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a journal of literary  
and cultural criticism

Editorial Board

# Articulāte

a journal of literary and cultural criticism

Volume 2, Spring 1997

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Department of English

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While the journal is designed primarily for the critical writing of English majors and minors, all submissions of high quality will be carefully reviewed by the student editorial board. During the reviewing process, all student information is removed from the pieces and they are read as anonymous works of writing. Each *Articulāte* editorial board member ranks the essays on a 3-point scale. After all entries have been read the editorial board meets to discuss and choose the top essays for publication. The names and Slayter box numbers of the authors are not revealed until all decisions have been made.

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ESCAPING THE GENRE:  
REALIZING THE SATIRE OF 18TH CENTURY WOMEN THROUGH THE  
HUMOR OF 20TH CENTURY COMEDIANS

ELENA RUDY '97

ROBERT T. WILSON AWARD FOR SCHOLARLY WRITING

Is women's satire that different from men's? According to statements that Gilbert Highet, a leading critic of satire in the 20th century, makes in the conclusion to his book *The Anatomy of Satire*, it must be. It must be so different that he does not even recognize it as satire. Highet writes that "Women in particular, with their kind hearts, are prone to make this criticism [that satire is disgusting and holds no pleasure for the reader]: very few of them have ever written, or even enjoyed, satire, although they have often been its victims" (235). But a significant amount of satire written by women existed in the 18th century so that any well-versed 18th century scholar would have at least run across it in his or her studies. And today women's satire still persists. Therefore, perhaps women's satire uses such different techniques from men's that a critic such as Highet, who has very strict rules for satire, would not recognize 18th century works by Lady Mary Chudleigh or Sarah Fyge Egerton, for example, as satires. By exploring women's humor as Regina Barreca presents it in *They Used to Call Me Snow White . . . But I Drifted: Women's Strategic Use of Humor*, we find specific characteristics of female humor that differ from male humor and see that 18th century female satirists use the techniques that Barreca sees 20th century female comedians using.

Wit and humor in women has always created controversy where men are concerned. Barreca states early in her book that "A woman's ability to use humor, especially if she can couple it with an ability to think quickly, can have a daunting effect on men" (15). And she later quotes an article by Julia Klein in which Klein talks about the risks female comics take. Klein says that

'Comedy is itself an aggressive act; making someone laugh means exerting control, even power. But a woman cannot

come off as over-aggressive or she will lose ...' What will she lose? She'll lose the approval of her audience. She'll make people nervous, and nervous people don't laugh. (19)

The whole point of comedy is to teach through laughter, and therefore if you lose the laughter in your performance, then you lose the ability to teach your audience. Mary Leapor, in the 18th century, suggests almost this same thing in her poem *An Essay on Woman*. She talks about the woes of a witty woman: "The damsels view her with malignant eyes, / The men are vexed to find a nymph to wise: / And wisdom only serves to make her know / The keen sensation of superior woe" (29-32). Because it gets her into the most trouble, wit is a woman's worst attribute according to Leapor. And it also makes her unhappy: "Though nature armed us for the growing ill / With fraudulent cunning and a headstrong will; / Yet, with ten thousand follies to her charge, / Unhappy woman's but a slave at large" (57-60). Women, therefore, are slaves not only to men, she says, but they also suffer slavery at the hands of their intelligence because they understand their inferior position and realize that they cannot easily escape it.

Wit needs to be defined before I go any further. The word wit during Leapor's time does not mean the same thing as it does today. In the 18th century, wit meant intelligence. Today wit refers more to a sense of humor. But women often use humor to mask intelligence. Therefore, even though the word has developed a somewhat different meaning over the centuries, the idea behind it remains the same—wit was not valued in women in the 18th century, and today wit often conceals a woman's wisdom so that she does not threaten men.

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Concealing wisdom behind humor often leads to a self-deprecating kind of humor in which the comedian makes fun of herself or others like her. Leapor uses the self-deprecating humor that Barreca associates with much female humor in *An Essay on Woman*. It seems that Leapor does not so much accuse men of creating women's secondary position, she more explains women's place in society and blames women for allowing it to persist. She mentions women's obsession with beauty, and then seems to laugh at these vain women because this beauty they pride fades quickly. And then what will these women have left?

Her lip the strawberry, and her eyes more bright  
Than sparkling Venus in a frosty night;  
Pale lilies fade and, when the fair appears,  
Snow turns a negro and dissolves in teares (9-12).

While the undertone is that men have created this secondary position for women, the poem really criticizes women. Barreca writes that this self-deprecating humor is something of a defense mechanism used by groups low in the status structure. If you make a joke about yourself or your group before and better than anyone else does, then you have some control over your situation, and you make those people in powerful positions comfortable and your "pals" (25-26).

While this is something of a good strategy—the male patriarchy will think that women are not dissatisfied with their position in society and that they really do not want to change it, and thus men may let down their guard and inadvertently give women more freedom and power than they meant to—it can also go too far. After awhile, self-deprecating jokes are not funny to women anymore because they are the reality. And some women might argue, why should we bother with male feelings? Why should we want to let males feel comfortable in their high status position? They should feel uncomfortable and should be challenged in order to keep this superior position. Women such as Sarah Fyge Egerton and Lady Mary Chudleigh, both 18th century satirists, seem to prescribe more to this kind of thought. They do not seem concerned with keeping men comfortable or with concealing their dissatisfaction with the female position in society. They both blatantly accuse men of denying women "true" wit and thereby keeping them slaves. Egerton claims that women are actually smarter than men, and thus men deny them wit out of fear: "They're wise to keep us slaves, for well they know, / If we were loose, we soon should make them so" (13-14). And later she writes that "They fear we should excel their slug-

gish parts, / Should we attempt the sciences and arts; / Pretend they were designed for them alone, / So keep us fools to raise their own renown" (19-22). These are powerful words and straightforward statements. She does not worry about offending men. It seems more that she wants them to know that she understands her own wit and its power and that men better be careful because she will use her wit to gain a better position for women in society.

Chudleigh too accuses men of the fact that "Wife and servant are the same, / But only differ in the name" (1-2). She mentions the woman's role in her servitude in a sad sort of way—look at this pathetic woman who can do nothing without the approval of her husband:

Like mutes, she signs alone must make,  
And never any freedom take,  
But still be governed by a nod,  
And fear her husband as her god:  
Him still must serve, him still obey,  
And nothing act, and nothing say,  
But what her haughty lord thinks fit,  
Who, with the power, has all the wit. (13-20)

This poem uses the self-deprecating technique of humor a little more than Egerton's, but it still mainly blames men, not women, for the slavery of women. It is strong in its accusations of men and also suggests as Egerton's poem does that men have the wit because they have the power, not because they are more intelligent. In other words, men are defining what is considered wit—what women are taught is not as highly valued as what men are taught.

Thus Egerton and Chudleigh are really taking a strong stand against men. They do not seem concerned at all with how men will feel about their works. But perhaps I am reading with too much of a 20th century attitude. Men of their time may not have even understood this wit that seems so straightforward and accusatory to me. Barreca even states that "Perhaps it is fortunate, therefore, that occasionally a woman's wit is too quick or too 'different' to be understood by a man" (15). Could men not really understand what these women were accusing them of? Perhaps not, or perhaps the men did not even recognize these poems as satire or want to acknowledge that women had enough wit to construct satires against the "superior sex." For example, Gilbert Highet, as mentioned earlier, insists that very few women "have ever written, or even enjoyed, satire, although they have often been its victims" (235). Obviously from the above examples, many women wrote and con-

tinue to write satire. But like many men, he probably does not want to look at these satires closely because that would require looking closely at himself as a part of the satirized group—the male patriarchy.

And it is conceivable that Highet does not really even recognize these women's satires as satire. Most of the satires we looked at in class by women abided by the humane humor rule that Emily Toth defines in her article "Female Wits" and attributes to female humor. This rule states that "we should not make fun of what people cannot change, such as social handicaps . . . or physical appearance" (cited in Barreca 13). Women take on the powerful, rather than the pitiful, and they, more often than men, criticize sacred institutions like marriage or authority figures such as bosses. This makes their humor more dangerous according to Barreca because it does not take authority seriously (14). Many of the satires of the 18th century use this tactic as well. Hetty Wright in *Wedlock. A Satire* takes on the institution of marriage. She calls it a "tyrant" (1), a "plague peculiar to mankind" (6), a "sure forerunner of despair" (16), a "monster whom the beasts defy" (22), and many other unsavory names. She addresses humankind in general, but I believe she is speaking to women in particular, when she writes, "That wretch, if such a wretch there be, / Who hopes for happiness from thee [wedlock], / May search successfully as well / For truth in whores and ease in hell" (27-30). In other words, do not try to find contentment in marriage. *Wedlock* only breeds more slavery for women. Wright is thus taking on the powerful institution of marriage that was created by men and serves to keep women in an inferior position in society. She does not attack a particular person, however, or dwell on those inhabiting a lower social position than herself. Thus she uses the humane humor rule about which Barreca and Toth write. While it is a very direct way of getting her point across, it is also very risky because she is challenging a sacred institution and not taking it seriously.

Another female writer from the 18th century who comments on powerful institutions that often breed inequality also uses the humane humor rule. Mary Collier in *The Woman's Labor. An Epistle to Mr. Stephen Duck: [The Washerwoman]* takes on class issues as well as female issues. Her satire is a response to a poem written by Stephen Duck about the hardships of the working class man. She shows that the working class woman has an even harder plight than the man because she not only works for her employer but she must take care of her husband as well. Collier, however, does not use

accusatory words or an attacking tone in the satire. Her words and tone do not seem to fit the serious content of the poem. The overall message that Collier sends to her audience reflects the awful conditions of the washerwoman's life. But the words and phrases she chooses to use fool the audience for awhile into thinking that she is writing of something much less serious, a tactic that might allow her poem to circulate more easily even though it breaks the acceptable boundaries of women's writing. For example, at the beginning of the satire, Collier states that "When bright Orion glitters in the skies / In winter nights, then early we must rise" (1-2). These two lines say that the women get up in the middle of the night to go to work for the day, but Collier makes it sound romantic by mentioning Orion, a constellation and a classic story of love. She could have used a phrase like "only the dark sky greets us when we rise to start our day." This is much less romantic and does not conceal in any way that the women are rising before the sun to start working. While viewing the stars is romantic for lovers, there is nothing romantic about why working class women see the stars. Another phrase she uses early in the satire also serves to encourage this light tone, while it at the same time holds a serious message: "Our work appointed, we must rise and go, / While you on easy beds may lie and sleep, / Till light does through your chamber-windows peep" (4-6). These lines directly address Mr. Duck's poem. Women, she says, get up before men to do their work. Men do not get up until the sun rises. Instead of saying this, though, she uses a playful phrase—light "peeps" through the window. Once again she does not use an accusatory tone, but rather one that almost masks the meaning of her satire.

The words and phrases Collier uses when writing about the clothes the women wash and about the woman for whom they work also lend the poem an ironic tone. She reports very clearly and with no real emotion about the fine fabrics that the lady owns. It almost sounds as if the working class women value their work. The rich lady tells them to be careful of her clothes because she has so few garments. While this is written in a completely serious tone, we know as the audience that Collier does not believe this. She is not an innocent who marvels at the rich woman's clothing, but she presents her poem in that way. She toys with her audience as Barreca says many women do in order to avoid confrontation and to gain social acceptance without totally subscribing to society's rules. For example, Regina Barreca mentions that female characters such as Marilyn Monroe's in *Some Like it Hot* and Lorelie in Anita Loos's

*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* are “mistresses of innuendo.” The words they speak seem innocent, and they may even speak these words in an innocent, naive tone. But the words can be construed as sexually suggestive. Sometimes the woman who speaks them does not even know she speaks suggestively, but sometimes a sly look from the woman tells the audience that she is not the naive innocent she is supposed to be (16-17). Women tend to conceal their wit and attitudes behind innocent statements that only the correct audience will find ironic. This protects women from offending men and the power structure, but it also allows them to rise above their subordinate position. Collier uses this double meaning tactic throughout her satire. The subversive irony she so expertly uses may cause a critic like Highet to overlook this literary work as a satire. He perhaps is not a member of the correct audience, and thus he does not share in the humor of the situation. He would therefore not define this as satire because he would not see the humor of it.

Highet tries to keep satire a male-dominated genre by defining it in male terms and according to male satires and also by blatantly stating that women cannot handle it. But obviously they can because not only did the aforementioned women create some very satiric works, but women such as Lady Mary Wortley Montague wrote satires in the 18th century that were even more harsh than many satires written by men. Take as an example Montague's *To the Imitator of the First Satire of the Second Book of Horace*. In this satire, she says awful things about Alexander Pope—she criticizes his character, his physical disabilities, and his writing. She writes in a much more Juvenalian style than Pope ever does, and she seems to enjoy herself while doing it. She does not apologize or make any comments that suggest that she feels guilty for “gazing on these foul scenes”; Highet explains the circumstances presented in Juvenalian satire as “foul scenes.” Neither does Montague follow the humane humor rule that Toth has carved out for women. Montague criticizes Pope's physical appearance, referring to his humpbacked body as “That wretched little Carcass” (68). She also suggests that his

pen is not his only impotent feature, he himself is impotent:

Cool the Spectators stand; and all the while,  
Upon the angry little Monster smile.  
Thus 'tis with thee:—whilst impotently safe,  
You strike unwounding, we unhurt can laugh (73-6)

Her harsh statements reveal that just because she is a member of the female sex does not mean that she is automatically nice and sweet, attributes too often arbitrarily placed on women. It is a mistake to think of women as too weak to deal with or to dish out criticism.

While Toth's and Barreca's ideas of humane humor and of humor challenging powerful institutions find their way more often into female satire than into male satire, we should not try to define all female satire within this narrow framework. Montague's poem, for instance, would not fit because it does not challenge any institutions or refrain from personal attacks. So then, how do you define women's satire? Does it have any concrete rules? The one thing that I see in most satires by women is a need to satirize a bad situation in order to survive it. Barreca entitles one of the last sections of her book, “She Who Laughs, Lasts.” In this section she suggests that if you can laugh at your situation, if you can find anything humorous in your situation, then you can survive it and change it: “If you can see, in the most obscured curve of your peripheral vision, the way the situation could be funny, you might just be able to save yourself” (32). Women in the 18th century held an even lower position in society than women of today do, and the female satirists of the time realized this inferior position. But rather than let this lack of social status overwhelm them and thus destroy any hope of changing their situation, they found an outlet. They used satire to bring their ideas into the open. Realizing the humor in a situation allows one “to view her situation with emotional distance and, therefore, with clarity” (32). With this clarity comes the realization that you can change your situation. Thus, the one thing that might define 18th century satire is the understanding that change is necessary, but until that comes, humor will help you survive.

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## THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN THE *EPIC OF GILGAMESH*

ELIZABETH WILLIAMSEN '99

Dr. Carl G. Jung's theory of individuation can be described as the emergence of a hidden, more complete personality through gradual changes within the conscious and unconscious halves of the human psyche. These changes occur most prominently at periods of stress in an individual's life, such as puberty or "mid-life crisis." The changes can also occur through a person's relationships with others, which can cause intense anxiety or intense contentment. The Sumerian-Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh* can be interpreted as a demonstration of the ways in which interpersonal relations can bring about a more satisfying relationship with the Self.

A deep and binding love for another human being is a beautiful thing. A friendship based on such a love should be a goal for each individual, no matter where, how, or when he/she lives. Forty-seven centuries ago, two men shared such a bond. Gilgamesh the king of Uruk and Enkidu the wild man of the plains were joined by a friendship whose strength was destined to change each of their lives.

In the modern world, characterized as it is by homophobia and paranoia, many might look askance at such an exclusive friendship between two men. In the course of history, and the course of mythological study, Gilgamesh and Enkidu's friendship has been characterized as a loving homosexual relationship, a temporary homosexual experiment, and an example of male bonding as it should be done: confine the women to the kitchen and frolic in the wilderness like "real men."

In Will Roscoe's opinion, Gilgamesh and Enkidu's relationship is an assertion of male superiority through same-sex love. They reject women completely, preferring each other's (male) company. Although Sumerian society appears to have been patrilineal, women were important religious figures and their sexuality was celebrated in ceremonies and literature (Roscoe 169). In fact, "Eanna / Our

holy ground" (I.i.10-11 Jackson 2), Ishtar's temple, and thus by association the goddess herself, is mentioned in the epic long before any male god. The rejection of women by the two men can easily be seen as a rebellion against female power, and an attempt to overcome the feelings of inferiority caused by that power: "Men's power over women is based on the bonds that men have with each other, their willingness to aid and support each other in asserting their superiority over women" (Roscoe 171).

Gilgamesh feels the power conflicts between men and women even before his meeting with Enkidu. He rules over Uruk, but the fertility goddess Ishtar, apparently the most important deity of the city (as would seem most appropriate in an agricultural community), rules over him. In defiance against her power, and synonymously, her sexuality, he seeks domination over mortal women: he "hoards the girls of other men / for his own purpose" (I.ii.56-57 Jackson 3). This form of retaliation, while probably very physically satisfying for Gilgamesh, is not successful, since by enjoying female sexuality, he only empowers his enemy. The people of the city call upon the gods to remedy the situation, for Gilgamesh is not the king he should be:

"Is this the shepherd of Uruk's flocks,  
our strength, our light, our reason,  
who hoards the girls of other men  
for his own purpose?" (I.ii.54-57 Jackson 3)

In response, the gods ask Aruru, goddess of creation, to create another man, Enkidu,  
". . . in the  
image of Gilgamesh . . .  
as quick in heart and as strong in arm  
so that these counterforces might first engage,  
then disengage, and finally let Uruk's children

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Elizabeth Williamsen

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live in peace." (I.ii.71-76 Jackson 4)

The wild man is born of a lump of clay, feeds upon the grasses of the steppe, and runs with the wild herds. His animal nature is totally at odds with the civilization and culture which Gilgamesh represents. They are opposites, yet divine mandate has declared them to be equals. The two are destined to become one, but Enkidu must first be educated in the ways of men.

Enkidu is more animal than man; he has "neither clan nor race;" "tirelessly does he roam across the land . . . / he eats the food of beasts" (I.ii.86, I.iii.104-105 Jackson 4, 6). He is accepted by the animal herds as one of their own; however, he demonstrates human intellect in his defiance and methodical destruction of the hunters' traps (Wolff 4). The hunter who observes him, as a civilized being, cannot accept the thought of a human living like an animal, and seeks to bring him to the city. To aid him in this, he recruits a temple prostitute.

Rivkah Kluger points out that the seduction of Enkidu by the courtesan demonstrates specific intent. Enkidu's destiny is not merely to be shown off like a freak of nature; it is important that he become initiated into civilization. The prostitute's mission is to "bring him closer to the human, to bring him to Uruk" (45). As with those animals who will cease to care for their offspring after the young have been touched by human hands, Enkidu's herd no longer recognizes him as an animal after the seven days he spends in the arms of the harlot. John Tigue sees Enkidu's sexual encounter

as a social becoming. He is furthering his independence from the cthonic kingdom and entering into the paternal "civilized world." The first sexual experience is always a turning point in people's lives (sic). (60)

Enkidu feels the difference in himself and returns to the courtesan, the cause of the change, for advice on dealing with the change.

The prostitute can be seen as Enkidu's anima figure. Before his encounter with her, he was a gross exaggeration of manhood in his animalism. After femininity is revealed to him, he discovers the feminine qualities in himself; he is already at one with nature, and he relies much on his instincts, both stereotypically feminine characteristics. When he returns to listen to her words, she becomes "a higher anima," a sort of "teacher" (Kluger 46). The "woman is the bridge or mediator [as Enkidu crosses from "non-manhood (whether animality, childhood, or adolescence) into manhood], seen here in her familiar aspects of mother (in that she leads, clothes,

feeds, teaches), subservient female . . . and whore" (Wolff 5). Because he is willing to listen to his anima, Enkidu readily assimilates his feminine qualities, easily balancing them with those of his masculine side.

It is actually this balance that some critics have used to further their arguments of a homosexual relationship between Enkidu and Gilgamesh. Enkidu's feminine qualities are emphasized to underscore his integrated self-image; he is described in several cases as a woman, especially in Gilgamesh's first two dreams: in the first, "[Gilgamesh] . . . embraced [him], / as a man does the woman he loves best" (I.v.244-245 Jackson 11), and in the later dream he bends toward the axe symbolizing Enkidu "with manly interest; / so fair was its appearance / that it seemed wholesome, young and / ready as a woman" (II.i.15-18 Jackson 15). Enkidu's rage upon hearing that Gilgamesh is about to deflower another man's bride has been construed as the anger of a jealous lover (or pre-lover, in this instance, as the two men have yet to meet); the wild man challenges the king to a wrestling match (which has been interpreted as a metaphor for homosexual intercourse), that ends in a draw, with each man respecting the other's prowess.

"Then Enkidu and Gilgamesh joined in sacred  
friendship and sealed their solemn  
bond with noble kiss." (III.i.1-3 Jackson 20)

Following the pattern indicated by many of his earlier assertions, William Doty also suggests that the missing text that follows this kiss "may have described a homosexual union, and hence was excised" (78).

Whether Enkidu serves as a model of a balanced psyche or a homosexual temptation matters little. Robert Hopcke offers a beautiful rationalization of male femininity:

[T]o be in relationship to oneself as a man means fundamentally to both acknowledge and celebrate a kind of homosexuality, an enjoyment of one's own manhood as a man; this enjoyment is anathema in a patriarchal society whose dominant values and social structures are organized along heterosexual lines. (101)

At one with his own psyche, Enkidu meets Gilgamesh and proves the prophetic words of the prostitute, who instilled in Enkidu a feeling of destiny by telling him that Gilgamesh had already dreamt of his coming (I.v.231-233 Jackson 11). Kluger states that a very important part of the process of individuation is just such a feeling of destiny, a belief that something is meant to be (47). Enkidu's

belief in this friendship as his fate spurs him onward in his journey to Uruk. The prostitute has given him the boost in self-esteem he needs in order to discover himself, and later to help Gilgamesh in his own process of self-realization (Kluger 49).

Gilgamesh, at this point in the epic, is rather an unruly ruler, and his subjects have been forced to call on the gods for help. As with any hero, his spiritual development is incomplete, and he is destined to search for the completing factor (Van Nortwick 11). Much of his trouble may be caused by his partial divinity. His birth has made him heir to two worlds, but he belongs to neither. Below the rank of god, he is still too powerful to form relationships among mortals. He is an outcast in his own city, where he is unable to balance his roles as "simultaneously a powerful individual and a functionary of society" (Wolff 63). The introduction of Enkidu, who was specifically created to be Gilgamesh's equal, opens a new way of life to the king.

Enkidu is a shadow figure, a perfect foil for Gilgamesh. The cthonic man who recently ran with the herds represents all those qualities not possessed by the city-dwelling king (Van Nortwick 21), including the feminine qualities he gained from his encounter with his anima. Gilgamesh, the more powerful, dominant, and masculine of the two, turns Enkidu toward his own way of life, rather than immediately absorbing his newfound brother's path to individuation. He molds the wild man into all a civilized man should be: a warrior.

Gilgamesh has made himself into the perfect warrior-hero. He is unsurpassed in strength and skill with weaponry; he has the ability to overcome any opponent "by wit or force or fear" (I.i.23 Jackson 2). With Enkidu as companion, he can take the final step: without strong friendship, a man must look to marriage for fulfillment (Doty 76). However, an effective warrior must be without familial ties; no one must be wounded by a warrior's injuries but the warrior himself. Women, marriage, and family belong to a different life than that sought by Gilgamesh (Wolff 8-9), especially since he must struggle against female sexuality for power in the city. How better to display his rejection of female power than by completely rejecting all women? With Enkidu at his side, this will not be such a lonely course of action. Gilgamesh can cease to molest and rape young women; instead he can embark on heroic adventures with his newly-discovered second self.

Gilgamesh suddenly feels the urge to conquer Huwawa/Humbaba, the guardian of the Cedar Forest. In the narrative, no

real reason lies behind this desire; it is simply the warrior's urge to exert dominion over another, although in some translations Huwawa/Humbaba has somehow made himself vaguely offensive to Shamash, Gilgamesh's patron god. If so, the quest can be seen as an attempt by Gilgamesh to "atone with the Father," represented here by the sun-god who guides and aids the king in his adventure (in traveling outside the protective confines of the city, Gilgamesh passes from the realm of the Mother to that of the Father, and he must endeavor to pass the initiation trial the sun-god has set for him) (Campbell 136). The episode can be interpreted more deeply as the city-dweller's desire to overpower nature, to force conformity with the values of civilization; this same nature/culture polarity can also be read as female/male, understanding that the female represents impulse and nature, while the male represents logic and ordered civilization. Thomas Van Nortwick also sees the journey to the Cedar Forest as "postponing adult responsibility in favor of an adolescent brand of male bonding" (21). Tigues's reading of the venture is a "psychological break with tradition, custom, and human law, all of which [Gilgamesh] has spurned and conquered in one way or another" (61). The city can also represent the known universe, both physically and psychologically, while the wilderness into which the friends venture is the undiscovered territory.

Enkidu must become the guide on this foray, as he is the man of nature, and Gilgamesh is little more than a raw youth when it comes to surviving outside the city. The feminine qualities in Enkidu become less pronounced as the necessary violence of survival in the natural world claims control of his mind. We can see the conflict between nature and culture exemplified in the attitudes of the two men toward this little excursion. Gilgamesh sees the conquest of the monster as "part of a larger vehicle for getting status in the culture" (Van Nortwick 22), but Enkidu considers it a fight for survival. His animal instincts are the driving force behind all the decisions he makes on the journey.

Gilgamesh, unused to a quest of this sort, and, more deeply, uneasy about what he might discover on this journey into the unconscious, shows signs of uncertainty, expressing worries about the value of their mission and voicing disturbing dreams. Their positions have been reversed: previously, Enkidu had felt anxieties about dying in battle with the monster; Gilgamesh had replied that all mortals are destined to die, but only heroic men of action can live on through the glory of their deeds (III.iv.57-63 Jackson 22). Now it is Enkidu who reassures his brother:

"Brother, your song is a fine omen.  
This dream will make you well.  
Brother, that vision you saw is rich  
for on that mountain top  
we can capture Humbaba and  
hurl his earthly form from  
towering cliffs through sky to  
earth . . ." (V.iii.17-24 Jackson 29)

Enkidu's positive interpretation of the first dream is as steadying as Enkidu himself; the deep love Gilgamesh feels for his second self is a stabilizing factor in his life, allowing him to depart from his previous "berserker" existence (Doty 80).

Marked differences still appear between the two men's personalities; Gilgamesh has not yet learned to incorporate into his own psyche those qualities that give Enkidu his spiritual completeness. Enkidu, on this journey, has actually reverted somewhat to his former animalistic, survivalist tendencies. When the two warriors bring Humbaba to his knees in defeat, he begs them to spare his life, offering in exchange his lumber and his servitude. Enkidu urges the monster's death, saying, "Kill the beast now, Gilgamesh. Show / no weak or silly mercy toward so sly a foe" (V.vi.75-76). Gilgamesh, civilized, believes that reducing the monster to helplessness is proof enough of his superiority; Enkidu, more the animal, lusts for death (Van Nortwick 22). Humbaba is beheaded forthwith. While it may be true in this case that the recipient of mercy may later seek revenge for his subordination, Enkidu was once in such a situation himself: in their first fight, Enkidu was brought to one knee, but Gilgamesh spared his life; if Gilgamesh had acted then with the ruthlessness Enkidu now urges, the wild man would never have survived.

The two men return triumphant to Uruk, bearing their trophy of cedar wood. When Gilgamesh has washed the gore of battle from himself, the goddess Ishtar becomes enamored of him and presents an proposal of marriage. She offers him the godlike status which he has apparently been seeking in his physical quests:

"Come to my home, most sweetly scented of all places,  
where holy faces wash your feet with tears as  
do the priests and priestesses of gods like Anu.  
All mighty hands of kings and queens  
will open doors for you." (VI.16-20 Jackson 33)

Having rejected women as irrelevant to the life of a warrior (Wolff 9), Gilgamesh refuses the goddess's offer in an appropriately belligerent

manner, going out of his way to remind her of her negative aspects:

"Ishtar's the hearth gone cold,  
a broken door, without the gold;  
.....  
tar that can't be washed away  
.....  
a god's own sandal filled with piss . . ."  
(VI.37-46 Jackson 34)

and then going on to refresh her memory of the various miserable fates of her former lovers. The goddess, justifiably angered, arranges for the bull of heaven to wreak havoc on Gilgamesh's realm.

However, Gilgamesh's rude refusal is almost equally justifiable. In a relationship such as she offers, Ishtar, the female, would hold all power. Gilgamesh, as a mere male (and a mortal at that), would be but a temporary fixture in her home. His male mentality, still trying to believe in its superiority, cannot abide the idea of being replaceable, and there is no chance of his exerting dominance over Ishtar: "[F]emale deities willing to be dutiful wives have not yet been invented" (Roscoe 171). The king's masculinity has not yet connected with his feminine side, and so he fears everything Ishtar represents, especially her sexuality. Ishtar embodies all the negative aspects of the anima: uncontrollable physical lusts, bitchiness, irrationality, selfishness.

If Gilgamesh accepts Ishtar when she is passionate, he would be feeding his hunger for sensual gratification. To reject her so abruptly is to reject the passion within himself and thus to try to deny now this unruly side of himself. (Tigues 67)

Gilgamesh's fear of Ishtar's aggression is about as surprising as her furious response to the hero's insults.

Accordingly, the bull of heaven is released on the unsuspecting citizens of Uruk. Gilgamesh, as their king, must protect them; after all, if his subjects perished, who would he have to rule? Properly heroic, and perhaps recognizing and accepting their own responsibility for the bull's terrorism of the city, the two heroes work together in harmony to physically overcome the corporeal threat posed by the bull. Enkidu, having become endowed with more understanding than his counterpart since his seduction by and connection with his anima, realizes the moment of defying a deity by destroying the bull: "How could we defeat a god? / Brother, I see great challenge here, but can we dare defy such force?" (VI.145-146

Jackson 37-38). However, the heroes join as one and conquer the bull, disemboweling it in celebratory glee. Masculine bonds have proven more powerful than the heavy artillery of Woman (Roscoe 171).

Gilgamesh gains from these two encounters a "sense of self-importance" from identifying himself and seeing the world identify him as

a conqueror of monsters and nature. Unfortunately for him, however, this success suffers a reversal and results in his immediate suffering. True, he has proven his physical prowess, but he has failed miserably at being a person with any common sense or empathy for others. His heroism is strictly physical at this point and will need to be spiritualized if his life is to be meaningful. (Tigue 62).

The importance of physical heroism and all it represents has indeed been overemphasized by the pair. While Gilgamesh converts the bull's horns into sacrificial vessels (to be used in rituals for the benefit of a male deity), Enkidu, caught up in the woman-bashing spirit of the moment, throws the bull's right thigh at Ishtar where she stands shrieking on the wall, informing her that he would tie her with the bull's intestines and destroy her in the same manner (VI.171-174 Jackson 38). The entire episode, in which mere pawns attempted (and succeeded in their venture) to defy the will of the gods, forces the gods to destroy one of the pair.

Enkidu, so in touch with his Self that his dreams need undergo no interpretations, envisions the council of the gods and knows his end is near:

"The gods all gathered round last night  
and Anu told Enlil that one of us should die  
because of what we've done against their names."

.....  
Then Enkidu fell ill and soon lost his full strength.  
(VII.i.2-8 Jackson 41)

Gilgamesh had previously seemed immune to fears of death; on the journey to the Cedar Forest, when Enkidu expressed fears, Gilgamesh laughed the doubts away, saying that all mortals must die, but only heroes will live on through their deeds (III.iv.57-63 Jackson 21-22). By the time his wasting illness hits him, Enkidu has lost his faith in the eternal quality of fame:

"Oh Gilgamesh, some destiny has robbed me  
of the honor fixed for those who die in battle.  
I lie now in slow disgrace, withering day by day,

deprived as I am of the peace that comes to one  
who dies suddenly in a swift clash of arms."

(VII.iv.110-114 Jackson 44)

The impact of his brother's death on Gilgamesh is incredible; this seems to be the first time death has affected him in a personal manner, "the first time he has been struck by the awareness that man has to die and that this applies also to him" (Kluger 159). But perhaps he is mostly affected by the indignity of wasting away in "slow disgrace," when his warrior's way of life dictates that he should perish in battle-glory. Gilgamesh also feels guilt for the part he played in bringing about Enkidu's death, and this causes him to drive himself out of the community (Wolff 12) and

... [wander]  
over barren hills, mumbling to his own spirit:  
"Will you too die as Enkidu did?"  
(IX.i.2-4 Jackson 55)

Without becoming actively suicidal during skirmishes, Gilgamesh, as the perfect warrior, has no way of assuring that he *will* die in combat as befits a warrior-hero. Therefore, he must arrange things so that he will *never* die. Accordingly, he sets off on his quest to locate and learn from Utnapishtim, the only mortal known to have bypassed the path all non-deities must follow into the underworld. This part of the poem depicts Gilgamesh as the "one who goes farther, sees more, than anyone, who cannot be prevented by threats, hardship or kindly and practical advice from reaching his goal of finding out what death is and how to stop it" (Wolff 13). He intends to follow the path of the sun-god and so travels to Mt. Mashu, quite likely the *axis mundi*, through which Shamash makes his nightly journey. His entrance into the utter darkness of the tunnel, the region of the unknown, can be seen as "a kind of spiritual death . . . the feeling of being cut off from the world" (Van Nortwick 27). After traveling through the mountain for eleven hours, he emerges into a new and beautiful land.

Gilgamesh, on entering the tunnel, has symbolically returned to the womb, and his emergence is a sort of rebirth. According to Joseph Campbell,

[t]he hero whose attachment to ego is already annihilate  
passes back and forth across the horizons of the world, in  
and out of the dragon, as readily as a king through all the  
rooms of his house. And therein lies his power to save . .  
(93)

He also notes the (individuated) hero's ability to pass safely by the

guardians at the entrance to the "World Womb, the World Navel" (92). Hence, if Gilgamesh is able to pass by the scorpion creatures at the entrance to the mountain, he must have achieved one-ness within himself. At Enkidu's death, and during his subsequent bonding with nature (Enkidu's native environment), he has absorbed essential qualities of Enkidu's being. "[T]he outcome of grieving is to make the ones we have lost a part of ourselves, to make their attitudes and characteristic behaviors our own" (Roscoe 173). Enkidu's qualities have become integrated into the being of the king, although Gilgamesh himself may not yet know it.

Emerging from the mountain, Gilgamesh comes upon the dwelling of Siduri, an alewife "who gives her men lifesaving drinks" (X.i.13 Jackson 61). She is frightened by his savage appearance until he relates his tale of wandering after the death of "Enkidu, my soul's good half" (X.i.44 Jackson 62). On hearing of his quest for immortality, Siduri, another guiding anima figure, advises him

"Remember always, mighty king,  
that gods decreed the fates of all  
many years ago. They alone are let  
to be eternal, while we frail humans die  
as you yourself must someday do.  
What is best for us to do  
is now to sing and dance.  
Relish warm food and cool drinks.  
Cherish children to whom your love gives life.  
Bathe easily in sweet refreshing waters.  
Play joyfully with your chosen wife.  
It is the will of the gods for you to smile  
on simple pleasures in the leisure time  
of your short days."

(X.iii.88-99 Jackson 63-65)

"She is able to reason upon the various possibilities for her existence and arrive at a sound conclusion. This is something Gilgamesh has yet to learn to do . . ." (Tigue 70). Siduri's is somewhat a voice of civilization, urging Gilgamesh to accept the cultured, mortal life as a prerequisite for the divine. However, if he takes her advice, he will simply regress to the sort of life he led before Enkidu (Kluger 179-180). And yet, his rejection of her suggestions of marriage and children (X.iii.110 Jackson 65) is, while a refusal of mundaneness, is also the same rejection that characterized his identification with the warrior ideal.

Following the alewife's directions, he finds the grove of the

ferryman, and purposelessly attacks and destroys the "Stone Things," which, it turns out, would have facilitated his journey across the waters of death. "It is only by using his [weapon] in a constructive manner, guided by Urshanabi in cutting [a large number of] punting poles for the sea-passage, that he is able to go forward" (Wolff 16). Gilgamesh reaches the island of Utnapishtim, past the waters of death, and explains his quest to the deified man. Utnapishtim, however, is quite unsympathetic, with an apathy smacking of practicality:

"Why cry over fate and nature?  
Chance fathered you. Your conception was  
an accidental combination  
of the divine and mortal.  
I do not presume to know how to help  
the likes of you." (X.v.224-229 Jackson 70)

Gilgamesh asks to at least be given knowledge of how *Utnapishtim* achieved immortality, and is regaled with the story of the flood, prior to which Utnapishtim was warned by a god to take certain life-preserving precautions. Gilgamesh can now see this sage as a man no different from himself; both have their fates decided by the gods, although it would seem that Utnapishtim is the more favored (Wolff 18).

Utnapishtim, as a harsh father-figure, scorns Gilgamesh's desire to attain immortality: "which gods will be called on / to direct your path and future life?" (XI.iv.183-184 Jackson 79). He commands Gilgamesh to withstand an ordeal: the king must stay awake for seven days and nights. Considering how little sleep Gilgamesh has had recently, it is not surprising that he drifts off almost immediately (X.iv.188 Jackson 79). Gilgamesh has effectively been made to die a "symbolic death."

As an immortal hero, Gilgamesh fails, but as the mortal hero he has been throughout the poem, he succeeds: he survives, and in the crafty manner of mortals predicted by the wise man, he tries to pass off his sleep as a mere wink. (Wolff 18-19)

After waking, Gilgamesh realizes that, as a mortal, he is constantly surrounded by death: "My own / bed is where death sleeps and / I crack her spine on every line / where my foot falls" (X.v.220-223 Jackson 80).

Utnapishtim unceremoniously sends Gilgamesh to bathe and redress in clean clothes so that he can return to his city. The mourning period is finished (Van Nortwick 34), his period of awakening is

over; "the moment has been reached at which the hero moves from one stage of his life to the next" (Wolff 20). Utnapishtim's nameless wife, a mother-anima who is willing for Gilgamesh to remain a child (Jacobsen 28), feels compassion for the weary king and persuades him to reveal yet another "special secret, one / that the gods alone do know" (XI.vi.257-258 Jackson 81). The wise man tells Gilgamesh of a magical plant that brings eternal youth. The immortality-seeking king, whose fear of death has only been intensified by his "symbolic death," obtains the plant with little difficulty and embarks on his homeward voyage. As Tigie notices, Gilgamesh takes the plant with him, intending to share it with the "aged men" of his city. This self-extension shows the maturity he has gained from his pilgrimage; he is no longer the selfish ruler of the epic's beginning (64).

On the journey back to Uruk, the triumphant hero stops to bathe in a pool and "a cruel snake slither[s] by / and [steals] the plant from Gilgamesh / who [sees] the snake grow young again" (XI.vi.282-284 Jackson 83). Throughout the second half of the epic, Gilgamesh had been

fleeing death by fleeing old age, even maturity; he [was] reaching back to security and childhood. The loss of the plant stands thus for the loss of the illusion that one can go back to being a child. It brings home the necessity for growing up, for facing and accepting reality. (Jacobsen 29)

His "resignation to the fact of death" (Doty 82) enables Gilgamesh to discover his bonds to other mortals; he has learned "to see himself not as preeminent among men, but as a part of a larger whole, ruled by forces often beyond his ability to control" (Van Nortwick 37). He is ready to return home and devote himself to the success of his community, rather than to personal glory.

The quest for personal immortality as a way of denying the reality of death is an inherent problem in human culture. The Gilgamesh epic attempts to teach the importance of "see[ing] not

those things which separate [us] from other humans, but rather the emblems of [our] essential kinship with all creatures who must die" (Van Nortwick 32). Gilgamesh returns to his city with the ferryman and says,

"Rise up now, Urshanabi, and examine  
Uruk's wall. Study the base, the brick,  
the old design. Is it permanent as can be?  
Does it look like wisdom designed it?" (XI.vi.301-304  
Jackson 84)

Gilgamesh's pride in his work "is no longer that of the ambitious, power-driven ego of the beginning" (Kluger 205). His pride is now in the good work of his people in building the wall and in the thought that the wall will protect the citizens of Uruk for centuries to come.

Enkidu, Gilgamesh's second self, has continued to have an effect on his brother long after the death of his body. The wild man who ran with the herds from birth knew the value of community, and that value is one of those that was unwittingly absorbed by Gilgamesh during the grieving process. Gilgamesh meets his anima through Enkidu's qualities of caring, gentleness, and loyalty. As Van Nortwick suggests, "one part of the self [is] showing the way for another until a final reintegration is possible" (38). This "reintegration" occurs gradually during the heroes' relationship, but the effects do not become fully apparent until Gilgamesh discovers the importance of relating to the world and its inhabitants.

The relationship between Gilgamesh and his companion serves as the ideal toward which Gilgamesh will strive as he begins to interact more fully with his community. The love of these two men also demonstrates a "conception of male wholeness" (Doty 83). Their friendship blossoms into the incomparable radiance of a human being who has achieved individual realization, and who can straddle the border between nature and culture, between mortal and immortal, and between the conscious and the unconscious minds.

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## THE SPIRITUALLY REDEPTIVE POWERS OF WOMEN'S SEXUAL LOVE IN *THE KNIGHT OF THE CART*

ALISON STINE '00

Chretien's *The Knight of the Cart*, commissioned by Marie de Champagne, enforces his patron lady's ideals of courtly love in addition to weaving a quixotic ideology of romantic love as related to spiritual devotion. Yet rather than present these two unlike loves as polar opposites, Chretien makes a startling correlation between romantic, sexual love and a higher, religious devotion. Most interesting, Chretien's vehicle for channeling spiritual love through the sexual is not Sir Lancelot, but the women Lancelot encounters. Women form the tangible link to divine love in *The Knight of the Cart*, and only through the sexual adoration of women can pure, spiritual devotion be obtained by the men who seek it.

In *The Knight of the Cart*, Chretien mars the distinction between spiritual and sexual devotion to the point of near confusion. The parallels between love and religion blur, overlap, engulfing each other with their nearness. Sexual love becomes the religion as Cecil Maurice Bowra describes in his book *Medieval Love-Song*:

love secures both purity and strength . . . the purity of aim which seeks an authentic ideal of generosity and devotion, and the strength of which gives to otherwise remote and elusive ends [uncertainty of an afterlife], a recognizable place in a world of flesh and blood. (31)

Sensual love grounds a person on earth, and gives him an attainable, measurable heaven to hold onto in postponement, or perhaps in substitute, of the real thing. Chretien litters his sex scenes with religious imagery and secular vocabulary. Upon leaving his beloved queen, Lancelot bowed low before the bedchamber, as if he were before an altar, (265) worshipping sex. Here, religion becomes the orgasm, and sex becomes the cleansing communion.

Chretien presents sex as a sacrament, a religious purification rather than a corruption. Men perform this purification with women, and the women redeem them. The female sex has long been viewed

as a paragon of virtue: moral, complete, pure, preserving the roughish male by the sheer influence of her inherent virginal morality. In this sense, women set the religious examples for men. According to Bowra,

She [the woman] stands outside the round of his common activities almost as a presiding deity . . . Her being becomes the center of his own, and through it and for it he endeavors to be all that he ought to be in her eyes. (7-8)

The divine woman becomes the religious cheerleader for the man. "Though he asserts his unworthiness, he also asserts that, with his lady's guidance, it will be corrected and his finest qualities set to work" (Bowra, 23).

An example of women guiding the religious purification of men is found on page 215 of Chretien. Tramping along on their queen-fetching odyssey, Lancelot and Gawain briefly encounter a girl who shows them the right direction to take at a fork in the road. Though a minor incident in the story, this event bears a strong similarity to personal spiritual discovery, the act of 'finding' religion. Chretien furthers this notion of spiritual odyssey through the knights' dialogue with the woman, reminiscent of pilgrims seeking guidance for a holy trek:

Then the knights asked further: "Dear lady, where is this land? Where can we find the way that leads there?"

"You will be told," she replied, "but you must know that you will encounter difficulties and treacherous passes, for it is no easy matter to enter there." (215)

How do Lancelot and Gawain find the way? A woman points out the right path and cautions them about the road. The legendary land the knights seek represents more than an enemy's kingdom. It stands for a religious location—a hell, or more likely, a heaven.

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The only ways of reaching this pseudo-heaven are by crossing two barriers: the Underwater Bridge—a water metaphor for death and birth since both involve the coming out of or entering into the beginning, i.e. heaven or the other world—or the Sword Bridge, a metaphor for religious purity or passage to heaven through sexual love: redemption through proxy. What better, what easier way to possess religious purity than through the sexual love of one who already has obtained it?

As the female guide of Lancelot and Gawain illustrates, women steer the religious progression of men, bettering men's moral standards by serving as examples as well as mentors in their spiritual development. They pass judgement on moral attributes and errors, using their love—or the withdrawal of love—as punishment, a reward, or penance. "She expects so much of him, and he himself rates his obligations so highly, that any small divagation from the strictest standards may make him despise himself and feel that she also despises him" (Bowra, 25). Women's love is the incentive for men's good behavior, vaulting women to a position of power over men, and setting up the relationship of man and woman much like the devotional relationship of church and pilgrim. In his book, *The Secular Lyric in Middle English*, Arthur Moore characterizes this equivocal, nearly servant and master relationship as having the elements of "characteristic humility of the lover and idealization of the lady" (69). Women fulfill the role of the confessor, the absolver of sins, the sainted judge of moral right and wrong, the power of ultimatum invested in a mere bat of their eyelashes or a flick of their long flaxen tresses. In Chretien, the lady is so idealized, so glorified, she becomes the ultimate sexual and moral ideal. On page 262, Guinevere and Lancelot play out a melodramatic scene of transgression and atonement where the mere language suggests an intensely sexual relationship—a relationship not between two lovers, but between a priest and sinner. Using dramatic secular words to express his anguish, Lancelot pleads: "My lady, if you will tell me what sin it was that caused me such distress, I am fully prepared to atone for it at once" may God preserve you from such sin for God's sake, accept my penance at once, and if you ever could pardon me, for God's sake tell me so" (262).

After such an emotional, divine outpouring, the queen answers with a reserved, surprisingly cool confidence: "Dear friend, may you be completely forgiven . . . I absolve you completely" (Chretien, 262). The reader half expects Guinevere to spot holy water on Lance's head and proclaim Bless you, my child—so absolutely as-

sured is she in her own religious purity, in her power to absolve him of sin. Guinevere is just as "guilty" as Lancelot. She has committed the same sin as Lancelot, with Lancelot, yet she erases her own guilt and elects herself to the position of Lancelot's priest as well as his savior, transferring her holy virtues to this corrupt man through her love for him.

This idea of the sexual transfer of religious purity stems from Chretien's notion in *The Knight of the Cart* that women are vessels, channels through which God transmits secular virtues like a satellite dish. Likewise, they should be worshipped as such and given the same reverence that a pilgrim would lavish on the bones of a saint; "Lancelot bowed low and adored her, for in no holy relic did he place such faith" (Chretien, 264). Lancelot experiences a near orgasmic sanctification by worshipping a token from the queen's body, a lock of hair from her comb:

Never will the eye of man see anything receive such reverence for he began to adore the hair, touching it a hundred thousand times to his eye, his mouth, his forehead, and his cheeks. He expressed his joy in every way imaginable and felt himself most happy and rewarded. He placed the hair on his breast near his heart, between his shirt and his skin (Chretien, 225).

This explicit idolization seems sexual as well as religious in tone. Lancelot "touches it [the hair] to his eye, his mouth, his forehead, and his cheeks" (Chretien, 225) like a priest making the sign of the cross on his own face. The lock of hair stands for the cross, and fulfills the same function as a cross in Christianity: it redeems by reminding one of absolute perfection. For Lancelot, this absolute perfection is embodied by Guinevere, the Christ-like figure the standard to which he should devote himself.

While this flattering devotion elevates women, it also demeans them, reducing them to secondary objects of adoration. Lancelot worships Guinevere's hair, an inanimate, dead piece of her, and not her living attributes such as wit or kindness. Through this objectifying, women are lessened to virtuous gifts, trophies allocated to men for good behavior, God's jackpot prizes in the celestial super lotto. The knight who tries to steal a woman under Lancelot's protection boasts,

God has granted me the one thing I have always most desired. He could not have rewarded me more if he had made me a crowned king, nor would I have been as grateful, nor have gained so much, for what I have been

granted is fair and good. (228) Woman are so desirable as battle prizes so "fair and good," in Chretien's words because they are the embodiment of spirituality. They have an inherent connection with religion through the mere virtue of their gender. As the modern playwright Tony Kushner writes in his play *Angels in America, Part One: Millennium Approaches*: "Women are for birth, for beginning" (56). Because of their potential for childbirth, women have an inceptive link to creation and to spirituality that men can never share. Women are in themselves creators, mortal mini-gods. Guinevere makes a similar assertion in another Lancelot tale, *Lancelot of the Lake*: "And if I were God," she said, "I should have made Lancelot just as he is" (Corley, 29).

Women possess a closeness to God; in a sense, women are the next step down on the creation ladder, God's administrative assistants. Women's religious closeness is fostered by their natural connection with nurturing and life giving. Ray Bradbury writes in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*:

Oh, what strange wonderful clocks women are. They nest in Time. They make the flesh that holds fast and binds eternity. They live inside the gift, know power, accept, and need not mention it. Why speak of Time when you are Time, and shape the universal moments, as they pass, into warmth and action (42-43).

The exaltation of women into divine, eternal creatures also elevates the act of sexually loving them into something more meaningful than mere sex, something poetic, inspirational, and deeply spiritual. Women carry a closeness with nature, "Erotic love is part of nature," (Saville, 176) and nature is a part of God, vindicating erotic love as a means of connecting with God. The only way men can share in the female connection with nature/God is through possession of women's bodies; in other words, sex, procuring a spiritual closeness through a sexual love. By elevating the woman into a naturalistic, pious vessel of virtue, how can the man not acquire at least a portion of her innate holiness through sex? After sleeping with Guinevere, "so deep was the pain of parting that getting up was a true martyrdom, and he [Lancelot] suffered a martyr's agony" (Chretien, 265). Surely the mere act of loving a woman is not worthy of martyrdom, yet through this act of physical love Lance experiences a sense of spiritual love; he catches a glimpse of religious purity by briefly sharing a woman's intrinsic, natural connection with spirituality.

Yet while women's close bond with spirituality elevates men, does it also condemn them? Women are indeed closer to nature. Unlike men, their self-generated powers of creation show that their connection with the spiritual, with the garden of Eden i.e. the initial center of creation has not been broken. However, while Eden served as the source for creation, it was the center for original sin as well. Do women's close associations with the spiritual denote a close relationship with sin, and the opposite of religious purity, evil? After falling in love with Guinevere, Lancelot is inspired to stalwartly carry out her rescue, among other morally worthy acts, but he is also 'inspired' to sin by committing adultery with her. She encourages sin in him along with sanctimony. His once devout religious morals leave him. Lance now subscribes to the religion of Guinevere, and "since Love ruled his action, the disgrace did not matter" (Chretien, 212).

In Jeff Vandermeer's contemporary fantasy novella *Dradin In Love*, the narrator, a once pious missionary lusting after an unnamed woman, cultivates a similar blindness to disgrace and sin: "Now he could see her as a person, not an idea—never moving as he made love to her "If ever he had lost his faith it was then, as he lost himself in the arms of a woman indifferent to him, indifferent to the world" (96). Joe, a character in *Angels in America* and a Mormon, experiences a comparable loss of religious empathy. His perfect piousness is replaced by a dulled, physical dependence on a imperfect romantic relationship:

What scares me is that maybe what I really love about her is the part of her that's farthest from the light, from God's love, maybe I was drawn to that in the first place. And I'm keeping it alive because I need it. (Kushner 53)

Even *The Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* warns its medieval audience about the dangers of succumbing to the physical desire of women: "And those who sinned with the women God allows to die because he would pardon them through the death and anguish they suffer in the defense of his faith" (Porcheddu, 29). While the *Turpin* is obviously not making an argument for the rampant carnal love of women, the author unintentionally advocates physical love as a approach toward attaining spiritual redemption. Sleeping with women is a sin, yet God forgives sin. The subconscious message that emerges here is: Sex will get you to heaven. By partaking in sex with a woman, a man is assured spiritual forgiveness and completeness, despite the spiritual emptiness of the woman: "It did not matter that she was in pieces, that she was not real, for he could

see now that she was his salvation" (Vandermeer, 97). Women salvage men by allowing them to sin, providing an outlet for their corruption, thus an opportunity to be forgiven of that sin and ultimately, spiritually redeemed.

Though spiritual redemption is not the motive that sends Lancelot galloping off into the woods after Guinevere, her love as-

ures him of a spiritual as well as a sexual completeness by connecting him with the inborn intimacy of women and spirituality. In *The Knight of the Cart* women redeem men, and bring them a little closer to divine love through sexual adoration, assuring the essentialness of women in the road to spiritual fulfillment.

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## BISEXUALITY AND TRANSVESTITISM IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *TWELFTH NIGHT*

JULIE DRISCOLL '97

A contemporary reading of William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* suggests that the play is centered on bisexuality, as characters fall in love with one another, of both genders. This is demonstrated through dialogue, behavior and cross-dressing in the play, as would be seen in a late twentieth century scope. Shakespeare's portrayal of Viola implies a sense of sexual ambiguity, as she exhibits bisexual behavior throughout the play. The perceptions of Viola by other characters justify similar behavior, as views of her gender identity seem to define their own sexualities. It can be interpreted that Viola presents herself in either a "masculine" or "feminine" way based on her physical attributes, actions, and speeches in the piece, which influence the sexual behaviors of other characters. Thus, a theme of sexual ambiguity is exhibited among several key persons in the play.

The concept of bisexuality seems to be a fairly unexplored field today but is gaining much attention and acceptance. "In the splintered multiculturalism of the 1990s, an independent bisexual movement is starting its own identity" (Leland 47) and brings with it a new genre of literary criticism. Prior to such contemporary idealism, bisexuality was not looked upon very seriously; there existed a predominant heterosexual community and a liminalized homosexual community, struggling to gain its own identity among the masses. In the past, common perceptions of bisexuality have made many people feel uncomfortable, as the term suggests that sexual identity is not static, but subject to change, rendering sexual orientation in a state of ambiguity. However, such conceptions are rapidly changing and the acceptance of a bisexual community is becoming interwoven within societal perceptions of sexuality.

Similarly, transvestitism is becoming a more accepted phenomenon, if not one of popularity among some groups. Although many people do not accept cross-dressing as "normal" or favorable con-

duct, evidence of this behavior is growing within modern-day culture. Transvestitism has especially become popular among the gay community as a form of mocking, and even challenging, the social definition of gender. The most common form of cross-dressing is that of men flaunting women's garb. Women's dressing as men is not perceived as being so risqué as, over time, it has become common for women to wear garments similar to those which men have worn for centuries. Arguably, noticing a male in a dress would be much more shocking to many, than seeing a woman in long pants.

Conceptions of bisexuality and dressing in drag have changed drastically throughout the centuries. Homosexuality was seen as a pagan behavior in the Renaissance and human sexuality was viewed on different terms altogether. The terms "homosexuality" and "heterosexuality" did not even appear in the *Oxford English Dictionary* until 1933, and the idea of a "norm" for sexual behavior did not surface until the 1820s (Stallybrass 94). Prior to this time, homosexuality was seen as a perversion of sex and an adverse medical condition. During his time, "Shakespeare would not have recognized 'norm' or 'normal,' 'homosexual,' 'heterosexual,' or 'bisexual,' ... [even] 'sexual'" as common terms (96).

As awareness of these two issues has emerged in contemporary culture, application of such thinking towards interpreting *Twelfth Night* provides new perspectives, different from those which may have been embedded in Renaissance criticisms of literature. The only form of acceptable sexual relationships during Shakespeare's life were among opposite-sex couples; this attitude has changed over the centuries, as homosexual relationships have become integrated into some modern lifestyles. Similarly, transvestitism was seen as a device used to promote deceit in a humorous form, but today is seen as an acceptable practice among many. Though it is uncommon to see a female transvestite today

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Julie Driscoll

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or in the Renaissance, this was the role of Viola in *Twelfth Night*. The acceptance of such a practice has worked its way into society, proving to be another perspective one can apply toward interpretations of *Twelfth Night*. The way in which these devices affect the actions of characters is relevant in examining their intentions, deceptions, and sexual desires throughout the play.

Historically, bisexuality has been written out of literature, and possibly out of the Shakespeare canon. Instances of homosexuality may have been implied through verbalizations and actions of characters, yet such depictions were either mocked or hidden beneath larger themes in literary works; the presence of homosexual behavior between characters was never fully explicit. If issues of gender-bending were evident, they were depicted in a comedic manner. In *Twelfth Night* and other Shakespearean works, cross-dressing was used as a tool to display humor, making people appear as fools while being deceived by another's attire. However, serious themes never surfaced through behaviors which questioned the authenticity of gender.

In *Twelfth Night*, sexual ambiguity is an essential device used to convey a number of meanings and raise the reader's awareness to various issues which deal with characters' sexual orientations. Even the alternate title to this work, *What You Will*, suggests a possible second perception to the play's theme—this leaves the reader open to many interpretations, including those which closely examine gender identity. Shakespeare's portrayal of Viola seems to raise several questions with regard to sexual identity, as she displays similar feelings toward both men and women. Subsequently, other characters' perceptions of her gender pose questions to the validity of their own sexual interests. Does Viola devote her love solely to women, to men, or is she bisexual? Does Shakespeare answer this question, or even establish a "norm" for sexual behavior through the actions of the play's characters? It seems that Shakespeare toys with the idea of a stagnant definition for gender, specifically through his portrayal of Viola.

### VIOLA AS A BISEXUAL:

It is apparent, through Viola's dialogue with Duke Orsino, that she is attracted to him. At the same time, her words with Olivia suggest an attraction to women, as she goes beyond her call of duty in wooing Olivia for the Duke. Her duty to Orsino is to deliver his proclamation of love to Olivia, but Viola seems to voluntarily offer a number of additional compliments to Olivia, aside from her expected

duties. Her flourishing remarks and declaration of devotion to her imply a definite sexual attraction. However, she shares the same attitude toward Orsino, suggesting that she would be a better woman fit for him, as she has already devoted her service as an attendant. Viola displays the same tone of love toward both Orsino and Olivia and adorns each with varying compliments, exhibiting bisexual behavior.

Viola uses transvestitism to hide her desires to both Orsino and Olivia, unsure of how to display her true feelings. Torn between societal expectations of heterosexual behavior and her own private feelings, she is unclear as to how to express her sexual desires. While dressed as a man, Viola feels she cannot divulge her love to Orsino. When conversing with Olivia in disguise, she is able to speak as if she were a man, yet not confess her true feelings as a woman. "She never told her love, / But let concealment, like a worm i' th' bud, / Feed on her damask cheek," Viola said to Orsino (II.iv.109-11). This speech could be interpreted as Viola talking about herself and her hidden sexual impulses towards women. Because of social constraints, Viola is forced to suppress her sexual desires for her same sex, as such a behavior was seen to be pagan.

Other characters' perceptions of Viola can be questioned, with regard to whether they view her as being masculine or feminine:

Rarely, if ever, do we pause to wonder if an individual is 'really' a man or a woman; rather, perception is immediate and simple because, although we may not have direct knowledge of a person's genital sex, we 'know' what a man or a woman looks like.

(Woodhouse 7)

The immediacy with which each character perceives Viola to be a man or a woman is essential in the definition of each characters' own sexual identity, as well as that of Viola. She and Sebastian are fraternal twins with very little, if any, physical difference outside of their normal dress—as they are clothed alike, no character in the play is able to differentiate one sibling from the other. By looking at their faces and hearing their voices alone, it is debatable that either Viola facially and physically resembles a man like her brother, or Sebastian resembles a woman like his sister.

Perchance, both twins could be perceived as being masculine, which would explain certain sexual identities among the play's characters. Conversely, if both were perceived as being feminine, this would explain another slate of gender identity for each character. The perceptions of Viola's sexuality are themselves ambiguous, leav-

ing room to question her own sexual preference—is she heterosexual, lesbian or bisexual? As Viola displays love for both Orsino and Olivia, it appears that she is bisexual; the sexual orientation of each other person is dependent upon which view shall be accepted in the play.

VIOLA SEEN AS "FEMININE" BY OTHER CHARACTERS:

*Olivia:*

Viola's first meeting with Olivia is in disguise as Orsino's servant, Cesario, in which she attempts to proclaim her master's love for Olivia. The two women's perceptions of one another suggest a possible lesbian attraction among them. Olivia could be viewed as a lesbian, attracted to the feminine beauty of Viola; in turn, Viola's bisexual behavior would explain her returning compliments. However, Viola is unsure of whether Olivia is attracted to her physically, as a female, or to her attire, as a male. "Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness," proclaims Viola (II.ii.26), after receiving a gift from Olivia as a token of her love. "What I am, and what I would, are as secret as maidenhead: to your ears, divinity; to any other's profanation," says Viola to Olivia (I.v.204-6). She suggests that her love for another woman would be a form of ecstasy to someone of the same sex, such as Olivia, yet the idea would be considered sinful by any other person. Viola has come to visit Olivia merely to deliver Orsino's blessing of love; however, she begins careful observation of her. "Good madam, let me see your face," asks Viola (I.v.217). After Olivia lifts her veil, Viola begins to deliver a number of compliments. "'Tis beauty truly blent, whose red and white / Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on," she replies, poetically paying devotion to her looks (I.v.225-6). Viola is expressing her affection for Olivia, not that of Orsino—she has no knowledge of how he would react in such a situation. Meanwhile, Olivia insists that she cannot love Orsino, most likely because she is attracted to females. "I cannot love him," she says (I.v.243), "But yet I cannot love him" (I.v.248)—Viola seems to disown a heterosexual attraction towards Orsino and assume a lesbian persona.

Olivia falls in love with Viola, disguised as Cesario, due to her feminine appearance, and pursues her until the end of the play. Does this make Olivia a lesbian, or simply someone who is attracted to womanlike appearances? Olivia later meets with Sebastian and, unable to distinguish his appearance from Viola's, becomes wedded to him. As Olivia was in love with the feminine appearance of Viola, she personifies that quality in Sebastian; hence, Olivia and

Sebastian are married, as it is not socially acceptable for two women to become married. Essentially, Olivia has "the best of both worlds"—she is in love with the female looks of Viola which, as a twin, Sebastian has, and marries that quality with which she fell in love.

*Orsino:*

Orsino sees Viola as attractive as well, because of her fair complexion, though she is dressed as a male. He says to Viola, "Come hither, boy. If ever thou shalt love, / In the sweet pangs of it remember me; / For such as I am all true lovers are" (II.iv.14-16). While the bonds of friendship between males in the Renaissance were often very strong and difficult to distinguish from love, this is clearly an affectionate dialogue spoken by Orsino. He has only known Viola, as Cesario, for a short while, which would not have provided ample time to develop such a strong friendship as of yet. He says, "remember me" to Viola, and that he is "such as . . . all true lovers are," while speaking to her. This could easily be read as a flirtatious line, where Orsino has the intent of persuading her to be sexually interested in him.

When it is revealed at the end of the play that his servant is a woman, he immediately and openly falls in love with her. As he falls in love with her so quickly, it is apparent that he must have had feelings for her as the play built its momentum. However, as he would have had such feelings for her, he would have had them for the "male" Cesario during the play. Like Olivia, he noticed the feminine attributes of Viola's physique and fell in love with that aspect of her. As she was conceived to be a male throughout most of the play, he could not express that he had such feelings until it was revealed that she was really a male. The folly of his opinion shows that, no matter the true gender of Viola, he was still in love with the individual—it is this theme which recurs in each relationship which is formed in the play.

*Antonio:*

The strong relationship between Antonio and Sebastian can be substantiated by his perception of the other sibling. As Viola is seen as having a feminine appearance, despite her attire, her twin has the same physical features. Antonio could either be heterosexual and attracted to the feminine side of Sebastian or gay and attracted to his masculine attributes. This can be interpreted as the same type of affection that Orsino has for Viola, who would outwardly display his love were Sebastian not a male. "If you will not

murder me for my love, let me be your servant," he says (II.i.31-2). In making such a proclamation, he is expressing his sexual desires through the language of Renaissance male friendship. Again, the disguise of feminine characteristics through physically determined gender has persuaded Antonio not to act upon his feelings.

*Sebastian:*

Despite his feminine characteristics, Sebastian is still able to retain his Renaissance sexual integrity by falling in love with Olivia and ignoring any advances made by Antonio if he had, in fact, picked up on them. "If you will not undo what you have done, that is, kill him whom you have recovered, desire it not," he says in response to Antonio's remark (II.i.33-4). Perhaps Sebastian may feel the same way towards Antonio; however, he is negligent to acknowledge such feelings—he pursues only heterosexual desires towards Olivia.

VIOLA SEEN AS "MASCULINE" BY OTHER CHARACTERS:

*Olivia:*

As Viola introduces herself to Olivia as a male, she may have been perceived as having masculine characteristics—perhaps a face that resembled that of a young man as she intended, or maybe she had a physique which was not as fully curved as most women. These would give Viola physical resemblance to a male, fitting into a masculine description, in conjunction with her attire. If Olivia is in fact heterosexual, her attempt to win Viola's affection (disguised as a man) would have been an innocent pursuance opposite-sex love. Thus, dialogue between the two characters could be understood in a heterosexual context. As Olivia finds out that Viola is a female, she marries Sebastian; the physical attraction she had for Viola would follow her relationship to Sebastian, as the two were twins. It would also be socially acceptable for such a relationship to exist.

*Orsino:*

Orsino only knew Viola in the role of a man during most of the play, and he fell in love with this character. It is possible that he is homosexual, and fell in love with Viola as a man, but was persistent in concealing his feelings for fear of social ridicule. He says several things to Viola, which fail to equate women with men, stating that they are incapable of achieving the same degree of love as a male:

There is no woman's sides  
Can bide the beating of so strong a passion  
As love doth give my heart; no woman's heart

So big to hold so much; they lack retention.  
(II.iv.92-5)

Orsino states that women cannot love as men do, and therefore could not fulfill the needs of his heart. He also says, "Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm, more longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn, than women's are" (II.iv.32-4), which places women's love on a different plane than that of men.

Orsino is also a very narcissistic character, as these lines could also mean that women are not deserving of his love, nor that of all men. By demeaning women in such a way, it seems that Orsino does not have much of an interest in females, just in persons of his own gender. This would also justify his self-absorption, as only loving a male can make him sexually content. Since he could not express this love towards other males, he simply did it as a reflection of himself, setting his own name apart from any other.

*Antonio:*

If Viola is seen as masculine, then her twin brother would be viewed as being of the same manner. Antonio's strong emotions and words towards Sebastian may not only reflect the presence of Renaissance male friendship, but his own feelings of love. It appears that Sebastian is aware of these feelings, and could either be interested in Antonio or ignoring him altogether—it could conceivably be argued either way.

Antonio says to Sebastian, "Only myself stood out; / For which, if I be lapséd in this place, I shall pay dear" (III.iii.35-7). He seems to be saying that his sexuality has set him apart from everyone else in this new town. "Do not then walk too open," replies Sebastian (III.iii.38), telling Antonio to hide his sexual desires to the public. This appears to be what Shakespeare is doing with every character in the play. As many seem to have a degree of interest in at least one same-sex relationship, these feelings are pushed aside and the play ends by following the norm, establishing several heterosexual couples.

*Sebastian:*

Sebastian does not ridicule Antonio for his homosexual thoughts, nor does he tell him to keep too quiet, except for when in public. Perhaps he is also homosexual and has the same feelings for Antonio, yet is negligent to express those desires because of social pressures. Alternately, Sebastian may be viewed as a heterosexual, because of his interest in Olivia, as they marry before the



end of the play. Shakespeare could have intended Sebastian to also be bisexual, mirroring the actions of his twin sister. Perhaps he is in love with both Olivia and Antonio, yet suppresses his homosexual love and chooses to marry.

The sexuality of each character in *Twelfth Night* is called into question several times throughout the play. Depending upon how Viola is intended to be perceived, this reflects the sexual intentions of each character in the play. As can logically be interpreted, through the text, that each of the characters may have different types of sexual desires; depending on their perceptions of other characters, it becomes unclear as to how Shakespeare intended the work to be read. While Olivia can be seen as being lesbian but falling into the societal standards at the end of the play through marriage, it can also be justified that she was a heterosexual and her marriage to Sebastian simply reaffirmed that belief. Olivia can be seen as having sexual interest in both men and women, depending upon how her relationships are interpreted. Perhaps Shakespeare intended her character to be bisexual as well; perhaps he proposed each character as acting in a bisexual manner, or in a sexually ambiguous way. Either perspective considered, it is evident that Shakespeare carefully wrote the play to intentionally provide a variety of interpretations of sexuality to the reader.

Perhaps Shakespeare intended Viola to be a catalyst to the socially established gender ideals which were established during the Renaissance. Thus, she would be ideally portrayed as a bisexual, in opposition to a heterosexual society. It seems apparent that Shakespeare intended this play to be ambiguous about love and gender, and to leave the interpretation of this issue up to the reader. Due to drama censors during the Renaissance, who prohibited questionable topics from being openly addressed, the full intention of Shakespeare's text is difficult to extract. However, hailed as a ge-

nius of drama, Shakespeare's intentional inclusion of controversial themes, such as bisexuality, can be understood through double-meanings of text and actions of his characters.

It is interesting to note that *Twelfth Night* was a play written for all male actors, as most were during the Renaissance, as females were not heavily involved with the theater at the play's original time of production. Thus, we encounter instances of men dressing as women, who dressed like men. Gender roles are exploited, not only in terms of cross-dressing, but also in their sexual intentions. Orsino and Olivia both fall in love with Viola who, in turn, expresses similar feelings of affection for each of the two. The portrayal of people falling in love with one another, regardless of gender, opposes the societal norm of heterosexual relationships and appears to mock the conception that love is determined solely by gender. It seems that Shakespeare was ahead of his time, writing a play which explored the commonly accepted "love sees no gender" philosophy of today. Yet, he shies away from concluding the play under such pretenses, as homosexual relationships were viewed as pagan by Renaissance society.

As *Twelfth Night* most likely had to be written in the form of a comedy, seemingly poking fun at the issue of sexuality for the sake of the audience and censors, it is evident that the most important themes of this play examine the validity of how sexual identity is socially construed. Shakespeare seemed to have had no choice but to hide or mock the issue of sexuality, as was done with many other "racy" issues of the times. He shies away from the obscure and ends the play with everything following societal norms, with the pairing of strictly heterosexual couples. Through the portrayal of Viola in this play and her significance to the story, Shakespeare paints a picture of life in the Renaissance—one in which such controversial issues are often downplayed for the sake of pursuing the integrity of his work and the theater.

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## A JOURNEY WITH NO END

### AMY BLESSING '97

*I found myself  
baunted by an impression I myself would not  
understand. I kept thinking that the land smelled  
queer. It was the smell of blood, as though the soil was  
soaked in blood.*

—Carl Jung, upon arriving in Africa

*Every day has been a battle against bowling moral  
head winds, I had lived amidst stark good and evil,  
surrounded by mystery and magic. There was a  
witchdoctor in the servants' quarters, and Zionists  
danced around fires outside the window.*

—Rian Malan, on living in South Africa

Rian Malan is a white South African who wrote an unbelievably graphic, detailed book describing the injustices in his country and, more importantly, in his own heart. But for me Rian Malan is much more. He taught me to understand myself, to question my beliefs and open up to new ideas. In his book, *My Traitor's Heart*, he describes what it is like to be a traitor to his own people and how he decided what side to take in the struggle against racism, equality and capitalism. Malan showed me that it is all right to be born in one group, yet sympathize with another. But more importantly he made me understand that it is impossible for me to turn my back on who I am or how I was brought up. In response to foreigners questioning him about apartheid he says,

I would have told you that only I, of all my blind clan and tribe, had eyes to truly see, and what I saw appalled me. I would have passed myself off as a political exile, an enlightened sort who took black women into his bed and fled his country rather than carry a gun for the abominable doctrine of white supremacy. You would have probably believed me. I almost believed myself, you see, but in

truth I was always one of them. I am a white man born in Africa, and all else flows from there (Malan 29).

This statement made me think about myself, where I was born and who I am. I am unable to disregard the fact that I was born in the wealthiest country in the world, and even among my countrymen, I was born into the upper class. My private education, conservative parents and ingrained religious beliefs are something I will always have with me. My background shapes my morals, my beliefs and how I felt when I was in Africa.

I spent the spring semester of my junior year studying in South Africa. South Africa, the land of the racist white Afrikaner. The land of bloodshed, political strife and white supremacy. I thought I would be so different: the educated white American, coming to show all my South African friends the way it was supposed to be. I was going to show them of their evil, racist ways, judge them harshly and preach to them of a better political system. But just like Rian Malan, I was wrong. Instead I feared that perhaps I was racist after all. I began to love my own country and believe that perhaps America did not have any problems. I had no concept of South African blacks, I could not understand them, I became afraid of them. I thought my sympathy would be enough. Does sympathy make me liberal? Malan says, of his early days, "I was a sentimental little fellow who liked natives and thought it a pity that they were so poor and that so many whites were nasty to them" (Malan 51). This was how I felt. So how did I come to grips with my own fears, my own history and learn to deal with my cowardice? *My Traitor's Heart* helped me sort through these feelings. And as I lay back each night in Africa to read the pages of Malan's book I had to live with the reality of the horrors he wrote about. I woke up each morning in this strange land of hatred and murder. I was not in America, I was not safe from my fears.

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My first reaction to this book was that it was all right for me to be afraid. South Africa is anything but a safe country. When I first arrived, I was given countless lectures to watch my back, who to look out for and when to be afraid. Afraid? Who did they think they were talking to? But I soon learned of the violence that grows from fear. South Africans turned to violence because they could not understand one another, and they grew to fear each other. It was from this violence that my own fears arose. If the daily news reports were not enough to scare me, my friends had their own personal experiences to share. But Malan scared me the most. And who was I afraid of? This was a country where everybody hated everybody. Whites against blacks, blacks killing blacks and whites slaughtering each other. Malan was also confused.

One minute, you'd be harrowed with guilt and bleeding internally for your suffering black brethren, the next, you'd recoil in horror from the things they did, and from the savage latencies that seemed to lie buried in their hearts. You yawned between extremes. Sometimes you completed the round trip in fifteen minutes.

(Malan 88)

I could hear Malan speaking to me. I was unable to understand why blacks in South Africa killed each other. Stories of tribal wars raged on more than anything else. It made me mad at them. The next minute I would read about Steve Biko's brutal murder in prison and curse the white settlers for ever coming to Africa. And the next moment I myself would be afraid of the black people in Africa. This was the worst fear of all. After all my understanding of cultural differences and commonalities; after all my accepting parents had taught me; was I racist?

This question haunted me for my entire stay in Africa. I could not understand what happened. I grew up in Oregon where there are very few African-Americans. In all my twelve years of school there I went to school with three black people. I began to wonder if this sheltered white life had left me void of understanding in racial matters. Also, maybe I was susceptible to racist feelings. And the awful thing was that Malan's book was confusing me more. He had a file of what he termed "ordinary murders," giving me the impression that these were everyday events. They made me question cultural differences and shy away from blacks. These stories haunted me; they haunted me when I closed my eyes at night and confused me during the day. One story is about a young black boy's funeral:

The . . . father asked the [black gangs] to stay away, but they don't like being told what to do. so they throw the father into his son's grave and hit him with shovels . . . the old man eventually gives up and sits down on his dead sons coffin, cradling his bloody sons head in his hands. The [gang] buries him alive (Malan 331).

Why would blacks be fighting against one another when there is a much larger evil to overcome: the white government (this was before the abolishment of apartheid). Were they stupid? They should have understood the power in numbers they had. My cultural upbringing made me think they would understand this. But for them it was a fight against tribes as well. This was something I was unable to understand due to my background. In Africa I had classes with mostly black people. I walked into one of my classes on the first day and sat alone in the upper right corner. The three other white people in the class joined me. The blacks sat in tribes, in small groups, huddled together, talking among one another. And I was in the corner with my own tribe. I began to understand, it was not about skin color. It was about culture, language and history. Why did I group an entire country of people together because they are all black? I think of everyone living in my country as American. But I soon realized that in South Africa their country does not tie people together. Instead, they are bound by the history and cultures of their tribes. And what was even stranger was that I began to learn that whites hated one another as well. The English against the Afrikaners, it had always been that way. Where did I fit in? I was alone in this strange land of hatred. But I kept looking for the answers, I kept trying to find out if the fears in my own heart about being racist were true.

Cultural differences began to frighten me. I found the Afrikaners to be stubborn racists, yet most of my friends were of this tribe. My illusions of grand sermons on equality had left my mind. Soon I would have to preach them to myself. I was walking one day and a black man pulled along side me in a car. My heart raced, I looked around for safety. The man asked me where the university was, I gave him directions. He thanked me and the conversation was over. I felt silly for being afraid. A week later the same scenario occurred, yet this time the man was white. No pounding heart, I was not afraid. After I had given the man directions to the university, he began driving along side of me. He said crude, sexual things to me and exposed himself to me. I ran, and his car followed. I was afraid of a perfectly decent man because of his skin

color. I trusted a pervert because of his skin color. But I was in a country where nothing made sense. I hoped to plead insanity and continued my quest for answers to my own traitor's heart.

Then I decided perhaps it was all right for cultures to be different. Often I question things that are different. My family never taught me to question capitalism, class stratification or power structures in America. I was brought up to believe in the American dream, the great melting pot. But Africa brought me to a place where I could no longer melt. Black medicine men in Africa tell people with AIDS to have sex with a virgin and they will be cured; children and babies are raped for this reason. Malan tells his own stories of black African culture:

We're in a forest . . . watching an African father hack off his living daughter's arms. She says, 'Please father, let me go, I won't tell anyone,' but her father just keeps hacking. A political power struggle is underway...and he needs her body parts for battle medicine (Malan 331).

Malan does not pretend that these things are acceptable, but perhaps sees that they are the product of cultural upbringing. I tried to accept these vast and brutal differences. I tried to compromise my own western upbringing to accept these African traditions. But I could not get rid of my own morals. These stories scared and confused me. Science had always been truth to me. It is not humane to rape children and hack off their arms. This is where my prejudices stemmed from; I could not get over the vast differences in cultures. So I looked for answers, I looked for someone to blame. I continued to blame myself: was I unable to accept these other cultures merely because they were different from my own? But the oppressed people of South Africa are not saints, they have their own problems, inadequacies and cultural practices that may or may not be universally ethical. I decided not to brand myself a racist only because I did not agree with every cultural practice in our different worlds.

Soon I began to look at the whites inhabiting South Africa. I made generalizations about my white friends and the part they played in the racially stratified society. In South Africa it is hard not to base all assumptions on skin color because it is all anybody talks about. Malan says, "To hear me talk you'd imagine there was no more to life than being white or black" (Malan 69). And in South Africa this was true. I began to judge the Afrikaners harshly. This was the white tribe where the apartheid system had emerged. These are a people with a history of hatred and a history of fear. Hearing

my friends talk about blacks I became defensive and asked them what they had ever done to help. All the violence began to wear on me. My last week at school a huge racial uprising occurred on campus. I could not understand the screaming because it was in a foreign tongue, but when the hitting began I knew what was going on. Violence is universal. I heard hundreds of black and white boys hitting each other with cricket bats and hockey sticks. I called my white friends to pick me up and take me away from it all; I was afraid. I no longer knew who to fear. The Afrikaners had been killing blacks for so many years that I thought they could not have been humane, yet the blacks continued to kill one another. The only killing in South Africa I felt was justified was then a black man killed a white. What was wrong with me? Killing could never be justified. All the violence began to skew my grip on reality. I accepted the fact that there would always be violence in South Africa, and I chose, what I thought was the most just violence. My confusion had led me to become numb to violence. And Malan confused me more. He brought my fears home, he brought them to my own sacred land.

Malan ran away from his native land; South Africa had caused him to ask too many questions he could not answer. He grew tired of the blood, tired of black and white and most of all tired of the confusion in his own heart. He ran to America. He decided to try my own land for awhile. He stayed long enough to learn about our system. "Indeed, many things about America puzzled the socialist in me. The US was the world's most capitalist country, and yet there seemed to be no classes in it, and no class consciousness" (Malan 96). Statements like this made me question why I was listening to this crazy journalist at all. Just as I found his system disillusioning he felt the same about mine. Yet he may have been wrong. How could he say America was class free? Malan's lack of sense made me laugh. But I suppose after living in South Africa it would be possible to think America had no problems, which would mean having no classes. By the time I returned I truly thought, for a few brief moments, that I lived in the land of the free, the home of the brave and that the American dream was a reality. Another thought stemmed from my confused and tired brain: was I becoming a socialist myself? In my Sociology class I studied South Africa's future and we discussed the best political structure for the country. Here again I thought I would boast of my own great experiences and my own great country. But the closer I looked, the more I thought capitalism was a joke; the American dream was long dead and I had

not only to find a new route for South Africa, but I had to revamp my own "great" country. Malan became tiresome. He was breaking down all my walls, shattering all my beliefs.

While I was in Africa "I loved blacks, yet I was scared of them" (Malan 88). Although these are the words of another, I felt the same way. I loved aspects of black culture. It was beautiful, quiet, friendly. Yet, there were times when I was confused and scared of them as well. When I was in South Africa I loved and hated the white cultures as well. How could my friends believe what they did about apartheid? They never said they thought it was right, but they also never said it was wrong. How could I be friends with such people? I could no longer find my own moral ground. By befriending white South Africans, whose grandparents had constructed apartheid, was I abandoning my own belief system? I tried to explain to them and they tried to explain to me. I left Africa, still confused, happy to be going to a place where I could at least understand the problems on hand. How do you solve years of racial hatred and tension? I wanted to leave with an understanding of the future for the country. When I came I thought "dismantling apartheid was a question of allowing blacks to move to the front of the bus, use the drinking fountains, and sit alongside whites at lunch counters" (Malan 163). Rian Malan goes on to explain that the whole process is about power. Just as it is in my own country, I thought. How do I change it? Will I die in my own country with the same pathetic contradictions in my heart?

Just as Malan was always glad to leave Soweto (the largest township in South Africa), I was happy to come home. Both of our happiness stemmed from the fact that we left unharmed and moving further from the violence. I realize now that it was all right for me to be scared. It is not a safe country. *My Traitor's Heart* helped me to see that being afraid is not the problem. The problem is letting the skin color or the tribe of a person direct my fears. Instead I need to learn where the violence and hatred emerge and act accordingly. I want to share one more story from Malan's tales of ordinary murder. A savage white Afrikaner beat a black man within an inch of his life during a barbecue. A barbecue that was complete with family, friends and children. As the white man beat and kicked the black man, "the white children jumped up and down . . . they were happy" (Malan). This is learned behavior. All my fears and conflicts stemmed from my culture and what I had learned, not from myself alone. The barbecue went on as the black man lay

dying. "All these strong, suntanned white people standing around a fire, stuffing meat in their mouths...while a hog-tied black man squints at the sun through blood and moans for water in the background" (Malan 134). This is a perfect metaphor for society. As I reap the benefits of my education, wealth and opportunity, there are millions of others who feel hog-tied. For they have no where to go, they have no means of moving up in society. I continue to stuff myself with more and more benefits of my luck, turning my back on those who need my help.

Near the end of this book Malan says, "Are you sick and confused, my friend? I'll make you sick yet. I'll hold you down and pound these images into your brain" (Malan 331). Yes, I am sick and confused; I needed to drain the emotion out of my body. *My Traitor's Heart* brought out more emotion, confusion and understanding in me than anything else I have ever read. Combined with the fact that I was in the midst of South Africa, the experience left me drained and confused. How can I fix the uncertainties in myself and change the inequalities of my society? Furthermore, I have yet to fully understand what those inequalities are. Malan had yet to figure this out, and I am still on my way to a conclusion. The first step for me was to begin asking the right questions. I need to learn to go through life with understanding that I am from one cultural context and different people are just that, different. But difference is no longer a bad thing in my mind. I cannot begin to answer the questions of racism in America. For now people seem to be too caught up in what to call black Americans. I am no longer worried about these political terms for cultural groups. There are bigger problems at hand. Being in Africa when I read *My Traitor's Heart* forced me to realize the realities and truths of racism. I still battle in my own mind whether or not I can accept mutilating one's own child as a cultural difference. For now I am content to congratulate myself for not being racist. I was put into a situation in which I did not know how to react. Only through careful, almost painful, understanding will we all learn to accept one another. I hate to be a pessimist, but I can never see it happening. We have all been brought up too differently, we will find similarities in some cultures and vast differences in others. I cannot find an answer, even the questions are getting harder to ask. Malan prides himself on being the first white man to be truly South African. I thank him, for during his journey, he took me on my own.

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## DANGEROUS WOMEN

## HEATHER BAGGOTT '99

The master narrative is a broad term that can be used and applied in many contexts. It is a term that, in many ways, is relative to the exact situation in which one is placed. In one situation the term might refer to social protocol while in another situation it might refer to the dominant culture's oppression of the minority classes. Both Zora Neale Hurston in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Toni Morrison in *Sula*, however, use the master narrative in reference to authority. This authority is rooted in the accepted traditions, rules, expectations, and definitions which any society or culture attempts to levy against and upon which to judge its members. The authority of the master narrative can be most easily understood, as an often silent, yet unbelievably oppressive force that operates under the surface of common culture. It searches to define and, consequently, confine all members of the society in which it festers.

Given this understanding of the master narrative, it is not surprising to find that women, especially African-American women, have often fallen prey to the dictates of authority which rests within its control. The dominant authority of the master narrative desires to classify women as one thing or another. The master narrative thrives on being able to label women as black, white, mothers, whores, bitches, etc. Once such labels are placed upon women, the master narrative seeks actively to confine women to such predetermined roles. The biggest threat to the power of the authority is an authentically defined woman. In this way, the master narrative strives not to give women the ability to be more than one thing at a time. It does not want to overtly realize that women are human and, consequently, have the human capability of total and complete definition. If the authority of the master narrative admits that the true existence of a woman is as a completely actualized human being then its power crumbles—women become self-defined. Thus, the

key to feminine power rests in women's ability to become dangerously unpredictable through self-definition. The cry is then called for women to find an existence outside of the stereotypes that the master narrative actively assigns. Both Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Toni Morrison's *Sula* attempt to answer this cry. Although written nearly fifty years apart, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Sula* similarly trace the physical and spiritual journeys of two African-American women as they search for authentic existence outside the confines of the master narrative which attempts to impose definitions of race and gender upon them. The two struggles differ, however, as Janie, being more compassionate than Sula, has significantly more trouble in finding the power of her voice outside of the oppressive demands of authority. Yet, in the end, both Hurston and Morrison are successful in sculpting Janie and Sula into new models of womanhood.

Let us begin our analysis with the character of Janie. Throughout *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston makes it undeniably clear that Janie has no real concept of race or racial identity. Furthermore, it is clear that Janie scorns being identified and categorized by her race. She naturally has no concept of race. Instead, starting from her childhood, Janie knew that she was something other than her race. Hurston describes that Janie, although African-American, has many Caucasian features, thus indicating a mixture of the blood lines. As a result of her Caucasian features juxtaposed against her dark skin, Janie is exotically beautiful. As a child, however, Janie has no concept of her external identity either in relation to her beauty or race. She remarks after seeing a photograph of herself,

So when we looked at de picture and everybody got pointed out there wasn't nobody left except a real dark little girl with long hair standing by Eleanor. Dat's where

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Ah wuz s'posed to be, but Ah couldn't recognize dat dark chile as me. So Ah ast, 'where is me? Ah don't see me'.(9) Janie's self-image is based on factors which exists outside the definitions of her race.

Janie adds to our understanding that she does not attribute race to her identity when she explains that as a child her schoolmates called her Alphabet. Janie says, "Dey all useter call me Alphabet 'cause so many people had done named me different names" (9). Everyone had a different name for Janie, including herself. Thus, the question is raised as to why. What significance is it that Janie is literally called words and language? If we look at her name in terms of racial definition, we can understand that Janie was called language because she could not be called race. As her looks and, ultimately, her lifestyle do not conform to the authority invested in the master narrative of race, Janie is forced to find an existence outside of race. She eventually did so through her personal voice and language.

Janie continues to defy the definition that her race inherently places upon her throughout her adolescence and adulthood. She refuses to racially define herself as a child and she refuses to do so as an adult. In fact, Janie seems confused by the whole concept of racial definition. Janie is ignorant to the fact that most of her culture sought to find their identity in their race. Janie consistently lives with the notion that the separation of race and self is a natural behavior. Janie's mind set is most readily seen when she is simply unable to understand Mrs. Turner's stereotyping and generalization of whites and African-Americans. Mrs. Turner, like Janie, is dark skinned, but has many Caucasian features. Unlike Janie, however, Mrs. Turner externalizes her self-definition based on her interracial features. She desires most to be associated with, and accepted by, white culture. In doing so, Mrs. Turner finds it necessary to vividly pronounce and exalt the master narrative. Thus, she declares a belief in the authority of the master narrative as she adheres to its stereotypes of African-Americans. Mrs. Turner believes that agreeing with these stereotypes is the only way she can identify herself with white culture.

Mrs. Turner finds it necessary to speak to Janie about her views as she thinks that Janie will identify with her because of their similar racial appearances. Janie, however, has no concept of the myths which Mrs. Turner spins. Mrs. Turner bombards Janie with stereotypes commonly associated with African-Americans; she says,

And Dey makes me tired. Always laughin! Dey laughs

too much and Dey laughs too loud. Always singin' ol' nigger songs! Always cuttin' de monkey for white folks. If it wuzn't for so many black folk I wouldn't be no race problem. De white folk would take us in wid dem. De black ones is holdin' us back. (135)

Janie responds to Mrs. Turner's saying, "You reckon? 'Course Ah ain't never though about it too much" (135). Janie's reaction to Mrs. Turner's shocking and degrading words is bizarre. She acts as though she has never heard such stereotypes of African-Americans. She seems confused and mystified by Mrs. Turner's vendetta against African-American culture. As the narrator says, "Janie was dumb and bewildered before and she clucked sympathetically and wished she knew what to say. It was obvious that Mrs. Turner took black folk as a personal affront to herself" (136). Janie is so taken back by Mrs. Turner that she does not even know what to say to her. Even more bizarre than Janie's ignorance, however, is the fact that she does not become personally offended. Mrs. Turner insults Janie's identity as an African-American and Janie simply allows her to speak without any resistance.

The question then becomes why. Would not most people, if placed in Janie's situation, become offended? Naturally, most people would have been offended, but Janie is somehow different. People who externally identify themselves on the basis of their race would have been offended by Mrs. Turner's remarks because the remarks are personal affronts to their identity and culture. But Janie does not become outraged because race is not her identity. Her sense of self rests separate from her race, making her race objectified. Janie, unlike Mrs. Turner, does not take personal offense to black stereotypes. She does not desire to define herself as black or white. Instead, her identity comes naturally from another source. This source rests in the power of her voice. Mrs. Turner, conversely, conceptualizes herself in terms of black and white. She wants to define herself as a white woman. Thus, Mrs. Turner's agitation with the black population is caused because she still physically resembles a black identity and she is constantly surrounded by black culture. She ultimately desires to leave this culture and assimilate into white culture. As the narrator says, "It was distressing to emerge from her inner temple and find these black desecrators howling with laughter before the door" (139). Janie's existence is more authentic than Mrs. Turner's. Although Janie does not consciously understand it, her resistance to her racial identity allows her to escape the rule of the master narrative. Unknowingly, this attitude allows

Janie to escape the same fate of Mrs. Turner.

Whereas Janie seems to innocently and naively live her life outside of the boundaries of race, Sula seems to challenge these boundaries in a more deliberate fashion. Thus, for Sula, the effort to defy the master narrative of race is a less innocent and more offensive attack. Nevertheless, Sula, like Janie, is successful in ultimately finding an existence outside of her race. Sula specifically challenges the limits placed upon her through attaining a college education and achieving sexual power over men.

Earning a college degree allows Sula to confront the limits which the master narrative places upon her. Education takes Sula out of the world of ignorance and, consequently, gives her the ability to make her own decisions and censor information. Unlike other uneducated women, Sula no longer has to blindly follow the so-called knowledge of authority. In order to obtain her education, however, she has to live completely outside of the master narrative. Thus, she could not allow herself to be like Nel who adheres to the master narrative in both race and gender. Sula does not allow herself to settle for Nel's usual life as the stereotypical African-American woman that Nel represents. Sula does not want to have a husband, kids and a household. She, as well, refuses to live by Eva's rule. Eva desires Sula to live according to her race and gender as she says, "When you gone to get married? You need to have some babies. It'll settle you" (92). Sula explains that she does not want to live for anyone else. She wants to spend her life searching for herself outside of everyone's expectations. She says, "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself" (92). Through going to college, Sula is able to begin the process of defining herself according to her own rules and not the rules of authority. Says the narrator in regards to Sula's and Nel's position in life,

Each had discovered that they were neither white nor male, and that all the freedom and triumph was forbidden to them, they had set about creating something else to be. (52)

Sula's way of creating something is through getting a college education. That is her way of showing that freedom and triumph are actually not forbidden to her as an African-American woman.

Sula again proves through her sexual power that she can live with unadulterated freedom outside of the bonds of her race. Morrison is clear and precise in explaining that Sula has minimal sexual morals. Sula simply sleeps with men, both African-American and white, wherever she pleases. It is of little consequence who

the man is or her feeling for the man. Sula operates in the economy of sex. She receives a thrill not only from the pleasure of the act, but more importantly from the power and freedom she gains from it. She derives strength from the ability to use men and then simply discard them. She likes stripping away their sense of domination and the controversy this creates in the town. As the narrator says, Sula was trying them out and discarding them without any excuse the men could swallow. So the women, to justify their own judgment, cherished their men more, soothed their pride and vanity Sula had bruised. (115)

Sula reverses the game of sex as she becomes the dominant power and her male lovers become weak and submissive.

Sula specifically challenges her freedom as an African-American, however, when she chooses to sleep with white men. This is the ultimate testimony to Sula's search for existence outside the definition of her race. Interracial relationships, in Sula's culture, were a social taboo. The master narrative expected African-Americans to stay within their own race as whites were expected to do the same. The ultimate ruin of an African-American woman's reputation was to engage in sexual relations with a white man. Such a relationship would permanently label a woman. Says the narrator, But it was the men who gave her [Sula] the final label, who fingerprinted her for all time. They were the ones who said she was guilty of the unforgivable thing-the thing for which there was no understanding, no excuse, no compassion. They said that Sula slept with white men. (112)

In Sula's community, women who slept with white men were seen as a direct offense to African-American culture. Sleeping with white men was so offensive that the culture immediately wanted to accuse the white men of rape. It was almost unfathomable to think that an African-American woman would chose to sleep with a white man. As the narrator says, "They insisted that all unions between white men and black women be rape; for a black woman to be willing was literally unthinkable" (113). Thus, Sula's decision to sleep with white men was seen as a racial statement. In effect, Sula's society believed that she was making a statement that African-American men were not good enough for her. It was perceived as a sign that Sula did not appreciate or feel pride in her African-American heritage.

Thus, the question becomes why did Sula sleep with white men? Was she really attempting to shun her own culture? Did she

do it for the simple shock value? The actual answer connects back to Sula's definition of herself outside of the walls of race. Through her sexual behavior it is clear that Sula only views herself as a human being. She does not associate a color to her humanness. Thus, being plainly human, why not sleep with whomever she chooses whether that person is white or black? Sula does not listen to the decree of authority and the master narrative which artificially claims that blacks and whites should remain sexually separate. Sula lives and defines herself outside this power structure and consequently she disrupts and challenges it. The citizens of the town only become so outraged by Sula's behavior because it threatens all of their measures of normalcy and predictability. In this way, Sula revels in a freedom which is lost to all those who follow the master narrative and define themselves according to their race.

Janie and Sula also search for authentic existence outside of the master narrative in terms of gender. Both women struggle to define themselves as something other than merely female. Their struggles are marked and tracked against those women who follow a more traditional model of womanhood. That is, Janie searches for definition, as a woman, in contrast to the definition imposed on her by her grandmother. While Sula searches for definition away from the traditional feminine model as displayed by Nel. Their struggles differ, however, as Janie experiences significantly more trouble asserting herself and sounding her voice because she has more ties and compassion to the traditional model of womanhood than Sula.

Let us first discuss Janie and her journey away from the standards to which her grandmother attempts to make her conform. Janie's grandmother, being a former slave, desires Janie to fulfill the dreams and goals which slavery denied her. She remarks, "Ah wanted to preach a great sermon about colored women sittin' on high, but they wasn't no pulpit for me" (15). As a consequence of this mentality, her grandmother imposes upon Janie all of her values and standards of African-American womanhood. She wants Janie to marry a rich man-regardless of the love interest-have children, and simply live in the existing power structure of gender. As a former slave, Janie's grandmother resigns herself to the status quo of the master narrative and basically wants Janie to live according to the same narrative. She says,

So you don't want to marry off decent like, do yuh?...Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. So de white man throw

down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see. Ah been prayin' fuh it tuh be different wid you. Lawd, Lawd, Lawd. (14)

It seems as though Janie's grandmother is pushing her fate on to Janie thus not allowing her to fulfill her grandmother's dreams. But, in actuality, her grandmother does think that she is allowing and promoting Janie to live a life different and better than her own. Janie's grandmother believes that if Janie would only marry a wealthy and upstanding man that she could then prove to society that she is a refined African-American woman. Her grandmother also seems to buy into the notion that Janie can only find her pulpit and preach her sermon as a middle-class African-American woman.

Janie does not believe in her grandmother's theories about womanhood or marriage. She wants to find physical and emotional love with a man. Janie silently obeys her grandmother's narrative. After all, Janie loves her. Seeing that her grandmother is old and that she has lived through so much heartbreak and sorrow, Janie simply did not have the heart to violently evade her wishes. Later in her lifetime, Janie comes to realize that she hated her grandmother for the rules of behavior which she strongly urged her to follow. Janie realizes that she lived her life according to her grandmother's authority and not her own. It was a struggle for Janie to find her personal voice because her grandmother's voice always interfered. The narrator remarks, "She hated her grandmother and had hidden it from her all these years under a cloak of pity. She hated the old woman who had twisted her so in the name of love" (85). Regardless of her hidden feelings, however, Janie ultimately complies with her grandmother's will and unhappily marries both Logan and Joe.

Thus, it was obviously difficult for Janie to actualize her own voice against the voice of authority represented through her grandmother. In fact, throughout much of Hurston's novel, the reader is attuned to Janie's struggle to speak-out and defend herself as a woman. In part, the novel actually illustrates the series of "silent rebellions" which Janie must overcome in order to find an existence outside of the definition of her gender. These "silent rebellions" are most clearly seen in Janie's relationships with her husband, Joe. Joe expects Janie to simply be his wife and to perform all the duties of a good wife. Thus, he expects Janie to cook, clean, wash clothes, run errands, and entertain. Joe places upon Janie all

the definitions of womanhood, and unfortunately, for the better part of their marriage, Janie conforms to the definition.

Eventually, however, as she does with her grandmother, Janie does lament the loss of her voice and the sense of helplessness she feels as Joe's wife. After one of Joe's commands Janie remarks, "People ought to have regard for helpless things. But Ah hates disagreement and confusion, so Ah better not talk. It makes it hard tuh hit along" (54). Although she consciously wants to exert her voice, Janie cannot find the courage and consequently she still resigns herself to Joe's views and opinions. She agrees to Joe's will with her body, but not with her mind. Thus Janie does not express or share with Joe her true feelings and emotions. Instead, she locks them up inside and allows Joe to impose his narrative upon her. She lets Joe define and categorize her as only a woman. The narrator remarks on Janie's feelings saying,

She [Janie] found that she had a host of thoughts she had never expressed to him, and numerous emotions she had never let Jody know about. Things packed up and put away in parts of her heart where he could never find them. She was saving up feelings for some man she had never seen. (68)

Janie did, however, ultimately find that man with whom she could share her voice and thus begin her life outside of the definitions of her womanhood.

Even before she meets Tea Cake, Janie actively undertakes and successfully wins the battle to find an existence outside of her gender. She begins this battle with Joe upon finding the courage to share her voice with him and threaten his manhood and power. Janie first usurps Joe's command over her when she interrupts him as he is stereotyping women with his friends. Janie interrupts saying,

He [God] told me how surprised He was 'bout y'all turning out so smart after Him makin' yuh different; and how surprised y'all is goin' tuh be if you ever find out you don't know half as much 'bout us as you think you do. It's so easy to make yo'self out God Almighty when you ain't got nothin' tuh strain against but women and chickens. (71)

Janie further succeeds in striking back against Joe through emasculation when she remarks on his age and declining sexual prowess. She says to him, "Humph! Talkin' 'bout me lookin' old! When you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de change uh life" (75). Thus, through these examples, it is clear that Janie does eventually es-

cape the definitions and boundaries of her gender as she asserts her voice loud and clear against Joe and metaphorically against her grandmother and the master narrative. She takes the first step towards living authentically.

Janie completes the struggle to find authentic existence as she enters into a relationship with Tea Cake. With Tea Cake, Janie finally experiences life as she desires. She is, at last, able to break free of the chains which her grandmother placed on her. As she says, "Ah done lived Grandma's way, now Ah means tuh live mine" (108). Janie lives with Tea Cake according to her own rules and without regard to the opinions of society and authority. For the first time in her life, Janie lives outside of the boundaries of the master narrative in both race and gender. She is able to live with such freedom with Tea Cake because he allows Janie to experience life as a natural and impulsive product of nature. He gives Janie the one thing she wants out of life, love. Tea Cake lets Janie love him and in return he loves her. Janie is able to become a sexual being. Through Tea Cake, Janie blooms like a pear tree just as she fantasized about in her youth. Janie's dream becomes the truth as she lives the narrator's wisdom, "Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is truth" (1). With Tea Cake, Janie remembers and lives everything she never wanted to forget. Tea Cake teaches Janie the "maiden language" again. He teaches Janie the language of love, desire, and happiness which her grandmother stripped away by clouding Janie's existence with the dictates of the master narrative. At last, Janie is able to call herself a woman according to her own definition and not someone else's.

Sula, however, differs from Janie as she exhibits no inhibitions or qualms about asserting her will and voice upon those around her. Instead, it seems as though Sula's defiance of the narrative comes more naturally to her character. Sula, like Janie, has to face the same demands of society which believed that she should adhere to the traditional principals of African-American womanhood. Eva represents these societal beliefs as she pleads with Sula to settle down with a husband and raise children, but Sula flatly refuses to listen. She plainly tells Eva to "shut her mouth." Unlike Janie, Sula only looks out for herself and her own happiness. She never allows anyone else's voice to be heard above her own. Sula simply does not have the same compassion to appease those around her and, consequently, it is easier for her to live by her own definitions than it is for Janie.

It was also easier for Sula to live according to a new model of feminine existence because she could always concretely measure her life against Nel's. Nel provides Sula with an example of what she did not want her life to become. In this way, Nel provides the catalyst by which Sula's life takes its shape and course. Growing up together as best of friends, Nel and Sula could have turned out identically as adults; the same options were open to both of them. They could have both explored the world, gone to college, and lived a carefree life. Nel and Sula, however, take different paths in life—Nel stays in Ohio and raises a family while Sula went off to see the world. Their lives became diametrically opposed. As a consequence of their different lifestyles, Sula uses Nel's life as a clear and defined example of what she did not want to be. As Janie's grandmother represents authority for Janie, Nel represents authority for Sula. Sula does not aspire to be the good wife and polite woman that Nel is. Thus, Sula is overtly offensive to her family and friends. Sula does not want to put anyone's demands or opinions above her own as Nel is forced to do as a wife and mother. Thus, Sula lives to prove that the qualities women can be more than the ideals embodied by Nel.

Sula lives so vehemently against Nel's lifestyle because Nel personally saddens her. As children, Sula felt that Nel was the only person who believed in her and had no expectations of her. As children, Sula and Nel existed free, unconstrained and undefined. Thus, when Nel chooses to live with the backing of authority as an adult, Sula sees this as a waste of a life. Sula explains this, saying,

Now Nel was one of them. One of the spiders whose only thought was the next rung of the web, who dangled in dark and dry places suspended by their own spittle, more terrified of the free fall than the snake's own breath below. Their eyes so intent on the wayward stranger who trips into their net. Now Nel belonged to the town and all of its ways. She had given herself over to them, and the flick of their tongues would drive her back into her little dry corner where she would cling to her spittle high above the breath of the snake and the fall. (120)

Sula becomes a rebel to show the world that, while Nel might have sold out to authority, she refuses. Sula wants to show the town that she is first and foremost an individual human being. Not an African-American or a woman, but simply a human being. As a human, she has the option to satisfy her earthly desires above those of anyone else. Using this logic, Sula explains to Nel why she slept with

her husband saying, "There was this space in front of me, behind me, in my head. Some space. And Jude filled it up. That's all. He just filled up the space" (144). Nel's feelings did not enter into Sula's consciousness as she slept with her husband. She was only concerned with exercising her power of choice as a human being. The rules of womanhood and friendship did not exist.

But did Sula ultimately gain anything from her selfishness which gave her the autonomy to define herself outside of her gender and race? Like Nel, did her dream become her truth? As Sula understands it, she does fulfill a dream. Sula lived with energy, enthusiasm and authenticity. Unlike Nel, who is afraid to take the fall and experience life fully alive, Sula lives completely. She exists completely on her own beyond the periphery of the master narrative. Like Janie, who became her dream as she actualized into a sexual and vocal being, Sula became the dream when she dies. Sula dies having lived every moment of her life with passion and fervor. She says before she dies, "Me, I'm going down like a one of those redwoods. I sure did live in this world" (143). Sula also lives her dream, she leaves a legacy behind after she dies. She leaves all the woman of the world an alternative example of how to live their lives with freedom. Sula thinks that her philosophies on life will be understood as a new generation learns and follows her lore and legacy. She believes that people will love her once they let go of the authority which limits their existence. Sula says,

Oh they'll love me all right. It will take time, but they'll love me. After all the old women have lain with the teenagers; when all the young girls have slept with their old drunken uncles; after all the black men fuck the white ones; when all the black women kiss the black one...then there'll be little love left over for me. (145)

Once society is filled with people who exist simply to live and to satisfy their desires, no matter how perverse those desires might be, then everyone will come to understand Sula and the path she took in her life. Then, finally, Sula's dream will become truth.

Clearly, both Hurston and Morrison are successful in presenting Janie and Sula as characters who actively defy the limits of race and gender that are placed upon them by the master narrative. In so doing, Hurston and Morrison present a new model of feminine existence. Janie and Sula are examples of new women; their existences lie out-of-reach from authoritative definition. The true soul and essence of their beings cannot be summarized by their blackness or their femininity. They exist authentically within. They are

not just women nor are they just African-Americans. Instead, they are mothers, daughters, wives, students, lovers, and spirits because Janie and Sula are in control they cannot be labeled, stereotyped or predicted. In this way, Janie and Sula usurp the base power of the master narrative and live dangerously free as new women outside of its grasp.

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## BERNARD'S CUBIST "SELF" IN *THE WAVES*

RACHEL BOLTON '99

In many ways, Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* resists definition as a novel, disregarding as it does all the formal conventions one expects from a novel, including such usually indispensable components as narration, dialogue, and plot in their traditional senses. Instead, the vague storyline of six people progressing from childhood through middle age and beyond is presented to the reader only via those characters' individual thoughts, full of personal symbols and peculiarities and complexities which create a style very different from traditional narration and replace the traditional unifying conventions with a web of subtle meaning connecting the characters' thoughts and experiences.

This choice on Woolf's part makes the book a modernist work, incorporating the ambiguity and departure from tradition which, among other things, characterize modern art. By eliminating a conventional narrative voice and placing the job of narration in the hands, or rather the minds, of her characters Bernard, Susan, Neville, Jinny, Rhoda, and Louis; Woolf links the emotional and the descriptive in a way which surpasses even the attempts of the post-impressionists and expressionists in this area. Unlike Stephen Crane, to use a literary example of an expressionist, whose impersonal narrator in *The Open Boat*, albeit rooted in the correspondent's views, is still no more inside the boat than the reader and thus free to impose his own judgments of emotion upon the characters, Woolf works from within her characters' own minds, setting down on paper only what they themselves choose to report. This includes the thoughts and images which an outside narrator might easily weed out as too cryptic and non-plot-oriented for a traditional novel. Woolf, in other words, goes a step beyond Crane and eliminates the middleman between the characters' emotions and the reader's experience of them.

To make an artistic comparison, she rejects the way Gauguin

arbitrarily chose red for the field in "The Vision After the Sermon" or Matisse chose to interpret his portrait of a woman as green-striped, and instead moves toward the way in which Franz Marc's paintings such as "Yellow Cow", "Does in the Forest II", or "The Fate of Animals" tried to express the animals' own experience of their world. Marc succeeds in making the viewer of his paintings feel he or she is understanding the cow's own joy, the does' connection to nature, and the horror of all animals in these canvases, respectively, rather than Marc's own judgments about his subject matter. Woolf's modernist narrative structure achieves the same thing by eliminating extraneous impersonal narration and judgment and thus allowing the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of its characters to resonate more fully.

A prime example of increased opportunities for meaning due to Woolf's chosen structure centers around Bernard and his function in the novel in terms of modernism. When he "sum[s] up . . . the meaning of [his] life" (Woolf 238) in the novel's final section, his reflections seem to indicate a notion of self which reminds one of a cubist painting, a notion reinforced by the fragmented narrative structure of the novel as a whole. Moreover, his final rejection of his lifelong phrase-making is reinforced by the sudden use of nearly normal narration in the final summing-up section. In essence, the narrative structure of *The Waves* parallels not only Bernard's developing cubist sense of self, but also his quest for a sense of where he fits in the larger scheme of things throughout his life, and for the true story in which to use his saved-up phrases, simultaneously creating opportunities for enhanced meaning and requiring the reader to contribute his or her own powers of interpretation, in accordance with the true modernist vision.

Throughout *The Waves* and throughout his life, Bernard searches for a sense of connection and order in the world, as well

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as for a sense of his own place within that order, something he attempts largely by making phrases. "I must open the little trap-door," he says, "and let out those linked phrases in which I run together whatever happens so that instead of incoherence there is perceived a wandering thread, lightly joining one thing to another" (49). He also searches for a sense of self, something which, from his perspective, has much to do with his process of phrase-making. He begins to describe it as follows:

I only come into existence when the plumber, or the horse-dealers, or whoever it may be, says something which sets me alight. Then how lovely the smoke of my phrase is, rising and falling. . . upon red lobsters and yellow fruit, wreathing them into one beauty. . . Thus my character is in part made of the stimulus which other people provide, and is not mine. (133)

By the end of the novel, when he describes his life to an old school fellow in the section which breaks from the fragmented thought-narration and employs the closest thing to traditional narration which the reader ever gets from any of the characters, Bernard has further developed this idea of others shaping one's character, or indeed one's whole self, to the point where he says,

what I call 'my life', it is not one life that I look back upon; I am not one person; I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am- Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda, or Louis; or how to distinguish my life from theirs. (276)

He is aware that it takes all six together to come closest to a real "self", as evident when he remembers their last dinner-meeting together and says, "We saw for a moment laid out amongst us the body of a human being whom we have failed to be, but, at the same time, cannot forget" (277).

Thus Bernard's real "self" is shaped by the other five characters, and thus those six people's "selves" combine to create a real "whole"; not only a whole human being, but a whole collective understanding of the outside world, the perfect example occurring in Bernard's two descriptions of the flower on the table at Percival's farewell dinner. While that scene is in progress, after Percival arrives at the dinner, he says,

There is a red carnation in that vase. A single flower as we sat here waiting, but now a seven-sided flower, many-petalled, red, puce, purple-shaded, stiff with silver-tinted leaves- a whole flower to which every eye brings its own contribution. (127)

Much later in the novel, when reflecting back on that scene while spending an evening with his five friends, he says, "The flower, the red carnation that stood in the vase on the table when we dined together with Percival is become a six-sided flower; made of six lives" (229). Here Bernard expands his conception of the self to apply to the rest of the world as well; it becomes apparent that, from his point of view, a true understanding of the "many-faceted flower" (229) requires all those present to contribute their perspectives, just as the self does.

Also apparent from these descriptions is a great deal of cubism, a form of modernism which began to ask, as it developed at the hands of Picasso and Braque, "Why should one be constricted to a single viewpoint in painting a figure? Why not try to make the canvas a synthesis of different views?" (Bowness 109). Picasso "broke away from what he could see and painted instead what he knew must exist. Thus emerged the simultaneous vision of the cubists" (110), a technique visible in such paintings as "Girl Before a Mirror," where the viewer can see the girl's face both in profile and from the front at the same moment. Cubism is also characterized by the fragmentation of objects into their geometrical components, as visible for instance in "Three Musicians," which, though oil on canvas, appears almost like angular paper shapes cut and pasted on a background to vaguely suggest three people.

These characteristics are clearly present in Bernard's flowers. The red carnation, as he describes it, does not create a picture of a typical realistic carnation in the reader's mind, but rather a collection of fragmented geometric shapes and colors overlapping to form an object which can be seen from all directions at once. The six (or seven) characters understand this object as the carnation's real nature rather than its real appearance, a phenomenon entirely in synch with the main ideas of cubist painting. Thus by association we see the cubism present not only in the flower description but also in Bernard's whole conception of his "self," since the many fragmented thoughts, perspectives, and descriptions he sees overlapping to create him form a whole which no more conforms to traditional ideas of what makes something "realistic" than the carnation does, or than Picasso's angular "Demoiselles d'Avignon" do.

On a larger scale, the entire narrative structure of *The Waves* can also be described in the same terms as Bernard's "self": many fragmented thoughts, perspectives, and descriptions overlapping to create a whole. The fragmentation of the novel into sections, paragraphs, and sentences describing everything from six perspec-



tives at once echoes everything going on with the cubist carnation. Just as the carnation is complete when all of the views of the people observing it are taken into account, Woolf's storyline is most fully realized when the perspectives of all its characters are combined. In the absence of formal narration, all six perspectives are necessary to describe the situations in the novel most completely, giving the reader a multifaceted, multiperspectival, and therefore more thoroughly "realistic" idea of everything occurring. The whole book, then, can be said to exhibit a sort of cubism which reinforces the validity of Bernard's conception of his "self."

The reader is left to decipher why this parallel occurs, as well as the even more significant coincidence of Bernard's rejection of his "phrases" with his, and the book's, sudden departure from cubist structure in the final section of the novel. The following is one possible interpretation.

If the reader looks at Bernard not as merely a participant in the cubist narrative structure of *The Waves*, but rather as its protagonist, and keeps in mind his self-proclaimed role as phrase-maker and storyteller, it seems not entirely improbable that the whole novel is really just Bernard telling his life story within the context of his five best friends' life stories, using their voices as well as his own to present the reader with the most complete and "real" picture possible, as discussed in relation to cubism. This would help explain how he is able to list some of his friends' personal symbols at the novel's end ("the growl of the boot-boy making love to the tweeny among the gooseberry bushes; the clothes blown out hard on the line; the dead man in the gutter; the apple tree, stark in the moonlight . . ." [Woolf 241]), not to mention account for the overall uniformity in the language and style of the characters' thoughts throughout the book.

More importantly, this ties into the shift from cubist to traditional narration. If the cubist structure of *The Waves* is viewed as the product of Bernard's phrase-making, which is inextricably connected with his "self", then the rejection of the fragmented narration in favor of a narrative style more typical of the non-experimental, non-modernist novel suddenly makes much more sense, as it thus becomes related to Bernard's process of reevaluating his life-long phrase-making and the conception of "self" which those phrases help to produce, rather than to any arbitrary and confusing choice on Virginia Woolf's part.

Bernard spends his life, as previously mentioned, trying to create order through fragmenting the events of his life into "phrases

that come down beautifully with all their feet on the ground" (238), phrases "to be used when [he] ha[s] found the one true story, the one story to which all these phrases refer" (187). By the time middle age arrives, he begins to question the validity of this lifelong defining pursuit, saying, "I have never yet found that story. And I begin to ask, Are there stories?" (187). Finally he rejects the phrase-making altogether, significantly enough right at the beginning of the traditional-narration section, which marks the "rejection" of cubist narration. He tells his school fellow, "to give you my life I must tell you a story- and there are so many, and so many- stories of childhood, stories of school, love, marriage, death, and so on; and none of them are true" (238). Keeping with the idea of Bernard fragmenting himself into his friends and telling stories throughout *The Waves*, this comment implies that the entire novel is "untrue."

From this the reader can piece together an explanation of Bernard's dilemma. It appears that the root of his troubles lies in the inherent fragmentation which permeates his "self," his phrases, and the narrative structure of the novel as a whole. His attempts to strip things down and use them to order his life and the world ultimately fail him, because the universe is too vastly beyond his control to submit to the phrases and to the attempts to create order. Instead it moves on unaffected by him in any way, and once he recognizes this fact, nothing remains but to let go of the ineffectual phrases and submit to the chaotic forces at work around him. "And time," he says, as an epiphany of sorts hits him when he is middle-aged, ". . . lets fall its drop . . . Time falls . . . These are the true cycles, these are the true events" (184).

Thus, Bernard's phrases fall apart, his conception of his "self" falls apart, and he feels himself finally "without illusion" (285) and therefore unable to stay in the world any longer. Once he lets go of his cubist ideas and "converts", as it were, to the traditional narration occurring throughout the novel, whenever greater forces such as sun and sea are being described, then there is nothing left except to die; and "The waves [break] on the shore" (297), a sort of cosmic affirmation that Bernard could not have done otherwise but to submit to the greater forces around him.

The reader must ask, Does this mean Virginia Woolf herself is rejecting cubism as a literary technique? For my own part I would have to say no. After all, she is not the one narrating- Bernard is. Thus the "rejection" of cubism along with the phrases come from his mind, not hers. From Woolf's own perspective as the author of this extremely unique novel, I would think the cubist techniques

employed in its writing could only appear successful, since they force the reader to delve deeply into Bernard's situation, as well as those of all the characters, and to construct his or her own personal understanding of exactly what is occurring and what meaning comes with it. Thus the use of cubism within *The Waves* on Woolf's part adds that additional dimension that modernists strive for, creating a framework which the reader can- and must- manipulate to extract

a greater and deeper degree of meaning than would be possible from a wholly traditional novel. Woolf's cubist structure and description reinforce the ideas Bernard develops, helping lead the reader to an appreciation of the novel's themes while still giving him or her the satisfaction of creating the ultimate meaning for him- or herself in a way surpassing all previous incarnations of modernism.

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## UNITY THROUGH DIFFERENCE: SOCIAL DEFINITION AND McNALLY'S *LOVE! VALOUR! COMPASSION!*

ANDREW MURPHY '98

Terrence McNally, in his 1995 play *Love! Valour! Compassion!*, presents an investigation of what it means to be homosexual in contemporary American society. Difference and unity, imaginatively interwoven, create a vivid portrait, not of gay identity, but of human interaction. McNally attacks stereotypes by presenting contrasting characters who depict homosexuals as no more than a group of individuals. At the same time, he illustrates the strong family and community connections that develop as a result of outside oppression.

Difference is prevalent in McNally's play from the very first page. Though the eight characters do share their gayness as a unifying characteristic, they are anything but similar. The opening scene introduces this idea by dealing with how individuals' views of objects differ. Gregory, a forty-something dancer, urges us to "appreciate detail" (10), as in his old farmhouse and collection of antiques. When a fellow choreographer gives Gregory a sled, he says, "It's flat here . . . No hills . . . What am I going to do with a sled?" (10), to which the man replies, "It's not a sled, Gregory . . . It's an antique" (10). John, on the other hand feels "it's not an antique," but "a piece of junk" (10). This exchange, though subtle, is not unimportant. It establishes, early in the play, the idea that there are many different ways of looking at anything—objects, situations, people, feelings, and so on. Gregory sees the practical value in the sled. The choreographer sees its artistic and aesthetic value, and John sees no value at all. This theme runs throughout the play.

One place this can be seen is in the characters themselves. They represent various occupational groups, nationalities, personalities, moralities, and dispositions, among other things. This implies that gay people come in all shapes and sizes, none of which is standard. Gregory, for instance, is a dancer/choreographer in his early forties. It is at his country home where the play is set. He is a

man with a "remarkably loving nature" (14), who, as implied by Buzz, "[doesn't] ever believe the worst about anyone" (42). He is a gracious host to his friends, opening his home to others—even those who take advantage of his generosity. He is nonconfrontational—one of the more neutral characters in the play—and dedicated to his work as a dancer. As a result, his body has paid the price, bearing the "scars of his dancing" (78) as his reward for a career of hard work and excellence.

Then there are Perry and Arthur, two middle-aged men who embody more "normality" and "masculinity" than do many male heterosexuals. Arthur says of himself, "I'm butch. One of the lucky ones. I can catch a ball. I genuinely like both my parents. I hate opera. I don't know why I bother being gay" (100), to which Perry replies, "I was so sure you weren't that first time I saw you. I came this close to not saying hello" (101). Perry is a lawyer and Arthur a middle-aged accountant. Though the two are lovers—and in a committed fourteen-year relationship—they have radically different personalities. A stereotypical man, Perry shouts obscenities while driving and forgets his and Arthur's anniversary. He is negative and, as Gregory states, cynical, always finding the worst in every situation. He is also somewhat unaccepting. In a conversation about starving children he says, "That kid is a picture in a newspaper who makes us feel bad for having it so good. But feed him, brush him off, and in ten years he's just another nigger to scare the shit out of us" (52). Similarly, Perry is self-centered. When he and Arthur discuss their avoidance of AIDS, despite the fact that many of their friends—including Buzz and James—are HIV positive, he says he feels "grateful" (120), a reaction quite different from that of his lover. As Perry says himself on being introduced to Ramon, "He's Arthur, I'm Perry. He's nice, I'm not," to which Arthur pleasantly replies, "We're both nice. Don't listen to him" (37).

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Andrew Murphy

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Arthur, although he is also very "straight-acting," is perhaps the polar opposite of Perry. Arthur has "too many convictions" (30), according to his lover. He is an optimist, always looking at the good, rather than the bad. He is soft-spoken, proper, and nice. While Perry shouts obscenities at other drivers, Arthur claims "it's never right to use words to hurt another person" (31). When Perry finishes his speech about the starving child, Arthur counters with, "Rather the man I shared my life with and loved with all my heart, rather he dissembled than let me see the hate and bile there . . . After a while, the hate and bile are for everyone. It all comes around" (53). In their conversation about AIDS Arthur feels not grateful, but guilty: "first I was just scared. Then the guilt. Massive at first. Why not me? That lingers, more than the fear" (120). Where Perry is unaccepting and self-centered, Arthur is loving and caring.

Next is John, an English man in his late forties and a pianist for Gregory's dance company. A more intense cynic than even Perry, John can be considered sour. From the beginning, John establishes himself as an outsider. He calls himself "that merry wonderer of the night" who is "obsessed with who people really are" and who "must know their secrets" (21). He invades Gregory's journal for this purpose, feasting on "words other eyes were never meant to see" (21). John is inconsiderate. He treats Ramon rudely on their arrival, embarrassing his boyfriend in front of someone he admires. In front of Gregory, John asks Ramon if they can "go upstairs and fuck" (29). He is also mean-natured. Of his brother with AIDS, John says, "He's not well. He needs me and I don't like him" (46). Other characters also comment on his disposition. Buzz says, "You still know how to clear a room, John" (29) and Perry asks sarcastically, "Who would willingly spend Memorial Day weekend at a wonderful big house in the country on a gorgeous lake with John Jeckyll when they could be suffocating in the city all by themselves?" (35). As the play progresses, however, it becomes apparent that John feels terribly alone. He resents his brother for being well-liked, claiming James "got the good soul. [He] got the bad one" (124).

Another interesting character is Buzz, who works for Gregory's company and volunteers at an AIDS clinic. Buzz is a thirty-something who has been diagnosed with AIDS. This aside, the dominating force in Buzz's life is the Broadway musical. According to Perry, "if it isn't about musicals, Buzz has the attention span of a very small moth" (16). A very dramatic, playful, and sometimes childish person, Buzz fits well the role of a stereotypical effeminate gay person. He is inept at sports, asking, "Which end of the racquet do I hold"

(66) before beginning a tennis match, and he constantly makes sexual comments and says things like, "He's gay, you know" (101). Buzz is also very witty, and keeps the other characters laughing at themselves and each other. Facetious as he may appear, Buzz does function at a more adult level. He likes musicals, not purely for their entertainment value, but because it is something he is able to manage; he "can contain the world of the Broadway musical. Get [his] hands around it, so to speak. Be the master of one little universe" (25). This allows a person who has little or no control over much of his life—including his health—to obtain a sense of stability and balance.

Bobby, a young man in his twenties, is another of McNally's characters. Bobby, like his partner Gregory, has, according to Perry, "a remarkably loving nature . . . never put[ting] himself first" (13). Also a remarkably determined and confident person, he is blind. He deals with his disability well, saying to Ramon, "I've been like this since birth . . . I get around fine. It'll surprise you" (38). Although Bobby is young, he seems overly immature, perhaps because of his blindness. He sees much of life as a game, "[his] whole life being a children's birthday-party game" (43), in his own words. He often gets into situations where he must rely on others to come to his rescue, especially Gregory, and he even says that "sometimes [he] get[s] tired of behaving like a grown-up" (43), even though he is in his twenties. Another strong trait of Bobby's is his faith. He believes in Gregory and is very supportive of his work, even though he has never been able to see him dance. Because he cannot judge appearances, he instead assesses people based on intuition. This allows him to love Gregory because his "heart is beautiful" (31), not for his appearance. Bobby also displays a great faith in God and His "unconditional love" (87). Despite his immaturity, he shows great insight in his belief that it is God, not "lovers, friends, [or] family" (87) to whom people should turn for their emotional needs.

Another young character is Ramon. A "horny Puerto Rican modern dancer" (65), also in his early twenties, he is, in Arthur's words, "hot" (18). Ramon's dominating characteristic is his sexuality. In addition to being nude during a considerable portion of the play, Ramon is obsessed with himself and his body. After swimming in the cold lake, he comments to the group that "[he has] no nuts" (26). "I had enormous nuts. I was famous for my nuts. Where are my fabulous nuts?" (26), he asks subsequently. Clearly he is out for attention. Later, after claiming to have had a sexual encounter with the Obsession man, he says, "Fuck you, all of you. I don't care.

But the next time you see his picture or you're tossing in your beds thinking about him, just remember: somebody had him and it wasn't you. I know how that must burn your asses" (92). Like Bobby, Ramon is young. Unlike Bobby, however, he is extremely cocky and believes he knows it all at his young age.

McNally's eighth character is James, John's twin brother who, like Buzz, has AIDS. As different from one another as Arthur and Perry, James is his brother's antithesis. Gregory, in his journal, appropriately cites them "James the Fair and John the Foul" (65). James is many of the things John is not: pleasant, easy going, and well-liked. Aware of this drastic contrast, he humorously tells the others, "It's not who you think. I'm the other one. When John stops playing the piano, you can start getting nervous again" (69). James also possesses another quality John does not, the capacity for forgiveness. When John confronts his dying brother about the hate and resentment he feel for him, James is willing to love his brother anyway. As John describes it, "My brother was forgiving me . . . He presses his head against my hand now and cries and cries and cries as I try to tell him every wrong I have done him, but he just shakes his head and bathes my hand with his tears and lips" (125). John excluded, James is embraced into the group. "Who could not love James?" Gregory writes, "We have all taken him to our hearts. It will be a sad day when that light goes out" (113).

One scene, in particular, well illustrates the diversity of the characters. Ramon and Gregory are speaking about dance companies and financial difficulties. Ramon says of his company, "Right now we're all just hoping there will be a next season. We're broke," to which Gregory replies, "Every company is, Ramon" (28). Then Buzz chimes in and suggests they need a Diaghilev, "a rich older man who in return for certain favors funds an entire ballet company" (28). The ways in which these four men respond to this idea shows the different aspects of their personalities. Buzz brings up the idea, in a playful and joking manner. Ramon shows his arrogant sexual interest saying, "Where is this rich older dude? I'm all his" (28). John cynically attempts to belittle Ramon by asking "[doesn't he] want to know what these favors are first?" (28) and Gregory takes a practical, business angle, saying, "I'm in line first for him, Ramon" (28). Although the entire exchange is meant to be light and funny, it does highlight the different attributes of the four men. There is no agreement between them on the issue of money in exchange for sexual relations. Buzz takes a humorous point of view, Ramon a sexually adventurous one, John a negative and cynical one,

and Gregory a sensible and realistic one.

Just as the characters have diverse personalities and character traits, so do they have very different views on homosexuality and about living as gay people. As in other things, Perry and Arthur present an interesting contrast in the way they feel about, and deal with, being gay. Both men are far from the feminine homosexual stereotype. Perry refers to his partner as "[his] button-down, plodding Arthur" (135). Arthur, however, embraces his sexuality and appears to be very accepting of that aspect of himself. He says to Perry, "You're really lucky I'm a big queen" (100). At one point in the play he tries to convince his friends to go skinny-dipping, saying "No one is wearing swimsuits . . . What are we? Men or wimps?" (40). In convincing them he challenges their masculinity. The end result, however, is eight naked men. Clearly, even though he is an accountant and very conservative looking, he is not attempting to hide any of his identity. He even agrees to participate in Gregory's Swan Lake benefit dance, in women's clothing, and tries to convince his lover to do the same and "[help his] best friends out by putting on a tutu for five minutes in front of three thousand people in Carnegie Hall" (103).

While Arthur is at ease with his sexuality, Perry is uncomfortable with his own. Though he accepts who he is and does not attempt to hide anything, he is not in favor of displaying it as Arthur does. When asked to be part of the benefit Perry declines, saying that Gregory "[is] not going to find one *man*" to participate and that "men in drag turn [his] stomach" (47-8). He feels that being a homosexual relates only to whom one loves or has sex with, not to the way one acts. When Buzz tells James to "Play something gay . . . gay music written by a gay composer" Perry says "there's no such thing as gay music" (57). Similarly, when Buzz starts talking gay politics, Perry says, "It's the Fourth of July, Buzz, no gay rights stuff, please" (106). As the play progresses, Perry shows that he is not as much uncomfortable with displaying his sexuality as he is scared. Watching the others rehearse for the Swan Lake benefit, he says "[he] wanted to join them" but "[he] couldn't" (136), implying that he wants the freedom his friends enjoy, but cannot seem to find a way to obtain it.

Another character who seems to have problems dealing with his sexuality is John. Like Perry, he shuns anything "gay" oriented. When Ramon explains how he loves himself when he dances, John asks sarcastically, "Is this as a gay dancer, luv?" (55), mocking Ramon's sexual nature. When Perry refuses to dance in the benefit,

John agrees with his logic, claiming that "people are bloody sick of benefits" (49). Although John is involved in the performance, it is only indirectly as the pianist, not a tutu-donning performer. John looks unfavorably upon any legitimate discussion or depiction of gayness, as with Perry and Ramon, but does not have a problem dealing with the sexual side. In front of two of the other characters, he attacks Ramon by asking if they can "go upstairs and fuck" (29). He feels somewhat comfortable with vulgar representations of homosexuality, but with little else. His sexual life reflects this. When John and Ramon are preparing to make love, John says to Ramon, "Put your hands behind your back. Feet apart. Head down. Ready for interrogation. My beautiful bound prisoner. Look at me. You look so beautiful like that. I think I could come without even touching you" (94). The story he later tells Ramon offers a possible explanation for this behavior pattern. John explains one of his early sexual encounters involving an Irish boy with whom he practiced some light bondage. An emotionally unhealthy experience, John describes how it ended:

He moved to whisper something in my ear. My heart stopped beating. He was going to tell me he loved me! Instead, he said, 'I've doused this place with petrol, I'm lighting a match. You have three minutes to get out alive. Good luck, 007.' And then he laughed and walked out whistling. (97)

Love and caring seem to be lacking in John's life. Homosexuality to him is much like his secretive Irish boy experience. As a result, he deals with his gayness the only way he knows how, on a sexual level.

Unlike John, Ramon is very open and comfortable with his sexuality, on all levels. What he presents, however, is mainly sexual. He expresses his sexuality in a very open, in-your-face fashion. When asked how he loves himself, he replies, "I love myself when I'm making love with a really hot man . . . I love myself when I'm swimming naked . . . The rest of the time I just feel okay" (55). He incorporates sex into much of what he does. For example, when he is describing his Puerto Rican identity, he says that Puerto Ricans "speak American . . . think American . . . dress American . . . the only thing [they] don't do is move or make love American" (38). He tells Gregory about how he did "You Can't Hurry Love" in a high school talent contest, saying, "I was turning the whole school on. Girls, boys, faculty. I loved it" (115). He is concerned about his masculinity, however, because he "went into [his] tribute to Elvis .

. . . just in case anybody thought [he] was too good at Diana" (115). Ramon, like Perry, does not embody the stereotypically gay personae. He tells John "[he doesn't] know people like [him] and [his] friends," that "[he doesn't] know what [they're] talking about half the time" and that "[they] used to beat up people like [John] where [he] grew up" (93). Though he is very open about his homosexuality, maintaining a masculine image is very important to him.

An interesting contrast with Ramon is Buzz. Buzz is extremely open about his homosexuality, so much so, in fact, that it can be considered his main character trait. In addition, he has no reservation about appearing feminine, or appearing anything else for that matter. Without gayness there would be very little to Buzz. He is constantly making references to gay people, places, and things and he tells Perry, "They're all gay. The entire Olympics" (101). One of his favorite lines is, "[insert name] is gay, you know." Buzz likes to be surrounded by gayness. This is apparent when he asks John to "play something gay." He wants "gay music by a gay composer" (57), and this is exactly the way he goes about life.

In another contrast with Buzz, Bobby, although comfortable with his sexuality, does not define himself in those terms. Perry feels that dancing in a tutu would be humiliating. Bobby, who does not take this view, asks, "How would they be making fools of themselves?" (48). He is perfectly comfortable with the idea of playing that role. However, when Buzz says to him, "You are the only fairy in America who still wears white pants on the first holiday of summer," he responds with, "I was hoping I was the only *person* in America who still wears white pants on the first holiday of summer" (44). He does not want to be labeled in that way. He sees his gayness as irrelevant, or at least secondary to other aspects of his identity. Bobby's blindness is far more relevant to his character than gayness. He tells Arthur that "people think blindness is the most awful thing that can happen to a person." "I've got news for everybody," he says, "it's not" (13). A strong person, he deals well with adversity. Whatever comes his way, whether it be a visual challenge or homosexuality, he accepts it and moves on.

Comparable to Bobby, Gregory is also comfortable with, yet quiet about, his gay identity. "I. Um. I am a flaming fairy. I thought we all were" (48), he says in response to Perry's remark about looking negatively in the newspaper after doing the Swan Lake performance. Gayness plays a small role in Gregory's life, his main identity being centered around his dancing.

James is in a similar situation. He is also comfortable with be-

ing homosexual. He is not overly sexual like Ramon, not image-oriented like Perry, or gay-obsessed like Buzz. His reaction to gayness seems instead to be a curious one. He describes *Outing America: From A to Z*, a book John gave him, to be "the most extraordinary book" (69). "It gives the names of all the gay men and lesbians in this country in alphabetical order . . . I'm absolutely riveted" (69). He treats homosexuality sheepishly, almost as if he is amused that it exists at all. His English reservation affects his actions, but not his view of himself. As with Gregory, James's gay identity is overshadowed by something else, his battle with AIDS. It is this, first and foremost, which defines his character.

An example which illustrates the variety of ways the characters react to, and deal with, homosexuality occurs in the second act. Buzz enters the outdoor scene "wearing an apron, heels, and little else" (80). The reactions of the three others present are quite diverse. Perry reacts with, "Jesus Christ, Buzz . . . Put some clothes on. Nobody wants to look at that . . . You're not at a nudist colony. There are other people present" (81). James, who is busy reading says, "You could all be starkers and I wouldn't bat an eyebrow" (81) and, when asked, Arthur says, "It's not bothering me" (81). Perry's reaction is one of shock and disgust, fitting with his own view of homosexuality. Likewise, Arthur doesn't particularly mind and James seems indifferent. As with the "Diaghilev" example, there is dissension among the four men on this issue of exhibiting one's sexuality.

Despite their diversity, the eight men in McNally's play are not separated. To the contrary, they are very much connected—and not just in romantic or sexual ways. Throughout the play, the inner-group relations resemble that of a family unit. Independent of the four main relationships—Perry and Arthur, Gregory and Bobby, Buzz and James, and John and Ramon—characters often interact with one another in pairings of friendship, professional involvement, support, and rivalry. John and Gregory work together, for example, John serving as the accompanist for his dance company. Perry and Gregory have a similar working relationship, as Perry offers his legal services to the company. Buzz, too, works for Gregory, doing costumes.

In addition to these business-type pairings, there are several more deeply-rooted partnerships. Arthur and Bobby, despite their age difference, seem to share a special connectedness. In the first act, after Bobby has a sexual encounter with Ramon, he discusses the event with Arthur. Though he obviously feels attraction for Bobby, Arthur is very supportive. Bobby expresses his regret for

his actions, saying "[he's] not very strong that way," and Arthur agrees that "Most people aren't" (18). Later McNally reveals that Arthur has also been in the same position, having cheated on Perry years before. When Bobby asks whether Perry found out, Arthur says, "No, I told him and it's never been the same. It's terrific, but it's not the same . . . Don't fuck up. You are so . . . He's not that hot, Bobby. No one is" (19). The scene shows how Arthur, who is much older and presumably wiser, is offering what help he can to Bobby, who is relatively young and inexperienced.

Another such relationship exists between John and Buzz. Past lovers—also very different characters—they share one quality that brings them together: they are both considerably nosy. When Buzz stumbles upon John leafing through Gregory's journal, he scolds him, but cannot resist the temptation of taking a look himself. The discussion the two have about the contents brings them together and is one of their few interactions during the play.

A similar pairing is composed of Arthur and Buzz. Partners-in-crime at numerous points, they both have fun-loving, playful natures. They possess a free and easy view of their homosexuality and often conspire to poke fun at Perry or the others.

Perhaps a more significant bond exists between Perry and John. Like Arthur and Buzz, these two men share similar feelings about their sexuality. Arthur tells Perry in Act Three that he is "as bad as John" (113), due to his constant concern about what other people are doing. Curiously, the two men—the most un-gay gay characters in the play—are also McNally's main narrators. It is through them that the audience receives much of its information. Although they do not seem to like each other much, they do team up on several occasions to support each other's views. They are, for example, both unenthusiastic about dressing in tutus for Gregory's dance number. "People are bloody sick of benefits, Gregory," John says, with which Perry agrees: "That's the truth" (49). Despite this similarity, their relationship never develops into anything beneficial. When John discovers that Perry was hiding in the closet during his discussion with Ramon, he is furious, spitting in Perry's face and then telling him he "hope[s] [Perry] gets what [his] brother has" and that he "die[s] from it" (99). These severe actions result from Perry actually seeing John's self. Throughout the play, he never actually is completely honest and open with anyone. Only in this instance with Ramon is there a glimpse of who he really is. John let something out that Perry was never meant to see, a kind of emotional "coming out of the closet" experience, with which he can

deal only hatefully.

Bobby and Ramon also pair up in several places. Their sexual encounter aside, they relate well to each other on the basis of age. Buzz's constant references to Broadway personalities elicit recognition from the older characters, but mutual amusement and questions such as "Who's Gertrude Lawrence?" (49), "Who's Julie Andrews?" (50), and "Who's Judy Garland? Who are any of those people?" (50) from Bobby and Ramon. Buzz becomes quite distraught, saying, "I long for the day when people ask 'Who's Madonna?' I apologize to the teenagers at the table, but the state of the American musical [metaphorically speaking] has me very upset" (51). Perry behaves similarly when he remarks that "the younger generation hasn't put in their two cents" (53). These situations set Bobby and Ramon in a group by themselves.

Another relevant pairing is Gregory and Ramon. Their relationship progresses from mutual admiration to rivalry, and ultimately to mentor-protégé. In the first act, Ramon's reaction to Gregory is one of respect. When he learns that Gregory was present at one of his performances, Ramon says, "You saw us, Mr. Mitchell? . . . I would have freaked if I'd known you were out there, Mr. Mitchell" (28). He makes a similar comment to John, saying, "Look, I'm sort of out of my element this weekend. He's Gregory Mitchell, for Christ's sake. Do you know what that means?" (33). Gregory also looks upon Ramon favorably, writing in his journal that "John will also have Ramon Fornos, a superb young dancer, in tow" (65). The circumstances change a bit after Ramon's affair with Bobby. Ramon tells Gregory that "If [he] ever get[s] famous like [him] . . . and they ask [him] when [he] decided [he] wanted to be a dancer—no, a great dancer, like [Gregory was]" (115), he will tell them of his high school talent contest. Sensing his slip, he corrects himself: "I'm goofing. 'Great dancer you are.' I didn't mean it, okay?" (116). Not okay, he lets his arrogance take over, exclaiming, "Fuck you then. I'm sorry your work isn't going well. Bobby told me. But don't take it out on me. I'm just having fun" (116). Having had enough, Gregory grabs Ramon, twists his arm, threatening to break it, and attempts to force him to mutilate his hand in the garbage disposal. Buzz and Perry come to the rescue and the situation ends without another word. Later, when Gregory finishes his current dance piece, exhausted—"a forty-three-year-old man whose body had begun to quit in places he'd never dreamed of" (127), according to Perry—he decides that his career as a dancer is over and he will pass his tradition on to the young Ramon. "You're good Ramon. You're very

good. You're better than I was at your age . . . It would be your solo at the premiere" (128), he says. The peace offering is final when Gregory says "[he's] fine" (129) after Ramon's mention of the Bobby situation.

John and James also form a pair. As twin brothers, they are as different as night and day. John appears not to care much for his twin—in fact harboring a great deal of hatred and resentment toward him—the reason for which comes out in Act Three. "I resent you. I resent everything about you. You had Mum and Dad's unconditional love and now you have the world's. How can I not envy that?" (124), John asks James, "So what's your secret? The secret of unconditional love? I'm not going to let you die with it" (125). The brothers come together when James forgives John for his hatred: "just then a tear started to fall from the corner of one eye. This tear told me my brother knew something of the pain I felt of never, ever, not once, being loved . . . We could see each other at last" (125). Finally, John can release all the anguish he has been holding in. He is finally able to relate to his brother.

A final link exists between Bobby and James. Bobby, blind, and James, dying of AIDS, have something in common—they both face more adversity than the average person. Near the end of the play, they have a scene which parallels their two conditions. Everyone else is down by the lake. James is very sick by this point and out of bed against his best intentions. James says to Bobby, "I have a confession to make. I've never been skinny-dipping in the moonlight with a blind American." "I thought you were scared of that snapping turtle," Bobby returns. James replies, "I'm terrified of him. I'm counting on you." Bobby understands, saying, "Let's go then" (139) and the scene fades. This exchange is about confronting fears and, even more so, about people being there for one another. James cannot make it without Bobby's support, in much the same way that Bobby cannot make it without James's guidance. It is central to the meaning of the play.

These common bonds allow the eight characters to form a kind of family. Though they may not always like each other, they involve themselves in each others lives and are a source of support for one another. The men show concern for numerous aspects of their friend's lives. Gregory's problems with his work serve as a first example. John includes in his narration at the end of Act One that "it was raining when Gregory sat alone in his studio for six hours listening to a piece of music and didn't move from his chair" (62). Bobby says that Gregory has "started telling people the new piece

is nearly done when the truth is there's nothing there." He tries to tell him "just stay in the moment, not to think in finished dances. That it doesn't have to be about everything" (112). When Gregory finally overcomes his obstacles, Perry shows his excitement: "Gregory was working! The lights in the studio had been burning all that night and now well into the next day" (126). John, Bobby, and Perry all know just how important Gregory's work is to him. As a result, it becomes important to them, too. They all, whether directly or indirectly, offer their concern and encouragement.

Another example of the strong family structure is the inclusiveness it extends. John, although he is not the most well-liked or pleasant person to be around, is consistently welcomed in the group. They likewise welcome Ramon—even Gregory does, after he had an affair with his lover—despite the fact that he can be cocky and obnoxious at times. James is another example. The brother of a questionable individual, with whose death they must also deal, is embraced and loved. All three of these men are invited to both share their lives and become involved in the lives of the others.

A third example is well-illustrated in a scene between Perry and Buzz. Buzz contrasts real life with a musical, saying, "if this were a musical . . . it would have a happy ending" (130). Upset about his illness and approaching death, he offers an alternate ending to *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* in which "the only thing that happens is nothing and it's not funny and they all go down waiting." "Waiting for what?" he asks, "Waiting for nothing, waiting for death, like everyone I know and care about is, including me" (131). Their dialogue continues:

PERRY: You're my oldest friend in the world and next to Arthur, my best.

BUZZ: It's not enough sometimes, Perry. You're not sick . . .

PERRY: That's not fair. We can't help that.

BUZZ: I can't afford to be fair. Fair's a luxury. Fair is for healthy people with healthy lovers in nice apartments with lots of health insurance . . .

BUZZ: I'm scared I won't be there for James when he needs me and angry he won't be there for me when I need him . . .

BUZZ: Who's gonna be there for me when it's my turn?

PERRY: We all will. Every one of us.

BUZZ: I wish I could believe that . . . Can you promise me you'll be holding my hand when I let go? That the last face I see will be yours?

PERRY: Yes.

BUZZ: I believe you. (131-2)

This very moving exchange illustrates just how close these relationships have become. Perry is willing to stay with Buzz until the end, watching his health deteriorate and death approach, in order to make him feel safe and secure. Related by no biological connection, there is a love and commitment in this group which is greater than many nuclear families possess.

These relationships forge a unity of which each character is a part. The eight men are able to come together, despite extreme differences. Two points in the third act demonstrate this unity. The first, at the conclusion of the story, is the skinny-dipping scene where "Everyone [takes] off his clothes to go swimming . . . One by one . . . the men at the rear of the stage undress and go into the lake" (142). This action demonstrates the synthesis of lives that has occurred during the course of the play. No matter their appearances, feelings, actions, personality traits, they have all come together, moving in the same direction at the same time.

The Swan Lake performance works to much the same end. It depicts both the unity—with all of the characters involved in some way—and the support—with them all physically connected, hand over hand—present in the group. In addition, it pushes the idea of connectedness one step further. Just as they are tied to one another, so are they all tied to the larger gay community. The dance is being done as a benefit for AIDS. They are giving their talents and, in some cases, sacrificing something, for the good of others. As Gregory says, "Nobody's done enough. Um. For AIDS" (48). Isolating oneself from others' problems is clearly not the course to take. Rather, it is with unity and togetherness that improvements are made.

*Love! Valour! Compassion!* is a play that accurately depicts, but deliberately fails to define, homosexuality. McNally shows that it is nearly impossible to grasp such a complex concept. Sexuality is not something which can be condensed, or simplified, or wrapped up into a neat little package. Instead, being gay is as diverse, as significant, and as real as any other human characteristic. As Buzz says, "Shakespeare was gay . . . So was Romeo and Juliet. So was Hamlet. So was King Lear. Every character Shakespeare wrote was gay. Except for Titus Andronicus. Titus was straight. Go figure" (115). To Buzz everyone is gay. This, however, does not offer any explanation as to what being "gay" means. Being gay is what one makes it. It can be everything, it can be nothing, and it can be both or

neither. Whatever the circumstances, this play asserts that one definition is simply neither justifiable nor conceivable.

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# THE SEXUALITY OF POWER: DECONSTRUCTING THE SEXUAL ROLES OF MEN AND WOMEN THROUGH THE SATIRES OF POPE AND ROCHESTER

ELENA RUDY '97

Salt-N-Pepa proclaim in their hit song "Ain't Nuthin' But a She Thing," "I can bring home the bacon, fry it in a pan. Never let you forget that you're a man." During other stanzas, they say that women work the same jobs but get half the recognition and half the pay that men do. These lines indicate that women, if they choose to, can do everything that, and even more than, a man can. The refrain even states, "It's a she thing and it's all in me, I can be anything that I wanna be." In these lines, Salt-N-Pepa reclaim women's identity and suggest that, in their own words, women should "fight for their right, stand up and be heard." But they fall into one societal trap when they suggest that women abide by the following precept: "Family's first before anybody else; Take care of them before I take care of self." They suggest with these lines that women naturally place family before anything else in their lives, unlike men who normally view family as secondary to their public lives. While some people may argue that this feeling is natural, I argue that the ideas of women as the caring sex and the giving sex are naturalized beliefs created centuries ago by men in power who feared female sexuality and the power women might gain through this sexuality.

Looking back through history, ideas concerning the differences between women's and men's sexuality have always existed. For example, men should be able to be sexually promiscuous, but women should not; men enjoy sex, women do not; husbands need more than one sexual partner, wives should be satisfied with only their husbands. These statements make it easy to see the inequality in gender roles and to laugh at these ideas as out-dated and no longer prevalent today. But these ideas have led to less conspicuous views of gender roles that have naturalized themselves into modern day American and European societies. As we look at more subversive ideas, we find it harder to deconstruct what nature dictates and what culture has naturalized into society so that we regard these cultural ideas as reality: mother's have a stronger bond to their children than fathers do—a woman will not leave her child, although a man will do it without a second thought; women want

the stability of a home and a husband, while men need to go out into the world and make money; a woman can be satisfied staying at home with the children, but a man cannot. While these statements may seem ludicrous to some people, others would wholeheartedly agree with them, especially if expressed in a different context, as Fay Weldon does in her satire *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*. These "correct" gender roles result from what Michel Foucault calls the "regime of truth." This refers to the set of "truths" in a society that determine our beliefs and behaviors. The regime of truth directly results from Foucault's philosophy that truth equals power. In the regime of truth, whoever holds the power determines the truth. In his own words,

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (1144)

For many centuries in Europe and America, white, upperclass men have held the power, through money and wars, and therefore have created the truth. This truth tends to place women in submissive and powerless positions. While we like to think that as a culture we have progressed, exposed, and, for the most part, eliminated the inequality among genders, comparing Rochester's and Alexander Pope's 18th century satires with Fay Weldon's 1983 novel, against the backdrop of Foucault's truth and power scheme, reveals that we still make the mistake of equating cultural beliefs with natural instincts.

An evident gap in gender roles emerged in the 18th century. A

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good place to see this rising dichotomy between the genders is in sexual roles placed on men and women. In his satires *Verses for which he was Banished* and *Dr. Bendo's Bill*, Rochester presents different sexual practices for men and women. Men should glory in their sexual feats and try to gain as many partners as possible while women should have only one partner, whether that be her husband or her lover. A woman who has more than one lover is immoral and a societal miscreant.

The subjects of King Charles II, the English monarch during Rochester's time, praised him as macho and thought of him as quite an incredible man because of his many mistresses. Unlike today, the citizens did not have to discover the sexual escapades of their leaders; their leaders flaunted their lovers, and the people seemed to accept this behavior as the right of the king. Kings, at this point, were still regarded as divine beings, gaining their positions through direct relations with God. Thus, the people never really questioned a king's behavior. When reading Rochester's *Verses for which he was Banished*, therefore, we have to discover what exactly Rochester was criticizing about the king and why the king was so upset by this satire that he banished Rochester from court. While a modern day writer or audience would focus on the "immorality" of Charles' behavior, Rochester and his companions are not particularly appalled by the King's sexual promiscuity. In all actuality, Rochester could not condemn this behavior because he himself was known as one of the biggest scoundrels and sexual mongrels at court. He spent his time drinking and whoring. So looking closer at *Verses*, we see that Rochester is not scolding the King for his number of mistresses; he is instead making fun of Charles because of his lack of sexual performance and is criticizing the King for his addiction to sex. The King, of course, does not want his people to learn of his declining sexual prowess, especially since Rochester has directly linked that to his ability to run the Kingdom. Rochester writes, "Nor are his high desires above his strength,/His sceptre and his prick are of an equal length,/And she that plays with one may play with t'other,/And make him little wiser than his brother" (10-13). Rochester asserts that any woman who finds herself in the King's boudoir has the ability to gain power because Charles is such a slave to sex that "Whate'er religion or his laws say on't,/He'd break through all to come at any cunt" (18-19). This addiction to sex—this inability to control himself in the face of sexual desires—is not looked upon positively by his countrymen. Thus he does not want this view of himself to find its way into the general circulation of the

court. Nor does he want his peers to hear that he can no longer perform sexually: "Yet still his graceless bollocks hung an arse: Nothing could serve his disobedient tarse" (26-27).

This liberal view of sex and extramarital affairs, however, does not for the most part extend to women. While the English people do not condemn the King's mistresses, Rochester in *Dr. Bendo's Bill* does treat women differently when it comes to sexuality. It is true that he addresses a different class of women—instead of the ladies of the king and the aristocracy, he addresses middle class women and even common whores. But still one can tell the difference with which he treats sexuality in women, most notably by the fact that he mentions venereal diseases and then mainly attributes them to women. In his *Bill*, he explains, "... I assure you for great secrecy, as well as care, in diseases where it is requisite; whether venereal or others; as in some peculiar to women, the green-sickness, weaknesses, inflammations, or obstructions in the stomach, reins, liver, spleen, etcetera..." (121). Though not explicitly stating it, he seems to suggest that women are the carriers of sexually-transmitted diseases and that because of their promiscuous sexual behavior, these diseases persist. I doubt that he accepts sexual promiscuity in women as he does in men. A woman can be his mistress or the King's mistress. That he accepts. But she can be *only* his mistress. He would not want her to act like him and have other lovers.

We can see this at the end of his *Bill*, as well, when he states the purpose of women's beauty. He is justifying why he will perform some kind of seventeenth-century form of plastic surgery. Beauty is now, according to Rochester, created

for the better establishment of mutual love between man and woman; for when God had bestowed on man the power of strength and wisdom, and thereby rendered woman liable to the subjection of his absolute will, it seemed but requisite that she should be endowed likewise, in recompense, with some quality that might beget in him admiration of her, and so enforce his tenderness and love. (122)

While we can only hope that some of this was written in a sarcastic tone and that Rochester does not feel that men hold such a superior position over women, it would not be too hard to imagine that he really did feel this way. In the 18th century, women were considered the property of men and therefore created to bring men happiness, nothing more really. Thus, a woman should submit to

her man, whether this be to a husband or a lover. We can expand this to suggest that a woman should not promote her own sexual desires as a man might but that she should always remain faithful to her man.

This notion of female submissiveness resurfaces in Rochester's *A Ramble in St. James's Park*. The woman in question is slandered by the narrator for satisfying her sexual appetite with younger partners who, almost certainly, will perform better than he will in bed. While Rochester mainly criticizes the lack of appeal of his narrator, he also, and probably unknowingly, reveals the dichotomy in sexuality and gender roles: a woman who pursues sexual partners has a "depraved appetite" (l. 135) and is morally corrupt, while a man who pursues many partners acts within an acceptable role and is entitled to these pursuits.

Today this inequality among male and female sexual behavior continues to plague many societies, especially middle and upper class American society. It seems that, as a society, we almost expect men in high-power positions to have affairs and not to hide these affairs. If the men do choose to hide their affairs at first, they are still not denigrated when the affair is made public. They may even gain some kind of respect among their peers—their male peers that is. Take, for example, Fay Weldon's portrayal of male and female affairs in her satire *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*. At the beginning of this work, Bobbo tells his wife, Ruth, about his sexual escapades with Mary Fisher. As Ruth states, when speaking of Bobbo's and Mary Fisher's sex life, "I know he does the same to her as he does to me, because he told me so. Bobbo believes in honesty" (12). And in the next paragraph, "'Be patient,' he says, 'I don't intend to leave you. It's just that I'm in love with her and at the moment must act accordingly'" (12). As a man, Bobbo feels he is entitled to his extramarital affairs; he does not even feel that he should pretend faithfulness to his wife. But when confronted with Mary Fisher's having an affair, he writhes in jealousy. Early in their affair, Bobbo wonders about her servant, Garcia: "Garcia was tall and fleshy and dark and young, and his fingers were long and sometimes Bobbo wondered where they strayed. Garcia was twenty-five and just the look on him sent Bobbo's mind at once to sexual speculation" (19). When confronted with Bobbo's jealousy, Mary Fisher just laughs and says that Garcia could be her son. This laugh serves to trigger a possessive response in Bobbo: "How pretty her laugh was and how easily it came. Bobbo wanted no one to hear it but himself. Yet how could he possibly be with her all the time? Cer-

tainly there was no other way of keeping her to himself and ensuring her fidelity but by being there" (19-20). By the middle of the novel, however, this is exactly what he does. He moves most of his business out to her home on the cliff so that he can watch over her and make sure she remains faithful. At the same time, ironically, he is carrying on an affair with a secretary in the city. He, of course, does not see the irony of this situation, though one hopes that the reader does.

But even if we may realize the irony of this situation, reversing the roles and making the woman the one having the affair would elicit more than a simple "Oh, what irony." A woman who has an affair often loses respect among her peers. If she occupies an executive or administrative position, people will speculate that she "slept her way to the top." If she has a family, people will discuss how horrible her husband and children must feel. We still seem to feel as Rochester did, that women exist for men. A sexually promiscuous woman, unlike a sexually promiscuous man, finds herself the target of people's contempt and disapproval because she has stepped outside her pre-ordained position, thereby challenging society's ingrained views of gender roles.

This inequality in sexual practices results from the regime of truth established by white upperclass males. They have the power, and therefore they have constructed a truth that keeps women from expressing themselves sexually. But in order to remain in control of the truth, they must keep the power; and, ironically, the one thing that seems to scare male writers and threaten the power structure most is women's sexuality. Rochester criticizes the King, as mentioned above, because the King is a slave to his sexual desires. In *A Ramble in St. James's Park*, Rochester, more vividly, degrades the narrator. This character is old and has been rejected by a prostitute. Rather than accept this rejection gracefully, however, the narrator allows the woman to gain power over him, though only through her sexuality. Rochester plays with typical gender stereotypes by making the man jealous and bent on revenge because his mistress has rejected him for other men. He also gives the narrator a pathos not usually associated with men:

But why am I, of all mankind,  
To so severe a fate designed?  
Ungrateful! Why this treachery  
To humble, fond, believing me?  
Who gave you privileges above  
The nice allowances of love? (105-110)

He goes on to say that he is her servant—a servant of "love" (125-133). Such words of devotion and dependence do not often come from the male voice; normally a woman speaks these words. Unfortunately, that we still describe Rochester's work as focusing on reversing gender roles comments on the persistence of gender inequality in our own society—we consider a woman the faithful one and the man the run around. Rochester detests such femininity in his narrator because the old man is giving a woman power over him. Granted it is power through sex, but still women getting power in any form will lead to a breakdown in the male regime of truth.

Pope too fears women's sexuality. In *An Epistle to a Lady*, he condemns women as "variegated tulips" (41), indicating that they have two faces—the pious wife and the cunning prostitute. He reduces all women to this double standard, saying that even though one may look like a pious woman, underneath she hides the sting of an untrustworthy, cunning witch. For example, he and Martha Blount (his friend and the adversarius in this satire) discuss a woman named Chloe. The portrait is one of a woman who does not readily divulge her feelings. To Pope she calculatingly destroys the male truth because she "has no heart" (160), though "She speaks, behaves, and acts just as she ought" (161). She shows no emotion:

So very reasonable, so unmoved,  
As never yet to love, or to be loved.  
She, while her lover pants upon her breast,  
Can mark the figures on an Indian chest.  
(165-168)

Her sexual coldness threatens the male power structure because she can use her sexuality to gain power over men. Once again, male writers reveal that female sexuality scares them.

At the end of his work also, Pope, playing the typical arrogant artist, suggests what he calls "The picture of an estimable woman, with the best of contrarities" (113n.). He says that women should not use cunning and sexuality to gain power; a better way to make their voice heard and to establish themselves in society is to act in accordance with their husband's wishes. He offers tame suggestions that really do not seem as if they would enhance women's power in any way:

She, who ne'er answers till a husband cools,  
Or, if she rules him, never shows she rules;  
Charms by accepting, by submitting sways,  
Yet has her humour most, when she obeys; (261-264)

While some may believe that Pope really felt these were ways for

women to become more powerful members of society, I believe he knows that his suggestions are tame and that women who follow his advice will remain forever in their husband's shadows. Looking at his relationship with Lady Mary Wortley Montague also suggests this. He loved, or at least was attracted to, Montague, but she dishonored him by criticizing his writing and his looks to all her upperclass friends in her satire *To the Imitator of the First Satire of the Second Book of Horace*. His sexual attraction to her gave her power over him that he most likely resented, but that nevertheless made him come to realize that women's sexuality equaled power. His writing shows a fear of women's sexuality, and this fear leads to his creation of a truth for women that involves submissiveness to their husbands and lovers.

The eighteenth-century regime of truth so vividly portrayed in Rochester's and Pope's satires condemning women's sexual desires while affirming the place of women in the home as silent wives and mothers has persisted over the past two centuries. But now instead of being a created role, we feel that *naturally* women are more closely connected to their children and their homes than men are. We believe that something innate and biological makes women want to stay home with their children, to nurture and care for them, while men do not have these, what we even call, "maternal instincts." Fay Weldon explores this created dichotomy in gender roles. Discussing this book with college-level women, many who would define themselves as feminists, revealed the extent to which these "natural" views of women and motherhood have ingrained themselves into our society. These women were shocked and disappointed in Ruth when she leaves her children (she leaves them in her husband's care after he leaves them and her for another woman). They felt that naturally a good mother would not leave her children. Unfortunately, they did not view Ruth's abandonment of her children as a positive step toward taking back her life. Rather, they viewed it as unnatural. But viewing Ruth's actions as an "unnatural" act is simply the result of cultural beliefs established centuries ago that we have naturalized into our belief system as the truth.

Twentieth-century authors are just now beginning to realize that these gender differences have no grounding in nature. A review in *Ms. magazine* entitled "Phyllis Burke: Exploding Myths of Male and Female" explains how Burke, a longtime feminist and lesbian, is just now coming to the "realization that gender roles have no true basis in the biological differences between women and men" (Golden 83). If we truly want to become equal members of society,

we must expose these cultural myths and work to destroy beliefs so naturalized into society that they are seen as truths. Not until we accomplish this can women truly "be anything that [they] wanna be."

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## THE IMPORTANCE AND EFFECTS OF CHILDHOOD MEMORY AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS IN THE POETRY OF ADRIENNE RICH AND SHARON OLDS

AMY SPEARS '98

*It is hard to write about my own mother. Whatever I do write, it is my story I am telling, my version of the past. If she were to tell her own story other landscapes would be revealed.*

—Adrienne Rich (Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution 221)

*I have never left. Your bodies are before me at all times, in the dark I see the stars of your teeth in their fixed patterns wheeling over my bed*

. . . . .  
*You think I left—I was the child who got away, thousands of miles, but not a day goes past that I am not turning someone into you.*

—Sharon Olds ("Possessed," *The Dead and the Living* 33)

In the above passages Adrienne Rich and Sharon Olds write as adult women reflecting upon their childhood lives. Rich writes of a problem associated with personal memory: the child's interpretation may differ drastically from that of the parent. Olds asserts the importance of the parents in a child's life and their lingering influence in adulthood even when they are separated.

These two influential poets have written and spoken much relating to the subject of family, specifically the importance which memories of childhood and family life hold in our lives. Both poets explore questions and themes related to family relationships, the development of children throughout their lives, and the problems of traditional family structure. Rich seems to be focused chiefly on the importance of parent-child connections and the great deal of influence which parents have on their children. Her prose and much of her poetic work deals with motherhood and the sacrifices which women in desperate situations must make for the sake of their chil-

dren; however, it is her more personal poetry that focuses on her relationship with her father. In her actual life it seems that Rich's father had a very strong influence on her, perhaps because of the way her family was organized with him at its center. This influence is evident in her poetic work on the subject of family.

The majority of Olds' poems deal with one family's life as the child moves from her early life in the family, into marriage and then into her own experiences of motherhood.<sup>1</sup> The family which she describes is also very father-centered in its nature; however, the situation is much more abusive than the families that are discussed in Rich's poems. Olds is also interested in the structured relationships between parent and child but seems not to discuss the importance of these in as much depth as Rich does, preferring to focus on how events occurring as a result of parent-child relationships affect the child in adult life.

Both poets employ memory as a tool for exploring childhood experiences and assert the importance of remembered events in the act of defining an adult person. Many of the poems are written from the adult's point of view as the speaker recalls childhood events and then comments on how these have influenced her as she moves into her life outside of the family. Both Rich and Olds comment on the traditional roles of family, in which the father fills a dominant role and has control over the lives of both his wife and children. Olds' father-figure is clearly abusive, while Rich writes of a man who is dominant mentally rather than physically. The poems by both women with such a focus often seem to call for a change in traditional family structure.

Many of Olds' poems describe specific episodes of child abuse, but perhaps her most powerful description of a father's actions is in "Saturn" (*The Gold Cell* 24). This poem is one of several in which the speaker calmly observes her father while he is in a pas-

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sive state and it is safe for her to do so.<sup>2</sup> Often she appears amazed at the beauty of his physical appearance which contrasts his otherwise overbearing demeanor. She seems to use her observation as a way of searching for good in an otherwise horrible man.

"Saturn" describes this father in both active and passive terms. He lies "inert," "passed out" and "heavily asleep, unconscious" yet some part of him remains active even in this serene state, as he exercises total control over his family. Their lives "slowly / disappeared down the hole of his life." His complete domination of his wife and children is effectively demonstrated here via the imagery of "eating" the speaker's brother. In this figurative act he is totally involved in fulfilling his own goals with no compassion for his family's needs or wants, exactly like in his actual deeds.

Olds continually describes this father as a being whose sole function is to consume, to take, and he derives a great deal of pleasure from this action. His mouth is "open, darkness of the room / filling his mouth" as he sleeps and he is trying to put his family in this dark, empty place. The entire process of "eating" the child is shown in a manner very similar to that of a connoisseur eating a gourmet meal; every bite is savored and the meal is an elaborate affair with much attention drawn to it. He "sucked at the wound / as one sucks at the sockets of a lobster"; he snapped her brother's head "like a cherry off the stem." The child's bones are "like the soft shells of crabs," his genitals "delicacies." Clearly he draws great pleasure from the process of taking his child apart piece by piece figuratively, which suggests the equal pleasure which he obtains from the actual abuse.

Even though he is asleep, Olds makes it clear that the father is entirely and even happily aware of his heinous actions. Inside his unconscious mind his eyes are open: "He knew what he was doing and he could not / stop himself, like orgasm." This sexual or pleasurable connotation is but one piece of evidence supporting her father's addiction to hurting those near him—which is in itself most likely a result of his other addiction to "the glass," a reference to his alcoholism.

Another poem in which Olds describes a father's abuse is "San Francisco" (*The Gold Cell* 29).<sup>3</sup> This time the abuse comes in the form of sadistic teasing as he purposely drives the car up the steepest streets of the city in order to watch his daughter squirm and plead for him to stop. She offers him "a month's allowance" if he will stop but "he would sit behind the wheel and laugh with love." This "love," however, is not described tenderly but rather in terms

of violent actions: "his face / red as a lobster / . . . / after they drop it / . . . / into boiling water," his eyes like "seeds popping from a pod." The pleasure he obtains from the abuse in this situation comes from causing his daughter to lose control of her own body and do something considered "dirty":

As we neared the  
top he went slower and slower and then  
shifted into first, trying not to smile,  
and in that silence between gears  
I would break, weeping and peeing, the fluids of my  
body bursting out like people from the  
windows of a burning high-rise.

She is completely aware of the perverse pleasure that he gets from her reaction and feels totally powerless in the situation. She knows she cannot take control of the situation but does not believe that her father has total control over himself either.

In her book, *Sources*, Rich explores much of her early personal life and the events which were instrumental in the creation of her political consciousness. One section specifically addresses her relationship with her father throughout her life ("VII" 15). She reflects upon him as the dominant figure in her family and writes:

For years I struggled with you: your categories,  
your theories, your will, the cruelty which came inex-  
tricable from your love. For years all arguments I  
carried on in my head were with you.

Rich's father made sure that she received more intellectual training than most girls her age during the 1930s in which she grew up and he closely supervised her studies, so it is not surprising that she views him as responsible for her in many ways. But when she reviews her childhood from the vantage point of adulthood, she becomes aware that she was "the eldest daughter raised as a son, taught to study but / not to pray." She is realizing how tightly controlled her education was. Later in the poem, she recognizes in her father the elements of "patriarchy / . . . / the kingdom of the fathers" and sees in him the "power and arrogance" which she most likely paid little attention to as a child. Beneath it was hidden "the suffering of the Jew, the alien stamp [he] bore, / because [he] had deliberately arranged that it should / be invisible to me." This denial of his (and her) Jewish heritage has not only caused her suffering, but it has taken some part of his identity as well. She realizes that if this part of him had been acknowledged, he would have lost some of that patriarchal power and she would be much different as well.

Like Olds in "Saturn" and several other poems, Rich's speaker in "After Dark" (*Collected Early Poems* 227)<sup>4</sup> observes her father while he is in a passive state, nearing death. Again, she remembers his negative behavior toward her as a child, which stemmed from his domineering control of her. She imagines a phonograph needle on a record, whose sound is now faint as his life fades, playing the phrase she heard over and over during her childhood: "I know you better / than you know yourself." This seems to evoke the claustrophobic feeling of that child, who then leaves her family and experiences a sort of rebirth as she moves into adulthood, but not without some damage to herself. "Self-maimed," she "limp[s] off, torn at the roots," breaking ties with her family and then claiming a new life for herself:

[I] stopped singing for a whole year,  
got a new body, new breath,  
got children, croaked for words,  
forgot to listen

This breaking off from the family almost seems violent in its nature, but this seems necessary in order for the speaker to escape the influence of that family, primarily her father. In this way she truly learns to possess herself. She seeks a "new breath" to rid herself of the suffocation she felt in childhood. However, she still seems to place importance on her childhood and expresses the negativity of ignoring such an importance. When she "forgot to listen" it seems she forgot some part of her make up as well.

However, just as Olds sees reminders of her father in her own body and mind later in life<sup>5</sup>, Rich also realizes she can never totally sever all connections with her own father. In "After Dark," she realizes that she will always have some part of him when she "woke up one morning / and knew myself your daughter. / Blood is a sacred poison." The word "sacred" is used to demonstrate the undeniable importance of family relationships, while in the same line the word "poison" suggests that these relationships can also have damaging or negative effects on those involved.

These poems about abuse and domination view the father in similar ways: he is powerful in appearance and attitude towards his children and imposes many punishments or restrictions on them. While these parental actions range from physical child abuse to overly cautious control of a child's intellectual development, they all have specific effects on the children involved. All of the adult personas looking back on their experiences seem to feel as if they were being stifled or restricted in some way, but they have varying

opinions on how they have been affected by these situations. It is obvious that a child who is physically abused will have a much different reaction toward the parent responsible than a child who is controlled emotionally. It is also clear, that these have been events that have had a lasting impact on the individuals involved because of the long-lasting importance which the individuals have at some point assigned to such memories.

The concepts of traditional family structure and prescribed family roles are deeply connected to these episodes of child abuse and control which Olds and Rich describe. Each person in a family has a certain role or capacity to fill, and often these become stereotyped according to gender or the family member's status of parent or child. These roles do seem to be important to the survival of the idea of family in general or to the protection of its individual members, although they are often described as harmful as well.

A poem which seems to point out the strength of the relationship between Olds' speaker and her mother is "Parents' Day" (*The Wellspring* 17) in which she describes the way in which her mother's appearance does not seem to fit any stereotype:

I remember her being  
much bigger than I, her smile of the highest  
wattage, a little stiff, sparkling  
with consciousness of her prettiness—I  
pitied the other girls for having mothers  
who looked like mothers, who did not blush.  
Sometimes she would have braids around her head  
like a  
goddess or an advertisement for California raisins—

While in many other poems by Olds about childhood, the mother appears as a broken down woman, the event in this poem occurs before the "long souring of her life." She herself still appears child-like because of her blushing innocence, and this may indicate her status as the typical young wife who has not yet fully accepted her mother role in the way that society generally expects.

Unlike some of Olds' other poems which demonstrate a bond between the persona and her mother because of their common status as victims within their abusive family, "Parent's Day" seems to take place before most of the horrible events they would encounter. Here, instead of calling herself the possession of her mother, the speaker claims her for her own: "my heart would bang and my lungs swell / . . . / to see that woman arriving / and to know she was mine." There is a certain pride in being associated with her

mother which seems to disappear as she grows older, similar to the shame many adolescents feel about their parents.

In "A Woman Mourned By Daughters," (*Collected Early Poems* 159-160)<sup>6</sup> Rich shows her readers how women can become defined not just solely as wives and mothers, but also in terms of the domestic tasks associated with these roles within traditional family organization. The mother in this poem is not really grieved for; no real sadness for the loss of her as a loved person seems to be expressed. Instead, we are shown what she has left behind: physical objects which seem to suggest her own existence as a mere object. These are described as "solid assertions of [her]self" and seem to inspire some sort of feeling of dread or awe in her daughters, rather than the respect, love or affection which would be expected to stem from the memory of the deceased in such a situation.

This poem also shows how these domestic roles are passed on from mother to daughter. The daughters seem to feel a great deal of guilt for the lack of respect with which they may have treated their mother while she was alive. Now it seems as if "nothing could be enough." They are given the household tasks which were formerly hers alone, including the care of their father, who is described as "an old man in an adjoining / room to be touched and fed." Through this inheritance of tasks reserved only for female family members, the daughters are forced into the exact place or role in which their mother existed.

The mother is also portrayed as constantly concerned with the tidiness of the household and the appropriateness of the actions of her daughters. This is indicative of the stereotype of the domineering, overly concerned mother and the feeling this imposes on her daughters is clear in the following passage:

And all this universe  
dares us to lay a finger  
anywhere, save exactly  
as you would wish it done.

These lines imply that the daughters are still under some sort of unspoken control exercised by their mother, possibly more so after her death than while she was alive. They now also seem to possess a new respect for the wishes and opinions of their mother, which appears to be something they did not have while she was alive. They may be realizing for the first time what kind of restricted life their mother actually led, as they are now forced into a very similar one.

While they were young, Olds and Rich (and their poetic personas) no doubt realized that their fathers were the more powerful parents, but they did not yet have an understanding of what this meant. These small bits of memory evident in these poems seem to be important to naming the father's power and determining its importance. Very minute details contained in these remembered events seem to point out the problems which result from the prescribed roles that each family member fills almost instinctively.

While fathers are clearly dominant in the families discussed by Rich and Olds, they do not completely overshadow the importance of the mother. In fact, in many of the recounted memories the mother is looked upon much more fondly due to the attitude held toward the father, sometimes even as the more important or more loving parent. Many of the poems which have already been discussed here have pointed out the close bond which exists between mother and child, especially when that child is very young. The close relationship seems to wane around the time the child leaves the home, but resurfaces again in adulthood. In any case, the mother-child bond, or more specifically, the mother-daughter bond, seems very influential to both poets.

In "The Forms" (*The Dead and the Living* 35) Olds examines this relationship with the mother, once again as she functions in an abusive family. The persona defends the mother's actions during the time of her marriage by showing all the ways she would have protected her children, had the situation been different:

In disaster, an animal  
mother, she would have died for us,  
but in life as it was  
she had to put herself  
first.  
She had to do whatever he  
told her to do to the children, she had to  
protect herself.

It seems as if the mother is still making some sort of sacrifice for her children by staying with them in this situation. She is a fellow victim here and is doing all that is currently within her power in order to protect them.

The last lines compare the atrocities of war to "all the forms / in which I have experienced her love." These lines demonstrate the acts of violence that the mother has been forced to perform upon her children which she would never have done otherwise because she does truly love them and is not motivated in the ways

her husband is.

Later on in the speaker's life, the mother attempts to make amends with her daughter concerning her behavior and her inability to leave her husband sooner in "After 37 Years My Mother Apologizes for My Childhood" (*The Gold Cell* 43). This situation causes many conflicts within issues that the speaker had already dealt with and is now forced to revisit. It seems that the speaker interprets this apology almost as an admission of her mother's guilt. The mother does indeed speak with "true regret" which may be some acknowledgment of her responsibility for these previous actions. She is also extremely distraught over the events and this seems to further compound her feelings of guilt.

The speaker wishes that her mother had not brought the subject up again, as she has made her judgements already; her mother, in her apology, forces her to rethink her conclusions, leaving her confused. This revisitation of the past is destroying her sense of identity and leaving her with a great deal of confusion about her sense of self:

I could not see what my  
days would be with you sorry, with  
you wishing you had not done it, the  
sky falling around me, its shards  
glistening in my eyes, your old soft  
body fallen against me in horror I  
took you in my arms.

Since the daughter had already come to terms with her childhood and accepted the ways in which she was defined by it, her mother's apology seems to have disrupted her life and sense of self. She cannot envision who she will be from now on. Since the mother is now accepting responsibility for her actions she is taking on some part of the identity of the abuser. She existed on both sides of the situation but now seems to be removing herself from the victims somewhat and placing herself on the side of the criminal. This may be the majority of what the daughter cannot bring herself to accept and why she says, "I hardly knew what I said / or who I would be now that I had forgiven you."

Rich's explorations of the mother-daughter connection have the privilege of existing outside such an abusive atmosphere, but the effects of patriarchy in general can still be observed, especially those which pigeonhole women into being defined solely by motherhood.

Rich explores the mother-child bond as it is inherently related

to the female body and the condition of women in a patriarchal world. In "Sibling Mysteries" (*The Dream of a Common Language* 47-52) she writes:

Remind me how we loved our mother's body  
our mouths drawing the first  
thin sweetness from her nipples

our faces dreaming hour on hour  
in the salt smell of her lap Remind me  
how her touch melted childgrief

how she floated great and tender in our dark  
or stood guard over us  
against our willing

This earliest bond between mother and child creates something between them which lasts forever and this sort of intimacy can only be found again in having children of one's own. Bearing children renews the bond with one's own mother through a shared experience.

The mother also seems to be more protective of her daughter. She will most likely encounter experiences much like the ones which the mother has, and so she not only stands guard over them, but again shares her experiences with her daughters. They are bound together as women surviving within a male dominated world. It seems that men would destroy these female bonds, but women strive to keep themselves connected in many different ways.

And how we ate and drank  
their leavings, how we served them  
in silence, how we told

among ourselves our secrets, wept and laughed  
passed bark and root and berry  
from hand to hand, whispering each one's power

This suggests that there are certain feminine secrets, "mother-secrets," or a female knowledge which are shared by mothers, daughters and all women alike, passed from generation to generation, but which would be misunderstood or threatened by men.

The daughters never were  
true brides of the father

the daughters were to begin with  
brides of the mother

then brides of each other  
under a different law

These last lines reiterate the strength associated with female connections, especially female connections between relatives. She shows the primary connection between mother and daughter and the secondary connection between sisters. These leave no room for a father-daughter connection with the same strength, no matter what societal assumptions may say about the daughter "belonging" to the father.

Early memories of the mother-daughter bond seem just as important to the adult as memories of the relationship with the father. Often these memories resurface as the woman has children of her own and draws on her relationship with her own mother in learning how to treat and care for her own family, something Rich explores in depth in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*.<sup>7</sup> Childbirth seems to further strengthen the bond with one's own mother because both women have been through the experience.

Both poets have also written poems dealing specifically with the concept of memory. One of these is Olds' "My First Weeks" (*The Wellspring* 8-9). The poem recounts the events of the first few weeks of the speaker's life, when almost her entire world was made up of her mother's body, which provided everything she needed. This early time is obviously very important to her now; she writes: "Sometimes, when I wonder what I'm like underneath, / I think of my first two weeks, I was drenched / with happiness."

The birth is described in terms which make it seem an easy, simple experience; the child "soared gently, turned, squeezed out / neatly into the cold illuminated / air and breathed it." After sleep, the child is awakened to find the mother offering all those things needed for life:

Washed off, wrapped,  
I slept, and when I woke there was the breast  
the size of my head, hard and full,  
the springy drupelets of the nipple. Sleep.  
Milk. Heat.

These necessities are associated solely with the mother, who is the entire life for the child at this point—nothing else in the world exists yet. Complete happiness and bliss is expressed in the memory of these weeks and the speaker's relationship with her mother during that time: "I have known heaven."

After the blissful hospital stay, mother and child go home where

Paradise  
had its laws—every four hours and not  
a minute sooner I could drink, but every four  
hours I could have the world in my mouth.

Forcing the denial of this early "clock of cream / and flame" is the parents' way of making the child learn the real world in some way: "They knew it would build my character, / to learn to give up, and I learned it." The speaker doesn't seem to look upon this negatively at all, but it doesn't seem to be an excessively positive event either, merely something overshadowed by that first "fortnight of unlimited ration."

The poem places a large value on that early, ultimate closeness of the child with her mother. In these events she knows both "paradise" and denial, and it is these concepts perhaps that prepare her most effectively for the range of events existing in adult life. This also seems to make her appreciate her life now, just as she did when she "lay and moved my arms and legs like / feelers in the light. Glorious life!" The memory also gives her a sense of stability in her life, for "it would always be there."

Olds comments further on how her parents and her memories of them have shaped her in "Possessed" (*The Dead and the Living* 33). In this poem, written for her parents, she recounts many details of them that she remembers and remarks upon how she sees them everywhere, even though she is geographically removed from them.

I can look in the eyes of any stranger and  
find you there, in the rich swimming  
bottom-of-the-barrel brown, or in the  
blue that reflects from the knife's blade,  
and I smell you always, the dead cigars and  
Chanel in the mink, and I can hear you coming,  
the slow stopped bear tread and the  
quick fox, her nails on the ice,  
and I dream the inner parts of your bodies, the  
coils of your bowels like smoke, your hearts  
opening like jaws, drops from your glands  
clinging to my walls like pearls in the night.

This nearly obsessive attitude that the speaker holds toward her parents effectively demonstrates the incredible impact they have had on her life. She cannot escape the influences that they have had upon her, and finds hints of them everywhere.

The title of the poem demonstrates another important aspect of the parents' effect on their daughter. It seems that she will always belong to them in some sense; she will always be their daughter. This obviously shows the extreme importance of them in her life and how they do much to define who she is as well. Yet she herself will never be able to possess them in the same manner, so she tries to hold onto these small remembered details of them, writing: "Never having had you, I cannot let you go."

Rich's poems dealing with memory are also written from the safe vantage point of adulthood. In "For Memory," (*A Wild Patient Has Taken Me This Far* 21-22) the speaker is speaking to her lover about the importance of talking about and remembering childhood events:

I fell through a basement railing  
the first day of school and cut my forehead open—  
did I ever tell you? More than forty years  
and I still remember smelling my own blood  
like the smell of a new schoolbook

And did you ever tell me  
how your mother called you in from play  
and from whom? To what? These atoms filmed by  
ordinary dust  
that common life we each and all bent out of orbit from  
to which we must return simply to say  
this is where I came from  
*this is what I knew*

The association of the smell of blood and the smell of schoolbooks is but one example of a detail of memory which can persist throughout life. Without the memory of the surrounding event, the speaker would be confused regarding the source of this combination of seemingly unrelated smells. The "atoms" seem to indicate the importance of the origins of individuals and their knowledge.

"Sibling Mysteries," contains themes related to mother-daughter associations as discussed before and is also filled with references to memory. Each section begins with a phrase such as "Remind me," "I know, I remember" or "Tell me" which demonstrate an underlying theme pertaining to remembered knowledge. This conversation between sisters is filled with references to previous events and the importance of reminding each other of them: "I know by hear, and still / I need to have you tell me, / hold me, remind me."

The poems discussed here only scratch the surface in demon-

strating the countless subtle comparisons that can be made between Rich and Olds in both their subject matter and writing styles. One can begin to draw conclusions as to the messages which these poets seek to deliver. Many questions pertaining to the motivations and final effects upon the poets and their speakers also emerge in the poetry as a close reading is undertaken.

In the vast majority of the poems discussed in this paper, it seems that the childhood events and experiences that the speakers recall have very negative connotations. It seems unlikely that these are the only events which they are able to remember from this period of their lives, but it may be important to note that these types of occurrences definitely leave a most indelible impression which lasts into adulthood. These negative events comprised of abuse or punishment may actually be more important in shaping the perceptions and attitudes of the child than positive experiences, since they serve to more forcefully define fears and outline the appropriate boundaries for behavior.

Evidence supporting the significance of these events is clearly demonstrated in the way the speakers treat their own children and the connections these actions have with those of their own parents. Many times the speaker consciously acts in direct opposition to the way in which her parents would have acted in the same situation. Again, it is interesting to note that this is a negative response to childhood memory; it is less often that we witness the speaker acting in a manner similar to that of her parents.

In studying the works of these two important poets of the twentieth century, we can clearly see precise comments on the structure of our society as it relates to family structure, within the stories of how these poets and their speakers have been affected on an individual basis. The careful reading and interpretation of these effects could do much to impart a societal change in addition to a change in family structure which Sharon Olds and Adrienne Rich so clearly call for.

It seems that in many ways, the incredibly powerful effects of the poetry written by these women have yet to be fully realized. Their comments on the far-reaching effects of childhood memories in adult romantic relationships, parenting styles and political beliefs can be incredibly valuable in helping us to realize what large portions of our beliefs and personalities are comprised of the experiences of youth.

## ENDNOTES:

1. Sharon Olds has declined to comment on whether these poems are autobiographical. (See Pearlman, *Listen to Their Voices*, p. 204: "I don't talk about my personal life or my personal relationship to these poems.") Whether or not she is actually speaking of her own life, the events described in these poems suggest that she is documenting the everyday lives of *one particular* family, and the style she employs is autobiographical in nature. Brian Dillon writes, "Whether deliberate or not . . . Olds' poems allow readers to construct a plot, a linear progression from abuse to expulsion of the abuser to the apparent death of the abuser . . ." (Dillon 108) I will attempt as much as possible to clearly differentiate between Olds and her speaker.

2. Also see: from *The Gold Cell*: "Looking at My Father (31-32) and "This" (63); from *The Dead and the Living*: "My Father's Breasts" (43); and from *The Father*: "The Picture I Want" (10) and "My Father's Eyes" (31).

3. Similar themes are also found in "The Chute" (*The Gold Cell* 36) and "Natural History" (*The Father* 59).

4. Originally published in *Necessities of Life*, 1966.

5. In poems such as "This" (*The Gold Cell* 63).

6. Originally published in *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*, 1963.

7. "Mothers and daughters have always exchanged with each other—beyond the verbally transmitted lore of female survival—a knowledge that is subliminal, subversive, preverbal: the knowledge flowing between two alike bodies, one of which has spent nine months inside the other. The experience of giving birth stirs deep reverberations of her mother in a daughter; women often dream of their mothers during pregnancy and labor." (Rich, *Of Woman Born*... 220)

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