

## “Violations as Profound as any Rape”: Feminism and Sexed Violence in Stephen R. Donaldson

“Long ago, she had done such things [as possession]: she knew now that they were violations as profound as any rape.”

*Against All Things Ending*, pg. 26

### Introduction

Few readers of Stephen R. Donaldson have missed how thoroughly sexual violence inundates his work. Rape, or the threat of rape, appears in nearly every novel and short story—the protagonist of *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever* (1977–2013), for example, assaults a young woman early in *Lord Foul’s Bane* (1977); fantasies of sexual violence obsess Castellán Lebbick in *Mordant’s Need* (1986–1987), and the first novel in the five-volume *Gap* (1991–1996) sequence easily surpasses both series in terms of sexual violence. Moreover, as my epigraph suggests, similes involving rape abound. These ubiquitous references to sexual violence can dismay even Donaldson’s most ardent proponents—fan blogger Gavrielle Perry, for example, bluntly calls them “pretty damn disturbing.” At the same time, Perry also considers Donaldson a “scrupulously non-sexist” writer, someone in whom feminists can find much to champion. More than anything, perhaps, Donaldson’s fiction advocates for the individual’s absolute power for moral choice regardless of *Extrapolation*, vol. 60, no. 2 (2019) <https://doi.org/10.3828/extr.2019.10> sex or gender. Although female characters such as Morn Hyland and Terisa Morgan might *begin* as quintessential helpless beauties, they eventually develop nearly superhuman levels of agency. Other major female protagonists follow suit and, similarly, Donaldson usually seeks to destabilize traditional gender roles and sexual divisions of labor. Within his fiction, gender equality is the rule—although not, apparently, when it comes to sexed violence.<sup>1</sup> His perpetrators are always men, their victims almost always women. Despite Donaldson’s prominence as a speculative fiction writer, however, academic criticism has lagged far behind fan discussions on this issue.<sup>2</sup>

Arguably, one reason for this neglect concerns Donaldson’s standpoint as male humanist within the newly emergent genre of fantasy. Fantasy criticism during the late 1970s, which Gary K. Wolfe has characterized as “insular” (xi), took few cues from science fiction criticism, but

<sup>1</sup> The better-known term may be “gender violence” but, as Adrian Howe notes, the concept of gender has received “quite a trashing from poststructuralist, feminist and queer theorists for subordinating sex and sexuality” to a “vaguely defined, amorphous ‘gender’” (7). Thus I prefer Howe’s own usage of “sexed violence,” especially given Donaldson’s tendency to posit two incommensurate sexes.

<sup>2</sup> The only exception to this scholarly omission is Simons’s *The Leprous Man*, although several unfortunate misstatements and distortions problematize this analysis. For example, when trying to motivate the claim that Donaldson has written “misogynistic texts that renounce the feminine,” Simons is forced to view Bryony Hyland, Morn’s ideals-driven mother, as “cruel and predatory”; likewise, against overwhelming textual evidence to the contrary, Simons asserts as “unconvincing” the sincerity of Linden Avery’s and Morn Hyland’s maternal affections (25, 51–52). Some critics bypass the issue of feminism or sexed violence in Donaldson altogether. Senior, for example, never discusses Covenant’s rape victim, Lena, as a person separate from her attacker, and Laskar focuses exclusively on Donaldson’s existentialism. Others simply dismiss Donaldson as a humanist who reinforces “a blind faith in ‘eternal’ moral values” (Jackson 155; see also Alder 116).

even if criticism with feminist leanings tended, naturally enough, to focus either on female authors of speculative fiction—Ursula K. Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Octavia Butler, James Tiptree Jr.—or on gender-bending male authors such as Samuel R. Delany. Within this milieu, Donaldson’s existential humanist brand of feminism, despite residing firmly in the second wave’s forefront, seems to have gone overlooked by academic critics, and this held true even after *The Second Chronicles of Thomas Covenant* employed Linden Avery to exploit speculative fiction’s “most obvious attraction [...] the creation of a female Hero” (Merrick and Tuttle). In a more theoretical sense, too, Donaldson’s undeniable individualism might have raised red flags for some. Two major formative influences on his work, as Donaldson himself has often stated in interviews, were French existentialism and a background in fundamentalist Christianity. The individual’s own capacity for effective moral choice—frequently driven by immense personal anguish—therefore constitutes a major theme of his work. Over the last four decades, though, the postmodern turn in feminist thinking has thrown such humanistic assumptions radically into question—particularly when they involve sexed violence. Whereas Donaldson tends to see sexed violence as an existential agon between two groups of free individuals, victims and perpetrators, postmodern feminists interrogate the social ways in which various discourses—including rape culture and toxic masculinity—have enabled, minimized, or even excused such violence. Hence, despite Donaldson’s later career deepening his core existential-humanist themes, his work nevertheless continues to sidestep the major ideas and perspectives currently engaging postmodern feminist energies.

Two tasks therefore face this article. To begin with, the first section seeks to situate the first *Chronicles*—particularly *Lord Foul’s Bane*—within the discussions being held by second wave feminists on sexed violence. By and large, the *Chronicles* is a consciously progressive work. Its major limitation, the brutal disempowerment of Lena as a rape survivor, is something Donaldson attempts to correct with Morn Hyland in the *Gap* sequence—but, by this time, the postmodern turn in feminist thinking had already begun to scrutinize many key second wave assumptions. Hence, my second major task argues for the continuing usefulness of Donaldson’s individualistic (and non-discursive) approach to sexed violence. Section II explains the postmodern treatment of sexed violence and how, specifically, it challenges Donaldson’s existential-Christian humanism. Afterwards, Section III looks more closely at the *Gap* sequence in light of these postmodern feminist concerns. Although Morn Hyland presents an empowering—though problematic—model for surviving sexual assault, Donaldson’s greater success comes when portraying her male attacker. The character of Angus Thermopyle deepens a theme previously alluded to within the first *Chronicles*: that acts of violence, including *sexed* violence, wreak vast existential self-harm on the perpetrator. As counterintuitive as this might seem, the motivation for this claim might be one of Donaldson’s major lifelong literary ambitions. Few bodies of work have analyzed sexed violence with as much determination as Donaldson’s; certainly, no other genre novelist has examined the perpetrator’s side of rape with such rigor, nuance, or depth. If this ethical and existential literary analysis of sexed violence holds true, then Donaldson’s fiction, despite its non-postmodern approach, comprises a valuable additional tool against rape, sexual assault, and other forms of violence.

## **I. The First *Chronicles* and the Second Wave**

Given the pressing, public debates in the wake of fourth wave feminism and #MeToo, it might be easy to forget the “radical transformation” (Bevacqua 184) that marked our cultural

understanding of rape during the 1970s. Second wave feminism pushed three specific advances especially relevant when reading Donaldson. First, the second wave helped legally redefine rape in terms of the victim's consent rather than as a "property crime of man against man" (Brownmiller 18). Second, it also challenged the alleged rarity of rape. Rather than an infrequent criminal act committed only by "degenerate male imbeciles," as the psychologist Richard Krafft-Ebing once claimed (441), feminists successfully argued that even "normal" men could, and did, commit rape. Finally, the radical wing of second wave feminism especially advocated for seeing rape in terms of *power*, an issue of violence and control, rather than sexual desire simply. The pioneering work of Susan Brownmiller led the way in this charge. In her view rape, rooted in our biological differences, functions as patriarchy's primary tool, a "conscious process of intimidation by which *all men keep all women* in a state of fear" (15, emphasis original). Even a term like *rape* insidiously and effectively reminds women of their "special victim status" (309), and the fear of sexual assault creates the need for male protectors, which benefits law-abiding men while constantly reinforcing for women their powerlessness and, therefore, their continued social subordination.

As much as Covenant's rape of Lena may repel readers of *Lord Foul's Bane*, Donaldson's first trilogy nonetheless contains all three feminist advances, although occasionally in modified form. The issue of consent, for example, resonates strongly within Donaldson's larger advocacy of free will and individual choice. Covenant's violation of Lena's freedom to choose intercourse echoes several other Donaldsonian markers of evil: zone implants and Amnion mutagens in the *Gap* sequence, and possession (or mind control) in the *Second Chronicles*. Feminism's second cultural advance, the disassociation of rape from mental illness or defect, likewise infiltrates the entire first *Chronicles*. The leprosy that Covenant endures has no direct impact on his ethical being or mental capacity. While he feels a deeply buried rage at the social ostracization enforced upon him after his diagnosis, he comes to accept that neither leprosy nor Lord Foul can be blamed for his actions—Lord Foul, as Covenant slowly realizes, is "only an externalized part of himself" (*Power* 462), and blaming anything beyond his own moral will, such as disease or an archetypal fantasy Dark Lord, would be "just another kind of suicide," an abdication of his own core existential responsibility (*Lord Foul's* 385). Indeed, far from being aberrant or unusual, critic W. A. Senior considers Covenant an "everyman" figure (168, 215). Linden Avery reinforces that universality in the *Second Chronicles*: as much as Linden would like to believe that evil is like an infection, something any good medical doctor can simply excise, she must eventually confront evil—especially in herself—as a key part of her humanity. Thus, when Donaldson posits Covenant as both rapist *and* everyman, he helps undercut one of the classic rape myths: *all* men, no matter how "normal," have the capacity to commit *any* act of evil, including rape.

The third major second wave advance, which links rape to power, requires some explication as it appears in Donaldson. During the 1970s, of course, feminists hardly shared a single monolithic viewpoint on sexed violence, and the understanding of rape that arises from Donaldson's work actually suggests two different (and mutually incompatible) feminist positions. On one hand, much like zone implants or possession, Donaldson seems to view rape as simply one horrific situation, among many, that violates individual autonomy. This is the idea Donaldson usually defends in interviews. For example, he claims to write about "the damaged and the maimed, the violated and the bereft," and he considers such experiences

thematically universal. What happens to Angus in the GAP books is not less of a violation than what he does to Morn. What Covenant endures is not less hurtful than what he does to Lena. (*Gradual Interview* 16 June 2009)

As such, if feminist views on rape range along “a continuum from liberal to radical,” as Rebecca Whisnant notes, then Donaldson’s work seems to suggest the liberal side of the spectrum. Liberal feminists generally consider rape “a gender-neutral assault on individual autonomy” no different in kind, though often in degree, to “other forms of assault and/or illegitimate appropriation” (Whisnant). This gender-neutral conception preserves Donaldson’s egalitarianism, readily apparent elsewhere in his fictional world-building. There is no sexual division of labor within the Land, nor do gender restrictions apply to who may study at the Loesraat; likewise, men and women serve equally in the military. Amorine in the first *Chronicles* rises to the rank of Hiltmark (or second-in-command), and Osondrea and Elena both become High Lords, the Land’s highest political office.

On the other hand, Donaldson consistently *sexes* the crime of rape as something specifically male, which resonates with radical feminist views. The radical position, best articulated by Brownmiller, sees rape as the tactical weapon of patriarchy. Rape’s power is therefore *socio-political*. It maintains the social dominance of men, so is hardly gender neutral, and it also downplays the libidinous “naturalness” of rape. Although the first *Chronicles* eliminates rather than criticizes patriarchy, the trilogy nevertheless centers sexed violence on this radical locus of power, control, and violence. The word “impotence” contains an intentional dual meaning in the *Chronicles*: it simultaneously refers not only to Covenant’s leprosy-induced sexual dysfunction but also to the powerlessness (or impotence) enforced upon him following his diagnosis. Once a “golden boy” leading a charmed life, Covenant is led by isolation and helplessness to claim frequently that, as a leper, “I don’t know anything about power” (*Lord Foul’s* 168). Donaldson also disassociates sexual violence from sexual desire in his later work. Prior to meeting Morn, for example, Angus “never had much to do with women” (*Real Story* 78), and Master Eremis, who has an undeniably high libido in *Mordant’s Need*, still articulates his desire through the language of power, control, and violence; he once laments the “boredom” of consensual intercourse with Saddith (*A Man* 620). Nor can the sexed component of sexual assault in Donaldson be ignored. His rare references to male survivors, such as Nyle in *Mordant’s Need* or Angus himself, come via casual textual asides that bear little narrative weight. The perpetrators of rape, however, are always men, particularly violent men, and rape usually functions as an assertion of their power amidst the “impotence” of their lives.

Where Donaldson most diverges from radical feminism, though, is in his apolitical individualism.<sup>3</sup> Rather than something socio-political in character, Donaldson seems to see sexed violence as an *existential* category of power: an archetypal and universal (male) capacity for intersubjective harm. The power of rape lies beyond any social and cultural boundaries. Laskar has called the first *Chronicles* an “existentialist epic fantasy” (409), but it may also be called an ahistorical modernist experiment in consciousness. Donaldson describes the Land as an “externalization, a metaphor,” for the internal contents of Covenant’s mind (*Epic Fantasy* 8); or, in the words of John Clute, the trilogy is a “massively detailed story of one soul in Gothic anguish” (272). In one sense, radical feminism shares Donaldson’s interest in the

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<sup>3</sup> Also, his refusal to engage in separatist thinking. Strangely enough, Donaldson has only once publicly commented on his feminist leanings: “Ironically for a proto-feminist like myself, I was subjected to a few viciously anti-male attacks by radical feminists in my early 20’s” (*Gradual Interview* 22 Apr. 2005).

phenomenology of individual existential experience. One need go no further than Simone de Beauvoir, for example. Both radical feminism as well as existential philosophy examine “fundamental issues of power, freedom, subjects and objects, and human existence itself” (Burstow 1). Yet Donaldson avoids explicit political commentary and engagement in a way few feminist activists would sanction. His fiction usually minimizes the ways in which history, culture, and discourse affect individual selfhood. He rarely challenges patriarchy directly because, in a sense, only the individual matters—how one responds to events in all their givenness. There are no mass political movements in Donaldson; his greatest revolutions are revolutions of personal conscience. Actual social change often comes across as incidental.

Regardless, the *Chronicles* does actively participate in the progressive feminist viewpoints on rape previously noted. The trilogy emphasizes freedom and consent, asserts the psychological normalcy of the rapist, and engages major second wave debates on rape as a matter of power, not sex. To this list we might add how Donaldson in his fiction scrupulously eliminates any social stigma against rape survivors. The villagers of Mithil Stonedown, for example, never victim-blame Lena—not even after she bears her attacker’s child out of wedlock. Still, even within the context of the 1970s anti-rape movement, some elements of Donaldson’s treatment rest uncomfortably within the progressive purview. Strong responses may be offered to the first two sticking points; the third, however, is more concerning.

The first sticking point involves Donaldson’s tendency to perpetuate the rape myth of violent strangers leaping out of the shadows to assault beautiful young women. The brutal attack on Lena by Covenant, a stranger to the Land, fits the stereotype perfectly:

Then Covenant whirled and struck her a stinging slap across the face. [...]

Reaching her, he knotted his hands in the front of her shift and rent the fabric like a veil. She could not move. For an instant, he stared at her, at her high, perfect breasts and her short slip, with grim triumph in his eyes, as though he had just exposed some foul plot. Then he gripped her shoulder with his left hand and tore away her slip with his right, forcing her down to the sand as he uncovered her. (90–91)

Donaldson, of course, deliberately makes this crime as violent as possible— nothing must exculpate Covenant or lessen his monstrosity. Yet sexed violence always tends toward extreme violence in Donaldson’s work. Things like marital rape, date rape, “gray” rape, or other less stark cases of assault never appear. To be fair, many writers of genre fantasy at the time, including recognized feminist voices such as Mercedes Lackey or Marion Zimmer Bradley, share this shortcoming. Given Donaldson’s basic themes of responsibility and guilt, furthermore, it seems hard to imagine how the “violent stranger” scene in the first *Chronicles* might have been differently composed.

A second, stronger sticking point involves how Covenant avoids any legal repercussions for his assault. During the late 1970s and 1980s, this criticism would have been particularly trenchant as many feminist activists began targeting an American legal system that, too often, protected abusers and victim-blamed survivors. Initially at least, several narrative stratagems soften Covenant’s apparent legal immunity. Since the Land has no formal police force or magistrate system, only the Lords at Revelstone possess institutional penal authority, yet in *Lord Foul’s Bane* they never learn of Covenant’s crime. Although Lena’s mother, Atiaran, has ample reason to tell, she ultimately never completes her journey with Covenant to Revelstone.

Likewise, the villagers in Mithil Stonedown would have happily administered local justice against Covenant but they, too, never learn of the crime until after Covenant has departed. Ironically, Lena herself contributes to Covenant's freedom. She attaches great social importance to Covenant, whom she considers a reincarnation of Berek Halfhand, a legendary figure, and she sacrifices her own pain and trauma so that he might deliver an important message to the Lords from Lord Foul. In fact, far from depicting a legal system that fails to prosecute rapists, Lena's situation highlights the complicated pressures a survivor might face after an assault. Although Lena has no reason to fear social stigma or potential retaliation, as sometimes happens in cases involving socially or politically powerful attackers, she still feels an unfair compulsion to sacrifice legal justice for the greater good of her community.

Such narrative stratagems no longer suffice in *The Illearth War* (1978), however. High Lord Elena, the daughter of Lena through Covenant, certainly knows of her mother's rape. Yet, when Covenant asks about punishment, the High Lord deftly avoids a direct answer (89)—thereby closing the topic for good. This situation might be considered another uncomfortable literary necessity on Donaldson's part. In one sense, the first *Chronicles* functions as an extended answer to Plato's Ring of Gyges problem. Throughout *The Republic*, Socrates seeks to demonstrate the intrinsic worth of justice. If justice is an objective good and something more than society's power to punish, then anyone like Gyges should, rationally, continue to act justly despite a magic ring of invisibility that permits any crime to go undetected. A similar dynamic plays out in the first *Chronicles*. Because Covenant believes the Land a delusion or a dream, he has no reason to fear any real-world legal consequences. What happens in dreams stays in dreams. Yet Covenant comes to learn that evil actions bear their own heavy burdens. Guilt, anguish, and despair are his lot. Actually, as often as Donaldson invokes the concept of law in the *Chronicles*, direct applications of positive law—as opposed to natural law—are surprisingly rare. The power to punish is never actually employed by the Revelstone Lords. This applies even to Lena's father, Trell, who twice breaks his Oath of Peace, as much as Covenant. Trell's first violation (an attack on his daughter's rapist) can be easily forgiven, but his second violation initiates a small-scale Ritual of Desecration. When Hearthrall Tohrm later asks what should be done with him, however, High Lord Mhoram mentions not punishment but healing (*Power* 321). Internal coercion, or conscience, matters more to Donaldson than external coercion. Far from reflecting a patriarchal American legal system, then, the first *Chronicles* ambitiously seeks an intrinsic existential reason for ethical action.

The third sticking point, however, involves how Donaldson seems to erase Lena's voice when, more than ever, second wave feminists were struggling to make visible women's experiences with sexed violence. Obviously, Covenant's male viewpoint dominates the entire first trilogy. The entire reality of the Land—and the reality of what its inhabitants endure—takes a backseat to the Unbeliever's own self-involvement. The pity and horror of what happens to Lena therefore becomes, unfortunately, a mere stepping stone in a male anti-hero's moral journey. Worse, Lena only "survives" her assault experience in the shallowest sense of the term. Her entire life after the rape becomes nothing more than a footnote to that one traumatic event. She abandons her ambition to study at the Loesraat, never becomes a Lord, and never marries, refusing Triock's overtures because of an unhealthy obsession she develops with her attacker. In *The Power that Preserves* (1979), she even dies defending Covenant from a knife attack—despite knowing about Covenant's complicity in their daughter's death. If guilt and anguish are Covenant's fate, madness and loneliness are Lena's. Yet, in a half million words spent in a trilogy redeeming the pain of Covenant, Donaldson has nothing to spare for Lena. Perhaps

raping Lena had only “been a complex way of hurting himself” (*Illearth* 419), as Covenant eventually decides, but such self-discovery does nothing to comfort his original victim. If feminist criticism seeks to give voice to feminine perspectives blithely marginalized by traditional criticism, then the plight of Lena constitutes a major hurdle for the otherwise progressive and egalitarian first *Chronicles*.<sup>4</sup>

The feminist problem posed by Lena might have given Donaldson himself some uneasiness. His fiction generally seeks to affirm the human power to make effective choices—but Lena’s complete lack of agency, her status as a helpless cipher of pointless suffering, undercuts a key tenet of existential humanism. If a victim’s life can be so utterly destroyed by male sexual violence, then affirmations of our allegedly universal power for choice, our human capacity for good, necessarily ring hollow. Not until Morn Hyland from the *Gap* sequence, though, does Donaldson tackle how a rape victim might transform herself into a rape survivor. By the time *The Real Story* arrived in 1991, however, a profound shift in feminist thinking—the postmodern turn—had begun to emerge. This shift radically undercuts the theoretical foundations of Donaldson’s humanism. In particular, it deeply challenges his individualistic and non-discursive way of representing sexed violence.

## **II. The Postmodern Feminist Challenge**

No single moment marks the postmodern turn in feminist thinking. Instead, this turn should be viewed as a broad shift, arising in the late 1980s and early 1990s, centered on a new interest in discourse and language. This turn, which emerged simultaneously with third wave feminism, often found inspiration from Michel Foucault, a major challenger of Enlightenment-style humanism, and it offered a “new discourse or paradigm for framing and understanding gender relations that grew out of a critique of the inadequacies of the second wave” (Mann and Huffman 57). The feminists of the second wave tended to assume a homogeneously white, middle-class, heterosexual, and geographically Western feminist subject—and, as such, they overlooked concerns important to women belonging to other groups. Donaldson’s work, it must be said, shares many of these second wave assumptions. Most of his characters code as white; he represents a binary view of two incommensurate sexes (though eschewing any gender essentialism); and, in stark contrast with the third wave, his work very rarely mentions ambiguous sexual, ethnic, or personal identities. Furthermore, although the third wave, like Donaldson, is generally more individualistic and less focused on mass politics than the second, its valorization of difference operates at cross-purposes with what Donaldson calls his “archetypal intentions” (*Gradual Interview* 29 June 2005). Marxist critics such as Rosemary Jackson had long been skeptical of liberal humanists, among whom she places Donaldson (155),

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<sup>4</sup> While this article was in proof, Sylwia Borowska-Szerszun published an article on rape motifs in fantasy literature in which she notes that Stephen R. Donaldson “employs rape as a plot device that allows him to focus on the development of the protagonist and his existential dilemmas. Consequently, Donaldson favors the perspective of the perpetrator at the cost of the victim, who remains silenced” (18 n.1). As I am suggesting here, this assessment is accurate—at least up to a point. For one thing, such an assessment fails to recognize Donaldson’s literary engagement with major feminist concerns; in addition, it also overlooks the importance of Donaldson’s self-imposed task: the examination of the male abuser. As Joanna Bourke has argued in her exemplary *Rape: A History from 1860 to the Present*, only by “demystifying the category of rapist can we make him less frightening and more amenable to change” (viii). Although she ranks as someone who would prefer a discursive analysis of male sexed violence to an existential one, something discussed at greater length in the following section, Donaldson’s fiction nonetheless helps fill the critical void Bourke has recognized.

but the new postmodern emphasis on discourse presents fresh challenges to an author who, positing an autonomous existential self, usually neglects the power of dominant and oppressive discourses: white hegemony, hegemonic masculinity, heteronormativity, colonialism, etc.

This postmodern turn problematizes several core tenets of Donaldson's worldview—but most particularly when it comes to sexed violence.<sup>5</sup> As we have seen, though Donaldson differed from radical feminism by seeing power as an existential category, not a socio-political one, both saw power as something an agent or a group could wield. In contrast, the postmodern perspective turns such thinking on its head. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault argues that “power is exercised rather than possessed,” and it operates within a “network of relations” that invests all those subjected to power (26).<sup>6</sup> Such a postmodern view undercuts Donaldsonian humanism by radically decentering the location of power. Rather than inhering within autonomous individuals, power operates in—and through—discourse. This theoretical shift drastically alters the basic premises on how Donaldson treats sexed violence. For Donaldson, it genuinely matters that rapists such as Thomas Covenant and Angus Thermopyle bear *absolute* personal responsibility for their crimes. They must carry the guilt of their misdeeds and sins Atlas-like upon their shoulders. Only extreme youth (as in children), or the inability to bear responsibility for the decisions made by other people, provide a meaningful limit on one's existential capacity for holding oneself to account.<sup>7</sup> Otherwise, only by acting in good faith with one's freedom, almost infinite in scope, can an autonomous, self-realized individual become an ethically *effective* individual. The contingencies of history, culture, social environment, trauma and, yes, even discourse must ultimately bow in Donaldson before the awesome power of free persons guided by iron-clad, but self-chosen, moral principles. The guilt of decision-making is a natural consequence of this view—with absolute personal responsibility comes absolute personal guilt.

The postmodern feminist view, however, considers the rhetoric of individual blame or responsibility as highly limiting. In a classic article, Sharon Marcus argues that rapists do “not simply *have* the power to rape” (391, emphasis original). That is, sexual violence does not only begin with the physical crime—rather, it originates in a discursive “rape script” that creates the possibility for rape in the first place. Rape scripts encompass permissive social attitudes, ways of speaking, rape jokes, and other similar discourses that function to normalize sexual assault, and they permeate how people “experience themselves as speaking, acting, and embodied subjects” (390). As such, such scripts affect victims of sexed violence as much as perpetrators. Social expectations about female passivity and feminine politeness often inhibit women from more forcefully resisting unwanted advances. Rape scripts, in other words, help create the conditions for victimhood. Not the rapist himself but the *social script* and “the extent to which that script succeeds in soliciting its target's participation help to create the rapist's power” (391). Although

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<sup>5</sup> The idea of knowledge in Donaldson also faces a stiff postmodern challenge. Knowledge is important for Donaldson because, without it, characters necessarily make less effective moral choices. Under the postmodern viewpoint, however, knowledge is not something one either possesses or lacks—it arises as an *effect* of power and discourse. Knowledge is therefore much less neutral than in Donaldson; indeed, “knowledge” often functions as another site for oppression.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon E. Slethaug has claimed a certain similarity in the visions of democratic power expressed by Donaldson and Foucault but, otherwise, the latter's virulent anti-humanism seems thoroughly incompatible with Donaldson.

<sup>7</sup> Even so, Donaldson does privilege those characters who voluntarily accept absolute responsibility for other people's decisions as well—for example, High Lord Mhoram in the first *Chronicles*, the Christ-like Thomas Covenant of the second *Chronicles*, or Warden Dios in the *Gap*, a man who “condemns himself so severely that he judges no one else” (*This Day* 686).



postmodern feminists such as Marcus would never discount the legal responsibility of abusers such as Covenant or Angus, they nonetheless take the position that focusing on personal responsibility does dangerously little to alter the cultural factors that enable sexed violence to flourish and—sometimes—go unrecognized. The rhetoric of individual guilt, which accrues only *after* the victimization has already occurred, leaves victims no less victimized.

Marcus's argument carries many advantages, and similar postmodern positions have gained ascendance within current understandings on rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, toxic masculinity, and sexed violence in other forms. Returning to the liberal–radical spectrum for feminist views on rape, mainstream feminism, according to Whisnant, has now grown increasingly “radical in its challenges to patriarchal social and sexual assumptions, and more global and intersectional in its analysis.” This broad shift in thinking, however, effectively displaces Donaldson from his position on the feminist forefront. Rather than moving with the *zeitgeist*, Donaldson's later fiction—most particularly the *Gap* sequence—simply deepens and extends his previous existential analyses of sexed violence. While existential analyses still find a place within modern feminism, even sympathizers like Iris Marion Young see existentialism's classic disregard for discourse as a problem. For example, in a statement that might double as a critique of Donaldson himself, Young writes that the “normative commitments of existential phenomenology express a naïve humanism insufficiently aware of social plurality and the forms that power and repression take in well-intentioned liberal law and social criticism” (7–8). Hence, although Donaldson was the first male writer of adult fantasy (and one of the first male writers in speculative fiction more generally) to tackle major feminist issues, the existential-humanist premise founding his gender egalitarianism has become highly contested under those postmodern modes of thinking increasingly prevalent within feminist theory.

The next section, however, looks more closely at the *Gap* sequence. Despite the postmodern challenge, I argue that Donaldson's work carries substantial relevance for contemporary debates about sexed violence. Although some limitations apply, largely due to the great burdens placed upon Morn Hyland as a survivor of abuse, Donaldson's analysis of the male side of men's violence against women attempts nonetheless to ground moral intuitions about the intrinsic—and objective—existential wrongness of rape and other violent acts.

### **III. Sexed Violence in the *Gap* sequence**

Though arguably more ambitious than either Covenant trilogy, the *Gap* sequence has had very little discernable impact on the speculative fiction community. It has neither won any awards nor garnered any public accolades; despite a devoted but small fan following, its sales were unimpressive.<sup>8</sup> The reason why almost certainly involves the graphic rape and torture of Morn Hyland in *The Real Story*, the sequence's introductory novella. While some readers certainly found Thomas Covenant unpalatable, the character of Angus Thermopyle—a malice-driven and conscience-free extenuation of Donaldson's conscience-stricken leper—can churn stomachs. Yet, as the previous section suggests, the objection to sexed violence in *The Real Story* could be theoretical as well as visceral. In an era of deeper, more radical postmodern analyses of sexual assault and sexed violence, the intransigent humanism of Donaldson's magisterial space opera, focusing strongly on *individual* ethical action rather than systematic

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<sup>8</sup> In the *Gradual Interview* on his website, Donaldson has noted how *Mordant's Need* sold only 15 percent as well as *White Gold Wielder* (1983), the final volume in the *Second Chronicles*, and the *Gap* books have sold only 20 percent as well as *Mordant's Need* (1 Jun. 2004).

social or cultural change, has little contemporary intellectual support. This section will therefore examine both Morn and Angus within the context of postmodern feminism. Although Morn Hyland does provide an empowering model for coping with sexual assault, I argue that Donaldson's portrayal falls short in one key way—no real survivor of sexed violence could ever (or should ever) hope to mimic Morn's brutal self-abnegation. With Angus Thermopyle, though, I suggest that Donaldson examines an area of sexed violence that postmodern approaches seem ill-equipped to handle—that is, cases of rape and harm for which even sweeping socio-cultural changes might have little impact. By grounding an ethics against intersubjective violence in the existential as opposed to the discursive, Donaldson's fiction adds one more powerful tool to the struggle against sexed violence.

The most laudable part of how Donaldson portrays Morn involves her great personal agency. Unlike Lena, whose life basically ends after her assault, Morn overcomes severe trauma—which, besides weeks of rape, includes a zone implant, gap sickness, and survivor's guilt—to achieve effective political change of world-historical proportions. She helps stave off the existential and military threat of the Amnion, for example, and also proves instrumental in the downfall of Holt Fasner, corrupt CEO of the United Mining Companies (UMC). In addition, Donaldson also successfully avoids, albeit narrowly, two common rape survivor conventions in popular literature: the rape–revenge convention and the idea of rape leading to female self-actualization. Morn's firm commitment to abstract ethical principles makes no allowance for personal revenge. Furthermore, the nobility and effectiveness that Morn later achieves stems not from rape trauma but from ideals she has imbibed from her parents, Davies and Bryony Hyland, both exemplary UMCP officers. Likewise, Donaldson presents the healing process fairly as both long and arduous.

Still, Donaldson's penchant for individual examinations creates problems for the *Gap* that the first *Chronicles* avoided. Those earlier books had functioned as a psychodrama, studying Covenant's moral consciousness in splendid isolation from his real world; his social embeddedness is there, but it resides only on the fringes of the narrative. In that sense, the failure of the Revelstone Lords to punish Covenant for rape, as argued in Section 1, does not pose a major problem. The legal system in the fictive *Gap* universe, though, not only fails to protect sexual assault victims like Morn but also doubly reinforces their victimization—an issue that Donaldson, focused on his main individual protagonists, ignores. In the *Gap*, Angus installs a zone implant into Morn's brain against her will, and she eventually becomes addicted to this device as her means for coping with horror, abuse, and rape trauma. Once freed of Angus, however, Morn's "improper use" of this device leaves her legally vulnerable to the death penalty. Thus, in stark contrast to Lena whose post-assault decisions were influenced by her concern for the greater good, Morn actively fears the consequences of an oppressive and patriarchal legal system. Despite all that Morn accomplishes, including overthrowing Holt Fasner and saving Earth from an Amnion incursion, this patriarchal system of justice continues to exist largely unchanged. Such an oversight seems surprising given Donaldson's feminist leanings.

Even more daunting, though, might be Donaldson's inflexible, yet intellectually consistent, existential commitment to personal responsibility, which applies even to survivors of sexual assault. Something of this had appeared in the first *Chronicles*: Covenant's choices belong to him, but not the choices of the many people—including Lena—adversely affected by his actions (see *The Power that Preserves* 305–306). In the *Gap*, however, Donaldson displays an intransigent willingness to let Morn hold herself exorbitantly accountable for every decision

she makes. Although helpless to resist gap sickness, Morn bitterly blames herself for *Starmaster*'s fate. More troublingly, Donaldson even has Morn "[weep] for the lies she'd used to manipulate Nick Succorso" (*This Day* 683), the debonair space pirate who had rescued Morn from Angus. Coming at the end of the final book, this repentance strikes a jarring tone. In *Forbidden Knowledge* (1991), only those "lies" had enabled Morn to escape Angus's brutality; Nick would never have saved her had he not believed her desire for him real.<sup>9</sup> Morn's situation is extremely precarious and exploitable, and not many readers would find fault with her post-assault decision making. Yet Donaldson seems unwilling to let Morn let herself off the hook. Absolute responsibility requires absolute freedom to choose, and so Donaldson prefers to valorize unlimited choice instead of the restrictions placed *on* choice by human situatedness. Sexual assault survivors, notably, often face "choiceless" choices. In a philosophical sense, Morn could have made different decisions; in a practical sense, no.

Yet personal guilt plays such a strong role in Donaldson's fiction that he seems loathe to allow any character, even a rape survivor, to disavow personal guilt by appealing to the systematic factors that enable—or exacerbate—violence against women. As Dr. Berenford explains to Linden Avery in *The Wounded Land* (1980), "Guilt is power. [... O]nly guilty people can be effective" (23). Unfortunately, as feminist therapist Bonnie Burstow notes, sexual assault survivors already tend to engage in self-blame "for their inability to protect themselves" (177). Indeed, in less sympathetic hands than Donaldson's, the rhetoric of personal responsibility has often carried connotations of victim-blaming, and such rhetoric can overshadow the way individuals, especially those from vulnerable demographics, might simply lack the power to withstand, much less overcome, wide-ranging systemic problems. In Donaldson, though, the idea of reform often seems superfluous.

The individual must prevail over, but not necessarily change or rail against, any given situation. Ultimately, Donaldson *does* succeed in empowering Morn. In stark contrast to Lena's unredeemed victimization, Morn takes charge of her own life and effects her own healing. Nonetheless, her brutal self-abnegation hardly provides a viable model for real-world sexual assault survivors. What answers to pain Morn discovers cannot be universalized. As such, the core ethical position of personal responsibility in the *Gap*—a logical extension of Donaldson's existential humanism—holds limited value for modern rape trauma counseling. At worst, such thinking may even be harmful for survivors to adopt.

Donaldson's handling of Angus, however, carries more advantages. Angus shares a thematic link as well as a criminal one with Thomas Covenant: power and powerlessness define their characters. Yet the *Gap* sequence incorporates a sociological component generally absent from the *Chronicles*, which never even bothers to name Covenant's hometown. Unregulated capitalism, a decaying social welfare state, and sprawling dystopian urbanization have brutalized Earth in Donaldson's space opera. Private corporations such as Holt Fasner's UMC have

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<sup>9</sup> The legal question of whether Nick Succorso commits rape in *Forbidden Knowledge* is a complicated one. In legal circles, the standard view is probably *mens rea* (or "guilty mind")—a crime of rape only occurs if a reasonable person has reason to believe that their intended partner is non-consenting. Gavrielle Perry implicitly adopts this approach when she (partially) defends Nick's actions in *Forbidden Knowledge*. Since Nick never knew of Morn's zone implant control, he sincerely believes in the consensual nature of their sexual activity. Some feminists, however, have criticized *mens rea* for implicitly assuming a male perspective on what constitutes reasonable evidence of consent. Catherine MacKinnon, for example, has argued that "men are systematically conditioned not even to notice what women want" (180–181)—and that includes Nick overlooking the exigencies of Morn's circumstances for his own benefit. If viewed in this way, Nick Succorso's actions might constitute rape since his actions clearly heighten Morn's sense of victimization.

supplanted the power of elected national governments, and “political and economic stagnation” has developed so profoundly that “more than a few analysts concluded the planet had exhausted not only its resources but its ability to solve problems” (*Dark and Hungry* 113). Within Earth’s inadequate social welfare system arose guttergangs: parasitic and roving urban bands that were “starving, loveless, abused, despised, cornered” (393). Memberships within these gangs constitute, on one hand, a demand for recognition from others, but their unreasoning violence also hastens the decline of “the same crumbling [social] infrastructure which had created the conditions for their existence” (393). Angus himself grew up in “one of Earth’s more degraded and pestilential cities” (23), and, tortured and abused by his own mother, who herself had suffered sexed violence on a scale even more horrific than anything survived by Morn Hyland, Angus learns to hate all the idealists and social do-gooders whose high talk had so dismally failed him.

Thus the key element in Angus’s character, as Donaldson slowly reveals, is how Angus participates in and perpetuates a continuous cycle of violence. He does unto others what has been done unto him: physical assault, sexual violence, theft, and degradation. Or, put another way, Angus holds his own fear at bay “by inflicting it on other people; an effort to stave off his past by consuming others in the present” (*Chaos* 111–112). A similar dynamic had applied to *Covenant*, but in a way more archetypal and less sociological—if Donaldson’s leper had been everyman, Angus is anyone. Together, though, they exemplify *power* as a key existential category of individual being. The work of Rollo May offers a clear articulation on how an existential framework might understand such power. According to May, the “ability to cause or prevent change” should be seen as a “fundamental aspect of the life process” (*Power* 20, 99). To endure continually the *lack* of power, he argues, or to feel bereft of personal significance, underlies many acts of violence. Or, as May states in his most famous work, living in apathy provokes violence because, in the absence of human relatedness, violence will flare “up as a daimonic necessity for contact, a mad drive forcing touch the most direct way possible” (*Love and Will* 30–31).<sup>10</sup> Indeed, this existential view on power helps explain why sexual desire plays so small a role for Donaldson’s literary rapists. As a UMCP ensign, Morn symbolizes for Angus all the “muscle for all the worlds which had ever despised” him, and his first thoughts upon seeing her aboard *Starmaster* concern not sex but “possibilities of revenge” (*Real Story* 55). For Angus, Morn represents a world that has marginalized and ignored him—and a world that dubs him an “illegal” when it *does* notice him, someone undesirable and unwanted.

From a postmodern feminist perspective, however, this sociological component to the *Gap* sequence would not absolve Donaldson’s treatment of sexed violence. For one thing, this sociological component still links Donaldson to those older forms of liberalism that, by ignoring discourse and language, continue to overlook several potential sites of oppression (such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, colonialism, and of course patriarchy). Just as importantly, Donaldson’s individualism and disinterest in mass politics can themselves be seen as insufficiently radical. Marxist critics, for example, despite their own tendency to ignore discourse, have long noted the political limitations of such atomic individualism. The postmodernist critique runs even deeper. In some ways, the *Gap* sequence simply follows the fantasy genre’s relatively conservative footsteps. CEO Holt Fasner shares Lord Foul’s narrative

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<sup>10</sup> Harlan Ellison uses this quotation as his epigraph for “The Whimper of Whipped Dogs” (1973), his literary response to the 1964 murder of Kitty Genovese but, whereas the Ellison story articulates a barely throttled rage at human apathy, Donaldson’s fiction consistently seeks to find a “better answer” (a frequent refrain in his novels) to apathy, powerlessness, and violence.

function as the archetypal fantasy Dark Lord, and his defeat by noble idealists like Warden Dios and Morn Hyland soon sets the world to rights. Yet the legal system that victimizes Morn remains in place; the decaying social system that creates guttergangs and Angus undergoes little change; and the discourses that create and perpetuate sexed violence remain undisclosed. In Donaldson, effective social and political change begins and ends with the individuals who maintain their autonomy despite the social and discursive forces that shape individual subjectivity. This individualism explains why Donaldson must place such immense burdens on a single rape survivor. Morn must heroically, and *personally*, end the cycle of violence perpetuated by her abuser. Direct cultural or discursive change seems off the table as a viable solution.

Yet, despite the validity of such criticisms, they also shortchange the advantages of Donaldson's particular approach. A key part of Angus's development, echoed earlier by Covenant, is learning that by harming Morn Hyland he harms himself. This claim might sound counter-intuitive, but it also demonstrates Donaldson's fundamental moral commitment and why he analyzes the male side of men's sexual violence at such length. The logic of Angus's realization seems to rely on the metaphysical distinction between subjects and objects: or, in classic Sartrean terminology, being-for-itself (*être-pour-soi*) and being-in-itself (*être-en-soi*). As we have seen, violence in Donaldson often functions as a reaction to individual powerlessness, a brutal demand for recognition amidst apathy, marginalization, or social ostracism. Yet Donaldson, always attuned to contradiction, also accentuates the core paradox behind such violence. A victimizer may desire recognition, but violence fails to elicit recognition in any satisfying form. Feminist Ann J. Cahill has argued that the wrongness of rape stems from assaulting "various but fundamental aspects of [a victim's] embodied selfhood" (8), but Donaldson seems to suggest that something similar happens to those who *perpetrate* sexed violence. The literary challenge presented by Angus is to show how a genuine sadist, despite relishing the victimization and objectification of another person, might also personally suffer on account of such sadism. Through Angus, Donaldson seems to argue that the existential structure of individual being, even for a malevolent abuser, demands a mutual recognition between free subjects *as* free subjects—an objective basis, if one will, for an ethics of intersubjectivity.

Angus tries to objectify his victim in three specific ways: rape, physical abuse, and the zone implant. This latter device bears special importance—it can switch Morn off and on like a machine, one of the classic modern binaries against which personhood is often defined. Throughout *The Real Story*, in fact, Donaldson continually has Angus link Morn in his imagination to another machine, his ship *Bright Beauty*. Both are possessions: Morn "was *his*. Wasn't she? Like his ship, she was in his command" (*Real Story* 78, emphasis original). Even as early as this moment, however, Angus's question ("Wasn't she?") betrays a key uncertainty. Part of him desires an absolute equivalence between Morn and *Bright Beauty*. True objects have no freedom and remain completely in thrall to their possessor—*Bright Beauty* might break down, but it will never rebel. More simply put, objects are safe. At the same time, Angus also finds such absolute control strangely unsatisfying. At one point, he observes that controlling Morn through fear rather than through her zone implant would constitute an "exquisite display of possession" (91). Mastering an object, after all, only displays a limited form of power. Without any contending will, no chance for defeat, there arises no special sense of victory. Objects might be safe, but they can never acknowledge one's mastery. Hence, as deeply as Angus attempts to objectify Morn, both physically and emotionally, he *also* paradoxically needs to reaffirm her essential subjectivity and independence from his will.

Thus Angus employs several classic abuser tactics by which he, cruelly, offers Morn that implicit affirmation. Fear is one; guilt another. Over and over again, Angus maliciously tries to convince Morn that, due to her gap sickness, she

deserved what was happening to her. She'd killed her family, hadn't she? She'd betrayed them all. No, it wasn't something she'd done by conscious choice. It was worse: it was something she'd done because of who she was, because of the fundamental flaw which left her vulnerable to gap-sickness. (122)

Of course, both fear and guilt fail disastrously for Angus by the end of *The Real Story*. Fear is a two-edged weapon, leading to attack as well as to retreat, but so is guilt, especially in Donaldson. As mentioned, Donaldson's most morally effective characters tend to be his guiltiest ones, and that certainly holds true with Morn Hyland throughout the *Gap* sequence. As a result, Angus loses his struggle against Nick Succorso; he is forced to bargain with Morn as yet another acknowledgment of her status as subject not object; and Angus himself falls into the hands of United Mining Companies Police (UMCP) operatives who weld him into a remote-controlled cyborg—thus bringing Angus full-circle into the absolute objectification he himself had tried to create for Morn.

Yet Donaldson's analysis of male sexed violence goes beyond turning the tables of objectification upon the abuser; indeed, guttergangs and institutions have already been objectifying Angus all his life, denying him his essential personhood. Throughout *The Real Story*, Angus does not simply treat Morn *as if* she were an object—initially, he barely understands his victim as a human being at all. She is, instead, a symbol, a synecdoche for the entire UMPC and all the social idealists who have despised him. Due to their close proximity for weeks on *Bright Beauty*, however, Angus finds that he cannot maintain that idea of Morn as the symbolic target for all his hatreds; the facticity of her subjecthood confronts him continuously. Angus therefore consistently slips in his ability to feel malice; he inadvertently keeps offering self-disclosures of his own being. His story about Scarl provides a good example. Scarl had been Angus's roommate and protector at their reform school, but Angus, indiscriminately hating all those who succeeded by conforming to the system, frames Scarl and, in the process, opens himself up to physical and sexual abuse by his fellow students. Morn points out the obvious, thematically significant lesson: "Betraying [and hurting] him probably hurt you worse than it did him" (*Real Story* 99–100).

More personally, such disclosures reveal something else about Angus. All his crimes and violent actions have, in a way, been a method of asserting himself in a social system under which he had become invisible. His acts of destruction and theft, however, have bought only *negative* recognition. He destroys idealists because they do not recognize his anger and his fear; he preys on outposts on the fringes of human space so that the UMCP must hunt him down, rather than ignore him, and he enjoys the victory of evading them. And he can harm the UMCP further by torturing a helpless UMCP ensign. But nothing positive results from any of this. Rape and torture can force Morn to acknowledge Angus's existence, but her recognition is tainted by loathing and revulsion. Such reactions might seem preferable to apathy but, as Angus grows increasingly aware of Morn's inalienable personhood through their weeks together on *Bright Beauty*, he also begins to realize—subconsciously at first—that more positive forms of recognition are possible: friendship, respect, admiration, genuine desire, and the like. *The Real Story* showcases a classic Donaldsonian paradox of power: despite every situational advantage

Angus holds over his victim, his power is also a form of weakness. It cannot coerce positive recognition and, indeed, exercising that power makes positive recognition fundamentally impossible. As pathetic as it might seem, Angus is grieved to realize that his victim would never *like* him, and hence Angus must eventually confront, in anguish, how “much power he lacked—and how much he wanted that power, how much he grieved for it” (129).

Thus the male capacity to enforce recognition through sexed violence, Donaldson seems to suggest, suffers a flaw on the existential level. Recognition can only occur between free subjects *qua* subjects—but objectification, which provides a temporary sense of power, also permanently prevents any deeper form of satisfying recognition. Only through this dynamic—power and powerlessness; subjects and objects—can we grasp Angus’s wild dismay when Morn seems to respond so viscerally to Nick Succorso’s presence at Mallorys Bar. The recognition Angus desires for himself has been spontaneously given to another, a charismatic and handsome space pirate who represents everything Angus himself can never be. Only in *Chaos and Order* (1994) can Angus bring himself to make his true longings clear. “I would have stopped hurting you,” he tells Morn, “if you’d ever looked at me that way” (552). Thus, although Donaldson discounts discursive postmodern approaches to sexed violence, Donaldson’s analysis of Angus Thermopyle, which extends and deepens his earlier handling of Thomas Covenant, nonetheless offers an existential basis for ethical action and intersubjective respect. If these intuitions are plausible, such a standpoint would hold true even in the absence of legal punishment, social opprobrium, or a drastic change in contemporary hegemonic discourses like toxic masculinity or rape culture. Granted, the women who have suffered under Covenant and Angus are no less victimized. Likewise, Donaldson’s general account seems inapplicable to genuine sociopaths. Yet the power paradox in men’s violence against women, prominent throughout the *Gap* sequence and also the first *Chronicles*, comprises a useful and significant tool in the contemporary struggle against sexed violence.

### Conclusion

In the end, this article has argued that Donaldson’s body of work, even as early as *Lord Foul’s Bane*, has attempted an ambitious, nuanced, and yet unrecognized engagement with feminist thinking on sexed violence. If most academic critics have failed to realize this, then the reason might partly stem, as I have suggested, from the postmodern turn in feminist thinking, not to mention larger theoretical trends in academia. As a humanist and existentialist in an era grown increasingly wary of atomic individualism and autonomous subjects, Donaldson offers a—for some—problematic, non-discursive approach to sexed violence. Still, no other writer in speculative fiction (or outside the field, for that matter) has ever attempted such a sustained and career-long phenomenological account of male sexual violence. While Donaldson does try to tackle the survivor side of rape with sympathy, creating Morn Hyland as a partially successful rewrite of Lena, his greater literary strength nevertheless seems to rest on the representation of men who violate and abuse. Appropriately enough given Donaldson’s religious background, we might consider his core literary mission a parallel to Christ’s dictum to have come to call, not the saved, but the sinners. At the same time, Donaldson shows a deep feminist commitment to gender equality, especially when it comes to moral choice.

Ultimately, however, even if contemporary trends in postmodern theorizing seem to hold little place for Donaldson, that disregard might actually cement Donaldson’s contemporary importance. Since power in Donaldson functions as an existential category rather than a socio-

political one, his fiction presumes an ontological priority for the individual subject over and against discursive and sociological influences. When it comes to sexed violence, then, this means that a Donaldsonian ethics of intersubjective relatedness—treating one another as subjects, not objects—can apply to situations outside the scope of other theory-driven solutions. It applies in dreams; it applies to illegals on the fringes of unregulated human and Amnion space. Depending on how well Donaldson's fiction is seen as motivating these intuitions, the first *Chronicles* as well as the *Gap* sequence might constitute some of speculative fiction's most groundbreaking work in the literary analysis of sexed violence.



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