. The excess of the speaker's creation, the "Two" sunsets and "several Stars," acknowledges the impossibility of the speaker delivering an actual sunset.

The speaker of "I send Two Sunsets" is not narrow minded as they can admit the excellence of nature: "His own was ampler" (Dickinson 5). According to the Emily Dickinson Lexicon, the poet would have understood "ampler" to mean "large; broad; plentiful; full; bountiful; spacious; extensive; great; vast" (Emily Dickinson Lexicon). Sunsets that encompass the sky are "ampler" than the speaker's: they cannot be contained. The speaker acknowledges this but defends their sunsets by attesting that they are "more convenient/ To Carry in the Hand –" (Dickinson 7-8). This could be interpreted as the speaker's assumed victory over Day:

The poet decides to create her own sunsets nevertheless. Such a decision obliges her to question whether the pure imitation of nature's sunset will be of any use. As a result, the speaker resorts to more pragmatic aspects of creating sunsets to the effect that she considers her own sunsets "more convenient" because they can be grasped. (Fraunholz 478)

Fraunholz recognizes the "humorous treatment" (Fraunholz 478) of the poem overall, but she interprets the speaker's conclusion to be a "pragmatic" one due to the "convenience" of their sunsets. However, the tone of "I send Two Sunsets" is not necessarily pragmatic and is rather playful. The speaker's rationalization of their sunsets' superiority falls flat as the poem abruptly ends with a dash. The "convenient" quality of their sunsets lacks explanation and

compels readers to wonder why anyone needs a sunset they can hold in their hand. The speaker's tone, "as I/ Was saying to a Friend –" (Dickinson 5-6) is conversational and enables an interpretation of their self-deprecating humor. The speaker jokes that their sunsets are "more convenient" but does not make an outright statement that their sunsets are better than nature's.

Dickinson's imitation of sunsets serves as her homage to them, but also witnesses the tension she views them with. In her article "The Poetics of Emily Dickinson", Eleanor Wilner defines Dickinson's imitative poems as "mimesis:"

...the conception of poetry as mimesis. Just as the intense emotional experience was a heavenly sign, so the aspects of nature particularly extraordinary or intense events-lightning, auroras, volcanoes, noon, snows, sunsets and sunrises-were emblematic of enormous forces and supernal mysteries. Thus to reproduce nature was in fact to perpetuate inspiration. (Wilner 133)

Fittingly, Wilner utilizes "I send Two Sunsets" as the immediate example of mimesis. Wilner feels that the speaker's "convenient" sunsets are "the condensation of a vast nature that then becomes accessible, significant, portable, scaled to the human grasp" (Wilner 133). Wilner believes that the poem, itself, allows a "vast nature" to become "accessible" on paper, where it may be contained. Recall that "vast" was one of the definitions supplied by the Emily Dickinson Lexicon for the speaker's word, "ampler", as they confess "His own was ampler" (Dickinson 5). Dickinson attempts to "condense a vast nature" in her poetry, but she competes against the natural world, which prevails as the "ampler," or "vaster," source of sunsets.

Using Wilner's idea of mimesis, it is obvious that both Dickinson and Whitman wanted to imitate sunsets in their sunset poetry. In Whitman's "A Prairie Sunset" (LOG 446) sunsets are portrayed as they would be in nature: they are vivid, resplendent, and sublime. This poem is reminiscent of Emily Dickinson's rich imagery, for example, Whitman describes: "Shot gold, maroon and violet, dazzling silver, emerald, fawn/... colors till now unknown" (Whitman 1, 3). In his characteristic style, Whitman features a long first line which lists all the colors he observes. Like Dickinson, he focuses on the sunset's colors because he wants to mimic and include them. Whitman, however, differs from Dickinson because he does not supply the colors with meaning or action: rather, he lists them as simple findings. Even when he expresses these are "colors till now unknown" (Whitman 3), their "Mystery" (Dickinson 1644), as Dickinson might have described these colors, is not stressed in Whitman's poetry. He is not as interested in the inquiry of sunsets as he is in their observance:

Color always delighted him, particularly the colors of the sky both day and night. He does not celebrate wet, cloudy, colorless days, but gorgeous sunrises and sunsets and the delicate colors of clear or filmy days... he paid special attention to "sky views and effects" ... he could

see strange shows “in light and shade – enough to make a colorist go delirious,” which implies a suspicious sympathy with the colorist. He had an eye for pictorial effect. (Foerster 752)

The “delirious” feeling sunsets that evoked in Whitman is apparent in “A Prairie Sunset” (LOG 446). The speaker, assumedly Whitman himself, is overwhelmed by the sunset’s expansiveness: “earth’s whole amplitude and Nature’s multiform power” (Whitman 2) have “no limit, confine” (Whitman 4). The powerful “I,” which typically distinguishes his poetry as being Whitmanian, is noticeably absent from this poem. Rather, “A Prairie Sunset” is an authentic celebration of the “ample” sunset in and of itself, and the poem aims to achieve the “pictorial effect” (Foerster 752).

Dickinson’s mimesis suggests more than a desire to “perpetuate inspiration” (Wilner 133) because of the frequent involvement of speakers in her sunset poetry. Rather than ‘telling’ the appearance of the sunset like Whitman does in “A Prairie Sunset” (LOG 446), Dickinson’s speakers often have something to ‘show’ about them, especially in relation to themselves. In her poem, “The Sun went down – no Man looked on” (F1109) the speaker’s experience with the sunset is intimate: “The Sun went down – no Man looked on –/ The Earth and I, alone,/ Were present at the Majesty –/ He triumphed, and went on –” (Dickinson 1-4). This speaker, “alone” with the “Earth,” seems inferior when compared to the “Majesty” and “triumph” of the sunset. This solitary speaker describes how the sun “went on,” and as the sunset ends, so does the poem’s line, with a dash. Dickinson’s formal choice mimics the progression of sunset but also renders the speaker powerless against the setting sun. Closure, then, is forced upon an unwilling speaker. Some of Dickinson’s speakers are more willing to imitate the sunset: “If this is ‘fading’/Oh let me immediately ‘fade’! /If this is ‘dying’/Bury – me, in such a shroud of red!” (F119, Dickinson 1-4). This speaker’s tone portrays the sunset more positively than the speaker of F1109; exclamation points and the interjection “Oh” (Dickinson 2) praise the sunset. The speaker desires to impersonate the movements and colors of the sunset, even if it means “dying” (Dickinson 2).

Like the speaker of “If this is ‘fading’” (F119), the speaker of Whitman’s “Song at Sunset” (LOG 414) welcomes endings, if they are as magnificent as the sunset. The speaker, assumedly Whitman, appreciates the “endless finales” (Whitman 54) of the sunsets which end each day, every day, while Dickinson usually focuses on the temporary quality of a single sunset. Whitman achieves closure as he writes about sunsets, because he understands this fleeting phenomenon ushers in a new day, and that the sun will ultimately set again:

Illustrious every one!
 Illustrious what we name space, sphere of unnumber’d spirits,
 Illustrious the mystery of motion in all beings, even the tiniest insect,
 Illustrious the attribute of speech, the senses, the body,

Illustrious the passing light – illustrious the pale reflection on the new
 moon in the western sky,
 Illustrious whatever I see or hear or touch, to the last. (Whitman 9-14)

Whitman utilizes anaphora by beginning each line in this stanza with “illustrious,” which the OED defines as “Lighted up, having lustre or brilliancy; luminous, shining, bright, lustrous” (OED). The word itself, “illustrious,” attracts attention as it is repeated, and illuminates the exclamations made by Whitman, whether they relate to the sunset or to the broader experience of living. The effect of anaphora in this stanza is that it encourages a cyclical reading; while reading the poem, one recalls the previous line began with “illustrious” and their attention is redirected to that line; thus, the poem’s form parallels with its content. The word “illustrious” begins and ends each line, just as the “illustrious” sun begins and ends each day. Whitman mimics the sunset’s progression and the cyclical nature of time in the poem’s form.

Whitman emulates the sunset differently than Dickinson: he does not compete with it or try to control it, but rather shares in it. An interesting overlap between “Song at Sunset” and Dickinson’s “The Sun went down – no Man looked on” (F1109) is that both use versions of the word “triumphant” to describe the sunset. According to the Emily Dickinson Lexicon, “triumphant” has many meanings, like “victory; conquest” or “celebration; pomp” (Emily Dickinson Lexicon). Dickinson’s “triumphant” aligns with the first definition. She employs this word to explain the sunset leaving the speaker alone: “He triumphed – and went on” (Dickinson 4) which depicts a pessimistic kind of triumph, in which the speaker is defeated and is no longer involved. Whitman’s “triumphant” aligns with the second definition; Whitman celebrates the triumph of the sunset and will “corroborate forever the triumph of things” (Whitman 8). He seemingly disregards that this sunset is a finite experience.

In Whitman’s approach, a sunset is an ending which fades into a beginning. He does not feel pressured to immortalize sunsets in his poetry, for they are already immortal: “I sing the endless finales of things,/I say Nature continues, glory continues,/O setting sun! though the time has come,/I still warble under you, if none else does, unmitigated adoration” (Whitman 54-55, 59-60). A finale is an ending, yet Whitman describes this finale as being “endless.” As the poem itself reaches an end, Whitman reminds his subject which is the sunset, “you,” that his “adoration” is “unmitigated.” Whitman sounds nearly intoxicated as he explains the infinite magnitude of his “adoration” for sunsets. He celebrates what he finds extraordinary about the ordinary occurrence of a sunset, and this is what compels him to write: “[Whitman] thereby invests everything with primitive, natural emotion, but he also enlivens by the sheer power of his verse.” (Davidson 6). “Song at Sunset” does not simply honor the setting sun, but “enlivens” it with the human experience.

Whitman enlivens and imitates the sunset further still in “Song at Sunset,” as he presents sunsets as a source of self-awareness and of universality. He sings about the many places where sunsets occur. He lists the many locations he has witnessed sunsets in his life: “prairies... whatever streets I have roam’d/Or cities or silent woods, or even amid the sights of war” (Whitman 46-51). This catalog is reminiscent of the scope of the sunset in “A Prairie Sunset” (LOG 446) which unifies “North, South, all” (Whitman 4). Whitman perceives sunsets as being accessible to all individuals in all places, classifying them as spiritual and inclusive phenomena. Whitman believed that natural experiences like sunsets, and spirituality, are intertwined:

The earthly and the divine, the sensuous and the mystical, are never far from each other in his verse. His images flow rapidly from the minutiae of plant or animal life through parts of the human body to sweeping vistas of different times and places, often with affirmations of God’s harmonious universe. (Reynolds 235)

Reynolds’s articulation of Whitman’s philosophy echoes the verses of his sunset poetry. In both “A Prairie Sunset” and “Song at Sunset,” the natural phenomenon encompasses many individuals and places. All the while, Whitman “affirm[s] God’s harmonious universe” as the sunset inundates his own soul: “Wonderful to depart! /Wonderful to be here!” (Whitman 22-23). “Departing” and “being here” are interchangeable; Whitman affirms that both life and death are “wonderful” as the sunset implies them to be. The spiritual experience of viewing a sunset is both a universal and intimate event in Whitman’s point of view, whereas Dickinson’s sunset poetry is much more intimate, featuring only one speaker who typically views the sunset alone.

Though their sunset poetry differs, Dickinson and Whitman wrote with the same intention: to imitate, and even to immortalize, the sunset. Their platform to accomplish this intention was their poetry, which permitted them to portray sunsets as more than just an image, but as a meaningful phenomenon that an individual could interpret and have a relationship with. Both poets felt a responsibility to convey the dramatic display of sunset that accomplished what a photograph could not: “Emily Dickinson was never surfeited by the sunset; her own sensibility and perception had to serve as a Daguerrean apparatus to capture the daily passion drama of the sun’s decline and death” (St. Armand 246). Similarly, Whitman was compelled to ‘photograph’ the sunset from his own unique perspective: “Whitman’s... words, ‘literally photographed’, reflect his faith in the power of photography to absorb experience and hold it fast... his poetic ‘I’ was a kind of roving camera eye aimed at the world around him” (Reynolds 282-283). The poets were photographers, except their expression of the sunset’s imagery and progression lacked the immediate visual and instead relied on words that could produce that visual in the mind’s eye. Poetic form,

diction, and tone enable their sunset poetry to imitate the evocative experience of viewing a sunset.

Whether they are “fading” or “endless,” a “competition” or “celebration,” sunsets, as described by Dickinson and Whitman respectively, were inspiring subjects. Dickinson’s sunset poetry, (not limited to the poems analyzed but also including the poems in Appendix A), defines the sunset as a momentary event that is indicative of time’s brevity. Dickinson’s speakers, though they strive to perfect the sunset’s craft, tend to overcome tension and generally marvel at the sunset’s beauty. Whitman’s sunset poetry portrays sunsets that are expansive in their appearance and breadth; Whitman’s unifying sunsets reach all parts of the world. The sunset is a spiritual experience for Whitman that he can be immersed by or that he can sing, as his celebratory voice often does. Dickinson and Whitman capture the imagery and progression of sunsets with the precision of photographers, but they also imbue sunsets with meaning in the ways only poets could.

Appendix A

Dickinson’s “Sunset Poetry”

Table created by Devyn Forcina

Note: “Sunset Poetry” refers here to poems that portray the imagery and progression of sunsets, not poems that simply include the word “sunset.”

Edition	Number	Title
Franklin	119	If this is 'fading'
Franklin	140	Bring me the sunset in a cup -
Franklin	182	The Sun kept stooping - stooping - low!
Franklin	233	A Slash of Blue! A sweep of Gray!
Franklin	251	If He dissolve - then - there is nothing - more -
Franklin	265	It cant be Summer!
Franklin	297	This - is the land - the Sunset washes -
Franklin	318	She sweeps with many-colored Brooms
Franklin	427	Sunset at Night - is natural -
Franklin	468	Whole Gulfs - of Red, and Fleets - of Red
Franklin	495	The Day undressed - Herself
Franklin	557	I send Two Sunsets -

Franklin	589	They called me to the Window, for
Franklin	603	The Red - Blaze- is in the Morning -
Franklin	669	An ignorance a Sunset
Franklin	715	The sun kept setting - setting - still
Franklin	752	Ah, Teneriffe - Receding Mountain -
Franklin	787	Bloom upon the Mountain stated -
Franklin	875	The Color of a Queen, is this -
Franklin	1013	Superfluous were the Sun
Franklin	1045	We learn in the Retreating
Franklin	1085	Who is the East?
Franklin	1086	Nature rarer uses Yellow
Franklin	1095	When I have seen the Sun emerge
Franklin	1109	The Sun went down - no Man looked on -

Franklin	1116	The Sunset stopped on Cottages
Franklin	1203	On the World you colored
Franklin	1442	It was a quiet seeming Day -
Franklin	1599	A Sloop of Amber slips away
Franklin	1624	Pass to thy Rendezvous of Light
Franklin	1644	Sunset that screens, reveals -
Franklin	1656	The Sun in reining to the West
Franklin	1681	"Red Sea", indeed! Talk not to me
Franklin	1709	The Sun retired to a cloud
Franklin	1733	Of Yellow was the outer Sky

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The Author of a Fictional Slave Advertisement

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Tolson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* presents the reader with a pairing of both fact and fiction. Throughout the chapters, the audience follows the fictional character Cora as she flees her bondage on Randall's Georgia plantation. As she runs, she enlists the help of the underground railroad, a historical group that helped to ferry slaves northward. In the novel, Whitehead's interpretation of the underground railroad replaces the houses of friendly whites with secret train stations and rails. Yet, one continuous historical aspect of the story is the inclusion of digitalized slave ads. In the novel, chapters named after states begin with said ads. All, except for Cora's poster — which is signatureless and fictional — are historical. While appearing to be authorless, Whitehead informs his reader, through the writerly text, of the originator of the fictional document. I argue that the author of Cora's runaway slave advertisement in the final chapter of *The Underground Railroad*, titled "The North," was written by Ridgeway's former companion, Homer.

Before the analysis of the ad's text begins, it is important to understand Homer's character, for it provides definitive proof that only he could have written Cora's ad. In the chapter titled "South Carolina," the reader is introduced to him as "a little colored boy, about ten years old, [driving] a wagon up the street through the crowd..." (191). In the chapter "Tennessee," Homer is further explained as being a former slave who was freed by Ridgeway. The slave catcher states that "[he] bought [Homer] for five dollars and drew up emancipation papers the next day" (206). When Cora questions Homer's decision to stay with Ridgeway after being freed, Ridgeway responds, "a black boy has no future, free papers or no" (207). He further states that "with me, he can learn about the world" (207). Ridgeway's comments regarding Homer provides an understanding of Ridgeway's racial bias. When the slave catcher refers to Homer as "black boy," he demonstrates that he sees Homer as a non-equal. Moreover, Ridgeway's comment of "with me" — which refers to him being a white male — "he can learn" notifies the reader that if a black individual wishes to be successful in the novel's America, they must be controlled by a white man. Finally, the repetition of the word "no" creates a negative, dead-ended view towards life that awaits everyone who is not white in America. Sadly, this sentiment embeds itself in Homer's character, as he willingly helps Ridgeway track down and deliver escaped slaves to their masters.

Being employed by Ridgeway, Homer arguably exhibits a superior understanding of the slave-capturing business. Homer would additionally understand the importance of spreading information to the masses through slave posters. Using the historical ads on pages 10, 86, 144, 202, and 242 as examples, the reader realizes that masters would publicly post advertisements asking for the location or capture of their runaway slaves. In addition, on page 206, the reader learns that Ridgeway has helped Homer with his reading and writing,

which is most notably confirmed on page 309 when the boy records the dying thoughts of Ridgeway. With his familiarity with slave-catching and writing, these experiences would manifest themselves in Cora's ad. Homer knows that to catch a slave, he would need to publish an advertisement, entailing that Homer possesses the necessary background to be the author of the ad for Cora.

Given that Homer has the necessary skills to write the ad about Cora, he also has the experience of dictating a poster about the runaway slave girl. As previously stated on page 206, Homer was both freed and employed by Ridgeway. Homer's freedom is essential and establishes a connection to Cora, which presents itself in two specific instances of the advertisement's text. The relation between Cora and Homer, in the sentences, "RAN AWAY from her legal but not rightful master fifteen months past..." (304), and "SHE WAS NEVER PROPERTY" (304), indicates that Homer is writing Cora's ad. Upon close analysis of the first quote, a connection between Cora's situation with her "master" and Homer's freedom can be made. In the chapter "Georgia," the reader indirectly learns from the writerly text that James Randall was Cora's master. On page 25, Connelly, an overseer on the Randall plantation, is introduced as commanding Cora to find a husband. Later, the reader realizes that James Randall left "the daily operations to his man Connelly" (30). Since James allowed Connelly to run his "daily operations," and Connelly had power over Cora, James thus is Cora's master too. After James' death on page 43, his brother Terrance assumes control over the plantation. (p 47). Upon Cora's capture, Ridgeway informs her that "[her] master is dead" and that "I don't know if the current master of Randall will pay your reward." (307). Ridgeway's reference to Terrance as "the new master of Randall" reveals that he sees Cora as masterless. Likewise, Homer, who is free but employed in a servant-like manner, most likely cannot differentiate between his experiences and Cora's due to his young age. Therefore, he sees Cora as belonging to Terrance in a "legal" fashion, although he is not her "rightful" master. Moreover, Homer's belief that both he and Cora share an experience could present itself in the second quote. Because of his freedom and "masterless" environment, his experience transposes itself on Cora, resulting in the line, "SHE WAS NEVER PROPERTY" (304).

It is important to mention here that although one may argue that Cora has written this ad, Cora has reflected that "she had not been [Terrance's] and now she was his. Or she had always been his and just now knew about it" (48). The repetition of the word "his" when Cora is contemplating her situation subtly demonstrates to the reader that Cora is a slave. Additionally, Cora questions whether she was just now "[Terrance's]" or if he had always been in control. Nevertheless, Cora understands that Terrance is her legal master and that she is a slave. Since Cora knows she is a slave, the author would need to be an individual outside of the Randall plantation who would not know that Cora saw herself as property. As a result, the only person with that experience is Homer.

Since Cora did not write this ad, it is critical to explain that Terrance Randall — another possible author — had no hand in the advertisement for his runaway slave. Once again, using the historical ads on pages 10, 86, 144, 202, and 242, the reader is presented with two common aspects in the texts' language: a signature and the names of the masters who are missing slaves. The five inscriptions are of "*W. M. DIXON*" (10), "*BENJI. P. WELLS*" (86), "*RIGDON BANKS*" (144), "*JOHN DARK*" (202), and "*JAMES AYKROYD*" (242). Each poster additionally includes the names of "Mrs. Steel's plantation" (10), "L.B. Pearce, Esq." (242), and "William M. Heritage" (242). Whenever the master's name is not directly indicated in the text, the author uses the word "subscriber" (10, 144, 202) to refer to them. Historically, the inclusion of the master's name was important for slave catchers and citizens reporting on the whereabouts of the missing individuals. In an age without mass media, a name and location were necessary if the master wanted to have their property returned.

In contrast, Cora's ad presents no similarities to the historical examples. Other than the opening line of, "RAN AWAY from her legal but not rightful master..." (304), there is no mention of Terrance Randall. Moreover, the ad is signatureless, only stating "*December 23*" (304). Given that there is no information on the location of the Randall plantation, a signature with a name, or mention of Terrance Randall, the reader can see that the plantation owner did not write this ad. If he did, he would have—following the five historical examples presented in the novel — included his location for a more straightforward return of Cora. Subsequently, the only person who could have written this ad is Homer. The poster contains specific details that only a person in close contact with Cora would understand. Homer is that individual since he is the only living character who spent enough time with Cora to understand her character well enough to write the advertisement properly.

The next textual evidence to suggest that Homer is the ad's author is the line, "possessed of a spirited nature and devious method" (304). As Homer, Cora, and Ridgeway are traveling through Tennessee, Ridgeway informs Cora that "you absconded for ten months...Insult enough. You and your mother are a line that needs to be extinguished" (226). In a twisted and racist manner, Ridgeway compliments Cora and her mother, Mabel, for escaping capture for an extended period of time. Although Ridgeway appears to be angered, he further reflects that "people like you and your mother are the best of your race" (227). Although he is clearly racist, he believes that the two women are still cunning, and therefore are a danger to white society. He states "we [white men] can't have you too clever...[and] so fit [that] you outrun us" (227). Due to Ridgeway's warped respect for Cora, Homer adopted a similar mentality. The boy further learns of Cora's "devious methods" when she tackles Ridgeway, forcing the pair to fall down a set of stairs as she initiates an eventually successful plan of escape (308-309). Since Homer learned from Ridgeway and experienced Cora's skillfulness firsthand, he best understands her skillfulness when it comes to

avoiding capture. Thus, only Homer possesses the experience to reflect Cora's nature truthfully in the advertisement.

The concluding evidence for the argument that Homer is the author of Cora's ad is the line, "last seen in Indiana among the outlaws of John Valentine Farm" (304). The term "outlaws" directly relates to Ridgeway's racial ideals. In his job of catching slave fugitives, he views individuals like Cora as being dangerous. This further implies that Ridgeway views those who assisted runaways as dangerous criminals too. A fantastic example of Ridgeway's sentiment towards the people who help slaves escape is during his discovery of the underground railroad. Whitehead describes Ridgeway as "[not] the first white man to see the underground railroad, but the first enemy" (308). Ridgeway, being considered an "enemy," indicates that he views the other "whites" as "outlaws" or "enemies." With Homer's extended exposure to Ridgeway's worldview, he would eventually share the same ideas. This is actively demonstrated in Homer's use of the word "outlaws." The boy views Valentine — who runs a farm for runaway slaves — as a criminal, since he harbors fugitives from the law. Upon raiding the farm, Ridgeway and Homer recapture Cora; however, the girl escapes, fleeing down a tunnel, leaving the dying Ridgeway and attending Homer behind (309).

Since she escapes, Homer becomes the last person to see Cora in Indiana, specifically on Valentine's farm. Once again, Cora's presence in Indiana can be interpreted as evidence for her writing the ad. However, Cora does not see Valentine as an "outlaw," but rather a person who granted her "unlikely [gifts]...after all her prisons" (246). Therefore, she cannot be the author of the ad since she does not view Valentine as a lawless individual. Likewise, while Ollie, one of the westward-bound travelers mentioned at the novel's end, may appear to know that Cora was in Indiana, the text fails to state where the two meet, implying that it is not Indiana. Furthermore, Cora mentions to Ollie that she "was [from] Georgia" (313), and not Indiana. Consequently, the only person who can definitively say that Cora was in Indiana is Homer, providing concrete evidence that only he can be the author of this ad.

Therefore, Homer is the only one in the novel with enough information to write this advertisement. He was the last one with Cora before she disappeared. He knows she is skilled at eluding capture. He understands that he is free and not property; thus, he sees the masterless Cora as not being property, although she still belongs to a master. Finally, his literacy and employment in the slave-catching business provided him with the experience needed to publish this ad. Thus, the only character in the novel, *The Underground Railroad*, with this combined experience is Homer. Therefore, he is the only person who could have written Cora's advertisement.

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Injustice in Childhood: *Jane Eyre* and the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

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'In the little world where children have their existence whosoever brings them up, there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt, as injustice.' (*Great Expectations*, Chapter 8)

—efore a child grows to understand how rotten laws, doctrines, customs, and persons permit and promulgate wickedness, a child simply feels the raw sting of injustice—and feeling this sting in a state of ignorance and vulnerability only heightens the pain. Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and Frederick Douglass’ *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, are simultaneously autobiographies and novels with the fictional character of Jane Eyre serving as the narrator in Brontë’s work and Frederick Douglass himself — statesman, orator, and abolitionist — being the voice of his own story. Each respective narrator highlights in vivid and dramatic detail those difficult, painful, and thorny moments of their upbringing. Jane and Douglass emphasize the alienation and solitude as well as the violence and cruelty that they endured in their respective childhoods. Physical abuse and deliberate neglect are the acme of injustice and manifest in the environments that Jane and Douglass grew up in.

Gateshead Hall and Lowood, the places in which Jane suffered through childhood and adolescence, are illustrated as brutal settings in Jane’s narrative. At Gateshead Hall, Jane lives under the tyranny of her aunt, Mrs. Reed and her three cousins: John, Eliza, and Georgiana. Mrs. Reed displays clear partiality towards her own children and permits their ill-conduct and bullying of Jane. Mrs. Reed is truly a despot, and the servants of the house follow in her prejudice towards Jane; Miss Abbot’s demeaning of Jane evinces that Jane is not on equal footing with her cousins, “you are less than a servant, for you do nothing for your keep... And you ought not to think yourself on an equality with the Misses Reed and Master Reed” (Brontë 16). Mrs. Reed’s antipathy towards Jane is brazenly enforced at Gateshead and Jane is left to ponder in despair and bitterness when such cruelty will ever abate, “Why was I always suffering, always browbeaten, always accused, for ever condemned? Why could I never please? Was it useless to try to win anyone’s favour?” (18). Perhaps the most heinous example of the injustice Jane suffers at Gateshead, beyond deliberate neglect, is in John Reed’s blatant physical abuse. A particularly disturbing account of John’s violence is when he hurls a book at Jane causing her to bleed, “the volume was flung, it hit me, and I fell, striking my head against the door and cutting it. The cut bled, the pain was sharp” (13). John’s trespasses are ignored by Mrs. Reed and the servants while Jane possesses no weapon for recourse: “I had no appeal whatever against either his menaces or his inflictions” (12). Jane lives in a state of profound anxiety in her day-to-day life:

He bullied and punished me; not two or three times in the week, or once or twice in a day, but continually: every nerve I had feared him, and every morsel of flesh on my bones shrank when he came near. (12)

Jane enjoys no rest at Gateshead: it is not a refuge of comfort or a haven of familial warmth but a prison of anguish in which she is treated as inferior to her cousins. Jill Matus states that *Jane Eyre* is “unique among the Brontë novels in its focus on the solitary, suffering child” (114). Jane is verily a stranger under the Reeds’ roof and is subject to a different set of rules; her isolation is purposefully effectuated by her family rendering her injustice at Gateshead especially appalling.

Jane’s beginnings at Lowood are saddled with similar tribulations that she had endured at Gateshead. This is due in part to Mrs. Reed’s iniquitous feelings towards Jane being carried from Gateshead to Lowood in the form of slander. Mrs. Reed defames Jane’s character to Lowood school supervisor, Mr. Brocklehurst and charges him to, “keep a strict eye on her [Jane]... guard against her worst fault, a tendency to deceit” (Brontë 41). Mrs. Reed’s instruction is taken up by Mr. Brocklehurst. After a harmless mistake in which Jane drops and breaks a piece of slate, Mr. Brocklehurst seizes on the opportunity to castigate her:

My dear children...it becomes my duty to warn you that this girl, who might be one of God’s own lambs, is a little castaway - not a member of the true flock, but evidently an interloper and an alien. You must be on your guard against her; you must shun her example - if necessary, avoid her company, exclude her from your sports, and shut her out from your converse (78-79).

Mr. Brocklehurst wields judgment like a pharisee; he is merciless in his condemnation of Jane and purposefully alienates her from her peers by calling on students to “exclude her” and “shut her out”—echoing Mrs Reed’s ostracism. While Jane is able to prove her goodness towards Miss Temple and Helen and thus reverses some damage that Brocklehurst inflicted on her reputation, she still must contend with the institution of Lowood itself —“The unhealthy nature of the site; the quantity and quality of the children’s food; the brackish, fetid water used in its preparation; the pupils’ wretched clothing and accommodations” (99). In addition to poor sanitary conditions and the meager rations of clothing and food, Lowood school perpetuated an environment of child abuse; Steve Davies writes that “Charlotte Brontë saw the novel as lifting the lid on an England built on violence to the young and helpless,” and that Jane’s narrative exposes the “hidden horrors of corporal punishment and the systematic starvation and exposure to cold and disease of helpless children in ‘philanthropic,’ ‘Christian’ establishments” (xiv). For Jane to witness the “flogging of Helen’s bare neck,” (xiv) and her subsequent death, is a severe tragedy for a mere child to observe. Jane is strengthened after enduring the injustices cast at her from both Gateshead and Lowood, but she can hardly look back at her childhood with happiness. The first ten chapters of Jane’s autobiography are dedicated to the first ten years of her life, “to the first ten

years of my life I have given almost as many chapters” (Brontë 99), and the first ten chapters of Jane’s narrative are decidedly miserable. While Jane eventually gains “ascendency and power... kin, inheritance, personal refuge, and marital joy” (Matus 119), her childhood remains a black spot in memory. Jane’s declaration: “I cannot bear to be solitary and hated” (Brontë 82) is truthfully a characterization of much of her own childhood — what she cries out against is what afflicts her.

Born into the evil institution of slavery, Frederick Douglass’ childhood was bereft of virtually all potential familial comforts. Douglass is intentionally kept separated from his mother, an action taken by slaveholders to “blunt and destroy the natural affection of the mother for the child” (Douglass 20). Black families were deliberately separated in the slave economy for the ultimate purpose of keeping the Black race down. In addition, the slave trade split up and jumbled African peoples and tribes so that a language barrier existed between slave populations on plantations. The destruction of family ties and a muddling of African language and culture was perpetrated in order to diminish Black cohesion; White plantation owners and the European slave market used their leverage to alienate Black persons on a collective and individual level. When the death of his mother reaches the ears of a young Douglass, he is not strained with stirring sorrow, “Never having enjoyed, to any considerable extent, her soothing presence, her tender and watchful care, I received the tidings of her death with much the same emotions I should have probably felt the death of a stranger” (20). That Douglass is not exceptionally moved by the passing of his mother demonstrates that the institution of slavery has succeeded in alienating Douglass from his blood ties. Slave owners also endeavored to keep hidden the history of their slaves’ origins; Douglass affirms that he lacks a precise understanding of when he was born, “I have no accurate knowledge of my age, never having seen any authentic record containing it. By far the larger part of the slaves know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs, and it is the wish of most masters within my knowledge to keep their slaves thus ignorant” (19). All slaves are dehumanized in the slave trade and are robbed of their origin and identity; Albert E. Stone states that “Under slavery, man possesses no such historic identity as name, date, place of birth” (68). When it comes time for Douglass to leave Colonel Lloyd’s plantation and to be transferred to another master, he does so without regret:

The ties that ordinarily bind children to their homes were all suspended in my case. I found no severe trial in my departure. My home was charmless; it was not home to me; on parting from it, I could not feel that I was leaving anything which I could have enjoyed by staying. (38)

Companionship is always under siege in plantation life as slaves can be traded away at any time; Douglass is thus unable to forge any lasting relationships in

bondage — from one oppressor to another he is bartered and denigrated. The lack of a parental figure, the blotting out of his identity, and the oppressive nature of plantation life renders Douglass alienated from his own kin.

Violence was endemic to the institution of slavery, and as a mere child, Douglass too was a victim of slavery's barbarity. Douglass received the greatest amount of physical violence under Mr. Covey who whipped him weekly: "scarce a week passed without his whipping me" (61) — "if any one time of my life more than another, I was made to drink the bitterest dregs of slavery, that time was during the first six months of my stay with Mr. Covey" (63). Douglass was just fifteen years old when he suffered his weekly whippings under Covey. Before adolescence, Douglass' childhood was corrupted with his bearing witness to the whippings, beatings, and sadistic torture of his race. One of the most horrific scenes shared by Douglass in his narrative is the murder of the slave, Demby at the hands of Mr. Gore, an overseer to Colonel Lloyd's plantation. Hoping to escape the harsh punishment of Mr. Gore's whip, Demby retreats into a creek in order to guard his already mutilated flesh from being further flogged. Mr. Gore gives Demby just three warnings before he discharges a musket ball directly at his face; Douglass recounts Mr. Gore's ruthless killing of Demby:

Mr. Gore then, without consultation or deliberation with any one, not even giving Demby an additional call, raised his musket to his face, taking deadly aim at his standing victim, and in an instant poor Demby was no more. His mangled body sank out of sight, and blood and brains marked the water where he had stood. (34)

Danjuma G. Gibson asserts that "The environment into which Frederick Douglass (and other victims of the slavocracy) was born was sadistic and violent towards black bodies" (23). Mr. Gore's murder is a display of Gibson's statement in brutal fashion. Plantation life sanctions the institutionalized violence of Black bodies and permits the evil of Mr. Gore to go unpunished: "and thus the guilty perpetrator of one of the most bloodiest and most foul murders goes unwhipped of justice" (Douglass 35). Douglass' remark that Mr. Gore "goes unwhipped of justice," rightly states that the White slave drivers are the oppressors and that they are the guilty party deserving of retribution. Accordingly, the alienation and violence that beset Douglass is more severe than Jane's due to the grievous torment of slavery. The comparability of Jane and Douglass' childhood can only reasonably be examined by means of general descriptors of trauma that they both endured, such as "violence" or "alienation." The uniqueness of each narrator's suffering and the severity of their plight can not be equitably juxtaposed — specially for Douglass, who bore the abuses of slavery, which can have no compare — though both of their stories can be observed in light of childhood injustice.

Jane Eyre and Frederick Douglass grew up in environments that were unfairly set against them. Plantation life was intrinsically evil towards the Black race, and Douglass, on the mere fact of his being Black, was arbitrarily consigned to the fetters of slavery. The prejudice of Mrs. Reed towards Jane rendered her unequal to her cousins at Gateshead; Mrs. Reed's aversion of Jane even followed her to Lowood, and though Jane succeeded in winning good opinion from her peers, she still had to bear the abuse that Lowood as an institution promulgated. Jane's young mind is unable to identify why she is unjustly treated at Gateshead, but with the advancement of age, she is awakened to the truth of her injustice, "in what darkness, what dense ignorance, was the mental battle fought! I could not answer the ceaseless inward question - why I suffered; now, at the distance of - I will not say how many years - I see it clearly" (Brontë 19). Jane, like Douglass, is eventually illuminated on the nature of injustice and how it tainted her upbringing, but this knowledge does not erase the pain or the memory of suffering. The violence and alienation that beset Jane and Douglass' early years can never be totally forgotten.

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Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* Read through the Conceptual Prism of "Tethers"

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In Marilynne Robinson's novel *Housekeeping*, she positions her central characters in relation to a greater surround and depicts their pursuit to find their place within it. Ruth, Robinson's central protagonist, her sister Lucille, and her aunt Sylvie are living in Fingerbone, a town in Idaho in which the environment plays a large role in their lives. Not only is Fingerbone flooded every year by the lake on its border, but the characters have also lost family members to this very lake. The relationship of Ruth with the surround shifts as she works through the trauma of loss and becomes more comfortable with the notion of impermanence. The characters' relation with the surround can be understood through those things that "tether" (204) them — to each other, to Fingerbone, and to their preferred modes of living. As the characters of *Housekeeping* grapple with notions of impermanence, transience, and stagnancy, they must reconcile with both those things that tether them, those tethers that do not exist or have been released, and even more importantly, the tethers they want to break free from. By reading *Housekeeping* through the conceptual prism of the word "tethers" and understanding the relation of the characters' with darkness and light, one can see both the escapable and inescapable "tethers of need" (204) that exist in human life and how these correlate with their relationships to an unsympathetic surround.

The characters, especially Ruthie, have a paradoxical relationship with the dark in which it brings both fear and a sense of freedom; Ruth's growing affinity with darkness allows her to break some of her tethers of need and situate herself as a part of the greater surround. At the beginning of the novel, the dark and everything that comes with it brings a sense of fear and impermanence that subordinates the characters to their greater environment. When Ruth and Lucille are out practicing their skating on the lake late into the night, Ruth remarks that as they started for home, they "...would become aware of the darkness, too close to [them], like a presence in a dream" (35). In this moment, Ruth finds comfort in the lights of the town and imagines the houses falling and the lights all going out and how, if this were the case, "...the bitter darkness would step nearer" (35). The darkness is the thing with agency, not the human, and the surround is the thing with power, not the human.

Lucille and Ruth are small in this greater surround and the dark has a power over them that is scary, yet at the same time, this does not stop them from staying out in the dark. While it may serve as an escape from civilization for a time, the girls are still tethered to each other and their home and appreciate these ties to warmth and light and an ultimate escape from this cold and frightening surround.

As the novel progresses, Sylvie's odd mothering and transient personality accustom Ruthie to life in the dark but simultaneously push Lucille further away towards life in the light. For example, Sylvie serves the girls dinner in the dark and as they eat, they would look out the window and Ruth considers how they "listened to the crickets and nighthawks, which were always unnaturally loud then, perhaps because they were within the bounds that light would fix around us, or perhaps because one sense is a shield for the others and we had lost our sight" (86). Ruth reflects about how the darkness has allowed her to hear more fully because of the absence of sight. While she does not seem to mind the opening of her senses in this alternate way of living, Lucille has tethers to the "common persuasion," (83) — that is, her notion of the right way to live is how she imagines others live, be that a clean kitchen, eating meat and rice, and sewing one's own clothes. While Ruth thought of herself and Lucille as almost one consciousness before Lucy came, it is Sylvie's introduction to a life different than typical that pulls them apart, this life different than typical being a life that seems to blur the lines between the inside of the house and the outside. One evening when the three are eating in the dark, Lucille suddenly turns on the light and "the window went black and the cluttered kitchen leaped, so it seemed, into being, as remote from what had gone before as this world from the primal darkness" (100). It is here that Ruth gives insight to her notions of impermanence as they relate to darkness as well as what makes her and Lucille different. Ruth has dealt her whole life with those things she wishes were permanent not being so — from the alleged suicide of her mother, to the death of her grandmother, and of course, to the simple fact that Fingerbone itself seems only to be a way station for most, while her and Lucille stagnate, tethered to it. In the dark, nothing is permanent and while this impermanence is difficult to deal with on one hand, on the other, maybe that makes the perishability of things easier to manage — if one is tethered to nothing, then maybe one needs nothing. So, when Lucille turns on the light so suddenly, Ruth is startled with a surround that "leaped...into being" even though it was there the whole time.

As the dark and light are juxtaposed, so are Ruth and Lucille, sisters who at one time were so close that they represented the ideal behind a "lighted window," (158) but ultimately take strikingly opposite paths as a transient and a person of the "common persuasion." Lucille has a different understanding of darkness than Ruth (though we only get Ruth's perspective in her first-person narrative) and on the night the two girls camp out on the shore, Ruth expounds, "Lucille would tell this story differently. She would say I fell asleep, but I did

not. I simply let the darkness in the sky become coextensive with the darkness in my skull and bowels and bones” (116). In the darkness, Ruth becomes a part of the surround and seems to release the tethers to her humanness, allowing the darkness around her to become “coextensive” with the darkness inside of herself. She goes on to say that “everything that falls upon the eye is apparition” and “darkness is the only solvent” (116). For her, while things may seem permanent in the light, they are not really, and darkness is the thing that exposes their true nature. In the light, Ruth is insecure, Ruth does not make friends easily, Ruth feels “. . .small in the landscape, and out of place” (79) and the tethers of need — need for people, for acceptance, for belonging — feel all the more palpable. However, when it goes dark, all of these tethers of need seem to release and Ruth can become less “out of place” and more connected with her surround. Like when Ruth has a nightmare in the kitchen, she states “I knew that my decay, now obvious and accelerating, should somehow be concealed for decency’s sake. . . .I began to hope for oblivion” (119). So, while this tether of so-called “decency” is present in a lighted kitchen, Ruth prays for a darkness and “oblivion” that would break that tether.

Robinson employs a symbol of a “lighted window” or “lighted house” and what it is like to be inside versus outside of it; yet, Ruth’s understanding of what inside or outside is like changes. When Sylvie leaves Ruth alone during their outing, Ruth cannot seem to ignore the whispering of “half-wild, lonely children. . . something Lucille and [her] together would ignore” (154). However, Lucille is not with her any longer and now Ruth too is lonely which causes her to lament that “Having a sister or a friend is like sitting in a lighted house. Those outside can watch if they want, but you need not see them” (154). When Ruth and Lucille were together and Ruth had “one solid human bond,” (154) she was positioned inside the window; but now, without Lucille and all alone, she is just another lonely person who is looking into the window and wishing she was on the other side. This is one of the tethers of human need, the need for connection, the tether or “bond” between two people that allow them to transcend loneliness and subordinate the rest of the world to them, rather than the world subordinating them to it. Later, Ruth resolves that when “. . .one looks from the darkness into the light. . .one sees all the difference between here and there, this and that” (158). Ruth’s journey of self-discovery and relation to the greater surround presents us with the notion that “Perhaps all unsheltered people are angry in their hearts” (158) wishing that they were on the other side of the window, yet she goes on, by choice, to become one of those unsheltered people herself.

Ruth, comfortable living her life in the dark, is tied to her journey of accepting the unknown for what it is: unknown. Ruth spends her life in constant expectation ever since her mother disappeared into the watery depths of the lake and died. She can never stop thinking of all the possibilities that another moment may bring, though each moment never does differ much from the one

before. She expects that any moment her mother may return, that what she has been dreaming will all come true, that things will become all knit up, but these things never happen. For, it is the catastrophe of things that give them meaning and all this expectation, should it result in an actual occurrence, would ultimately leave Ruth's life entirely meaningless. For Ruth, "the habit of waiting and expectation...makes any present moment most significant for what it does not contain" (214). The catastrophe of her mother's death makes her relationship with her mother meaningful, and makes her see her mother everywhere, just as it is the catastrophe of her grandfather dying in a "spectacular derailment" (5) that makes her even think about this grandfather she never knew. The very perishability of things make them of consequence and as Sylvie and Ruth row back to Fingerbone, they find themselves "...tethered to the old wreck on the lake floor. It was the wind that made [them] hover there" (170). Why are they tethered to this disaster that happened before they were born? Because of the expectation of what may be lying beneath them, of what may have happened, and then since it is the "wind" that holds them there, that is, the surround, this means they have no real control over it. Ruth wants to break these tethers of expectation, break her tether to Fingerbone, break her tether to the common persuasion and to what is expected of her, and it seems she can only do this in the dark and alone. One night when Ruth is hiding in the orchard, she has this revelation: "...if you do not resist the cold, but simply relax and accept it, you no longer feel the cold as discomfort...hunger has its pleasures, and I was happily at ease in the dark, and in general, I could feel myself breaking the tethers of need, one by one" (204). This is the moment when Ruth finally breaks free of her life of expectation, of her life tethered to her past and the catastrophe of it, to her life tethered to certain people and modes of living. By breaking these "tethers of need" and only being able to do so "happily at ease in the dark," she learns that should she not resist so much, her fear of everything — of the dark and this greater unsympathetic surround and loss and impermanence—dissipates.

Thus, transience serves as a mode for Ruth and Sylvie to break away from those tethers that exist when one stays still and allows them to become at peace with their place in the world rather than constantly longing for a permanence that fundamentally cannot exist. From the moment Sylvie is introduced, she brings a sense of transience into the household that while on one hand, "Lucille hated," (103) on the other, Ruth is drawn to. Especially when Lucille leaves and Ruth begins spending more time with Sylvie without the pull of the "common persuasion," (93) Ruth begins to resemble Sylvie more and more and become more akin with her ways of living. Ruth does not mind that Sylvie leaves the windows of the house open and eats in the dark in some strange effort to blur the lines between the inside of the house and the greater surround. Actually, she appreciates Sylvie's bringing her transient lifestyle to the house because that means she is planning on being permanent, or in other words, planning to stay.

The people of the town begin to fear what they see going on, maybe rightly so, but mostly, it seems, because they do not want Ruth to be “lost to ordinary society,” (183) or, that is, to be “other.” To them, as Ruth realizes, “Sylvie was an unredeemed transient, and she was making a transient of me,” (177) but what Ruth realizes that those concerned neighbors do not is that transients are to be pitied and strike fear in the hearts of the normal and ordinary people because “...they are not very different from us” (178). Well, the people, in the end, are not successful in “saving” Ruth from this sad transient life, as she and Sylvie disappear into the dark and leave the tethers of their former life behind. They let the people believe they died and they disappear and “become extraordinary in [their] vanishing” (195) and let the town believe that like so many before them, nature swallowed them whole. It is the house itself that separates humans from their greater surround and by leaving the house behind, Ruth once and for all takes her place as a part of the greater surround rather than trying to escape it like she had been doing by living conventionally her entire life. It is only by living transiently that Ruth can break some of the tethers that had been choking her and live life in the “odd” way that maybe is more right for her.

In the end, Ruth never truly does break all these tethers of human need or truly deal with impermanence. She questions if maybe it is better to have nothing to begin with and then nothing to lose. Yet, despite her giving up her home and submitting to transience and losing Lucille, she still proves this notion wrong because of her immense loneliness when she is alone. She needs Sylvie and despite her transience, Sylvie remains with her and despite having even Sylvie, the book still ends with Ruth thinking of Lucille. Ruth will always be tethered by her need for human connection and maybe darkness will always be “the only solvent” (116) to this need. In the dark, she can imagine things are there though she does not truly know. Her need for human connection can never truly be met in the light because, in the light, language is necessary and language itself recognizes the failure of coexistence. But, in the dark, language goes away and Ruth finally truly does coexist with not only humans but *everything* around her. While in light, there are some tethers of need that are broken in darkness, there are others that are adversely broken in light. While being inside a lighted window may seem all well and good, maybe life on the outside is not as bad as one may expect. Throughout the novel, Ruth learns that while darkness may bring fear, it somehow simultaneously brings peace and comfort and true connection with this greater surround that does not care whether you are comfortable or not. When considering Robinson’s portrayal of her characters’ relation to the greater surround, it is ultimately the tethers of need that the surround both causes in certain cases and breaks in others that dictate how they cope with their place as a subordinate to this thing much more powerful than them.

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