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R ereadings

T heories

Edited by:

Joanna Matyjaszczyk & Maciej Wieczorek

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Contents

Amara Graf 1

The Power of Poetic Praxis in the Literature of Pat Mora and Ana Castillo

Shawna Guenther 13

Roll a Hard Six: Losing Your Noodle in Raymond Federman's Double or Nothing

Jodi McAlister 23

Breaking the Hard Limits: Romance, Pornography, and the Question of Genre in the Fifty Shades Trilogy

Małgorzata Myk 34

Towards a Non-hierarchical Space of Thought: Reading Roland Barthes' The Neutral

Peggy D. Otto 42

Vision and Violence in Virginia Woolf's The Waves

Gabriel Quigley 51

Laying Bare: Agamben, Chandler, and The Responsibility to Protect

Alison Van Nyhuis 59

The American Dream and American Greed in Fanny Fern's Ruth Hall: Sentimental and Satirical Christian Discourse in the Popular Domestic Tale

Notes on Contributors 70

Amara Graf

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The Power of Poetic Praxis in the Literature of Pat Mora and Ana Castillo¹

Chicana literary work is predominantly characterized by poetry. Lyrical poetic phrases are interwoven into Chicanas' short stories, novels, theoretical, and critical essays. Why poetry? What is distinct about poetry as a literary genre or the process of writing poetry that facilitates Chicanas' self-expression? Various Chicana writers refer to the process of writing poetry as essential to the (trans)formation of identity and society. Poetry allows Chicanas to transform their own identities and to re-define the contours of the world by creating a new or distinct reality from which to act. Collectively, Chicana writers produce a corpus of literary work that is characterized by the commingling of poetry, theory, and criticism. In this article I illustrate that these three phenomena are inextricably linked and that theoretical and critical essays written by and about Chicanas often grow out of and through their more creative, poetic literary work. My analysis focuses primarily on two Chicana authors, Pat Mora and Ana Castillo, and examines how their poetry exemplifies and contextualizes some of their abstract claims and critical theories, as well as how the blending of poetry, theory, and criticism functions as a powerful tool to create socio-political change both in the academy and beyond.

key words: Chicana, poetry, politics, Castillo, Mora

Chicana literary work is predominantly characterized by poetry. Lyrical poetic phrases are interwoven into Chicanas' short stories, novels, theoretical, and critical essays. Why poetry? What is distinct about poetry as a literary genre or the process of writing poetry that facilitates Chicanas' self-expression? Various Chicana writers refer to the process of writing poetry as essential to the (trans)formation of identity and society. Contemplating the question why she, as a Chicana writes poetry, Naomi Quiñónez states:

To write poetry we must understand ourselves; in order to understand ourselves we must deconstruct ourselves from an imposed game plan, and then re-identify ourselves in newfound images. Through this process, we can incorporate everything we've ever been, ever wanted to be or wished to become into an art form that allows us our individual expression. (175)

Quiñónez explains how the process of writing poetry necessitates a deep level of self-understanding that is only possible by questioning and dismantling an already-established identity and re-creating traditional societal roles. Poetry allows Chicanas to transform not only their own identity but also the world around them. As Alma Villanueva articulates, "A poet's job / is to see / the contours of the / world and make / a myth to share / for others to see / to make a reality; /

¹ This article is part of a much longer analysis of their work in my Master's Report, *Intersection of Theory and Poetics in the Literature of Pat Mora and Ana Castillo*, The University of Texas at Austin 2003.

a point from where the / world spins— / and if stubborn and persistent enough, / the point from where the / universe whorls: / right here” (“A Poet’s Job” 1-13). Poetry becomes a way to re-define the contours of the world by creating a new or distinct reality from which to act.

The process of transforming identity and society through poetry is not a solitary act that each Chicana engages in isolated from her community. As Ana Castillo states, “the construction of poetics and prose, the development of ideas, is not the achievement of any one individual writer of her generation. Together, we create a tapestry” (*Massacre* 171). Pat Mora also captures the communal and collective aspect of Chicana literature in her poem “A River of Women.” She uses the metaphor of a river to describe the genealogy of women who have preceded her and who will support her and future generations: “River of women / stream on in this valley / gather all spirits / deepen and rise / sustaining your daughters / who dream in the sun” (“A River of Women” 25-30). Collectively, Chicana writers produce a corpus of literary work that is characterized by the commingling of poetry, theory, and criticism. In this article I illustrate that these three phenomena are inextricably linked and that theoretical and critical essays written by and about Chicanas often grow out of and through their more creative, poetic literary work. My analysis focuses primarily on two Chicana authors, Pat Mora and Ana Castillo, and examines how their poetry exemplifies and contextualizes some of their abstract claims and critical theories, as well as how the blending of poetry, theory, and criticism functions as a powerful tool to create socio-political change both in the academy and beyond.

Poetry holds an important place as a literary genre in the Mexican-American cultural heritage. Poetry links Chicanas to the early literary tradition within their culture from Sor Juana’s poems onwards. Tey Diana Rebolledo describes how, in the early part of the twentieth century, Spanish-language newspapers in almost every Spanish-speaking community in the U.S. were publishing Mexican poetry as well as poetry from other Latin American countries and Spain. Many local writers copied the styles of the poetry featured in the newspapers: “In early writing in Spanish, poetry was the craft most used by men and women” (Rebolledo, *Infinite* 38). Early U.S. women scholars writing in Spanish, such as Carmen Celia Beltrán, María Guadalupe Valero, and María Ibarra, preserved and documented their cultural heritage by passing on the details of their lives through the oral tradition as well as through poems and novels. These early women writers serve as “literary foremothers” to contemporary Chicana writers (Rebolledo, *Infinite* 38-39).

Not only is poetry a powerful tool through which Chicanas articulate a sense of communal identity, it is also a catalyst for social change. As Castillo explains:

Our early poetry,² primarily intended to catalyze resistance and to stir the hearts of the pueblo . . . The emergence and vitality of this poetry played an important role in the Chicano Movement’s two primary goals: the gaining of legitimate acknowledgement by dominant society, thereby generating greater educational and economic opportunities, and the affirming of our unique cultural identity in an Anglocentric society. (*Massacre* 167)

Sonía Saldívar-Hull also attests to the power of the Movimiento poetry of the 1970s, which she attributes to the burgeoning of her feminist Chicana identity. She describes how by drinking “the lifeblood of Chicana poetry,” she learned to value her voice as “a female subject of transfrontera culture” in South Texas, which led her to attend college and ultimately to go on to graduate

² See for example, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales’ *I am Joaquin* (1967), one of the most famous poems of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement.

school (12).³ Echoing Castillo and Saldívar-Hull, Rebolledo also emphasizes the connection between poetry and political praxis. She states, “the poet’s role is not just an intellectual concern abstracted from social and cultural reality”; Chicana poets are “very much linked to social and political concerns within their community” (*Women Singing* 145). Rebolledo emphasizes the fact that privileging theory over praxis runs the risk of questioning the validity of praxis (*Women Singing* 2). Chicana scholars provide a more pragmatic, realist approach to their theoretical and critical essays by grounding them in the praxis of poetry that focuses on the material reality of daily life. Rebolledo explains, “writing can be linked with day-to-day life at home, at work, in the streets of the *barrio*; for some poets, words come between loads of laundry, between the leaves of lettuce they are washing at the sink” (*Infinite* 274). Rebolledo suggests that part of what distinguishes Chicana feminist scholars from bourgeois white European feminists is that most Chicanas do not have the economic means to extricate themselves from the demands of their daily lives in order to write in private. For example, while Virginia Woolf imagines the luxury of a room of one’s own, Anzaldúa encourages women to write in the reality of a bathroom or on the subway, which they already ride (Rebolledo, *Women Singing* 132). Rebolledo is not suggesting that bourgeois European feminists do not engage in housework but rather that they have the luxury of obtaining time and space away from household chores in order to write. Nor is Rebolledo suggesting that all Chicana feminists write while doing housework, but rather that generally they have fewer options to obtain a separate space in which to write.⁴

I want to expand upon Rebolledo’s ideas by arguing that perhaps the more important point is not that Chicana feminist scholars integrate praxis into theory because they do not have the luxury of seeking privacy from the demands of daily life, but rather because praxis is the source of socio-political change. While European feminists tend to place more emphasis on abstract theory, Chicanas privilege and value poetic praxis as much as, if not more than, theory. As Norma Alarcón emphasizes, it is imperative to move beyond theory to focus on the socio-political struggle (qtd. in Rebolledo, *Women Singing* 5). By grounding their theoretical and critical writing with poetry, Chicana authors produce work that often leads to and precipitates a change in consciousness, ultimately creating social change, thus moving, as Alarcón exhorts, beyond theory and returning again to praxis.⁵

³ Yet, ironically, poetry by writers like Angela de Hoyos, an active Chicana in the early Movimiento, not only challenged the white supremacist hegemony but also the sexism of their own culture’s nationalist movement. In the introduction to *Feminism on the Border*, Saldívar-Hull discusses how de Hoyos’ poems “Mujer Sin Nombre” and “Below Zero” encouraged her to contemplate her position as a Chicana feminist in a movement with an exclusively nationalist agenda that failed to acknowledge the question of gender.

⁴ The title of Sandra Cisneros’ forthcoming book, *A House of My Own: Stories from My Life* (October 2015), alludes to Woolf’s canonical feminist text *A Room of One’s Own*, and the challenges of achieving the financial independence necessary in order to obtain the space (physical and mental/psychic) for one’s self in which to write. Of course there are exceptions to Rebolledo’s seemingly superficial divisions between European and Chicana feminists based upon economics. However, there is some validity to what Rebolledo is saying. There are economic factors that differentiate the lives of European and Chicana feminists. Rebolledo’s point seems to be that while European feminists tend to work in a more abstract, theoretical realm that does not often incorporate the reality of their practical lives, Chicana feminists are grounded in daily life.

⁵ However, it is important to note that not all theoretical and critical essays written by and about Chicanas are intertwined with poetic praxis and grounded in daily life. As Analouise Keating observes in the introduction to *This Bridge We Call Home*, “I’ve read highly astute theoretical pieces by other self-identified women of color. They know the lingo, they use the terms and theories with grace” (“Charting Pathways” 14). It is not that Chicanas are incapable of doing high theory or that which is more abstract and infused with esoteric jargon (see, for example, work by Chela Sandoval, Paula Moya, and Norma Alarcón); it is just that in many cases they have intentionally chosen not to because doing high theory is often viewed as assimilating to the dictates of the academy. However, as Keating points

In her introduction to the anthology *Making Face, Making Soul* Gloria Anzaldúa legitimizes personal narrative and poetry as valid praxis for scholarship and a direct link to theory. Anzaldúa states, “[i]n our literature, social issues such as race, class and sexual difference are intertwined with the narrative and poetic elements of a text, elements in which theory is embedded” (xxvi). It is precisely from these non-traditional locations, (i.e. personal narrative and poetry) that Anzaldúa creates new theories in her groundbreaking work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, which is an example par excellence of the blending of the creative and critical praxis (Rebolledo, *Women Singing* 6). *Borderlands*, originally published in 1987, is a revolutionary text for various reasons, but primarily because it features a voice that had previously been ignored in U.S. literature, that of a self-proclaimed “Chicana *tejana*-lesbian-feminist poet and fiction writer” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 253). It is also an innovative text because, as a commingling of theoretical and critical essays and poems written in various languages (alternating between Spanish, English, and Nahuatl, the indigenous language of the Aztecs), it does not conform to standard academic style. In this way, the formal aspects of the text, the crossing and blending of genres and languages, reflect or mirror the subject matter, namely the physical, emotional, sexual, and spiritual borders within, between, and among people.⁶

Anzaldúa openly states that she cannot extract herself or somehow detach herself from her literary work; “I cannot separate my writing from any part of my life. It is all one” (*Borderlands* 95). Her own experience and bias inform and permeate her theoretical essays and poetry. Anzaldúa admits that her subject position has a profound influence on her work and is a crucial part of what defines her authorial voice. But, she also indicates that her subjectivity should not invalidate her work because to separate herself from her text in order to establish an objective, rational voice would be to rob her book of its specific, historical context and social situatedness. Illustrating the intensely personal nature of her writing while simultaneously showing its universal appeal, Anzaldúa validates the subjective aspect of all theoretical, critical, and poetic texts. Anzaldúa carves space in the U.S. literary canon for other female ethnic writers, like Mora and Castillo, who also find it necessary to define their specific social location, which is necessarily a subjective process.

There are many ways in which Anzaldúa’s seminal thoughts and distinctive style influence the literary work of Mora and Castillo and yet other ways in which these scholars depart from her original ideas. While Anzaldúa states that the focus of her book is her own existence and viscerally describes her psychic transformation, Mora emphasizes her connection to the larger community and depicts her pivotal role as an educator. Castillo stresses the socio-political injustices in society and her work is a militant cry for systemic change. However, despite each of these scholars’ distinct approaches and motivations for writing, they touch on many of the same issues in their work. All of these Chicana writers incorporate aspects of their indigenous, cultural heritage, reclaiming some traditions and values and rebelling against or re-envisioning others. For example, Castillo echoes Anzaldúa’s challenge to machismo in the Latino community as well as to many of the Catholic beliefs that were imposed over indigenous

out, it is a false division to believe that women of color do non-theoretical work exclusively (12) and she questions the association of high theory with whiteness and the academy and the white/theoretical versus color/nontheoretical binary (14).

⁶ While I include a more extensive analysis of Anzaldúa’s theories, particularly the mestiza consciousness, *la facultad*, and Coatlicue state, and their profound influence on Chicana/o literature specifically, and Ethnic-American literature in particular, in my Master’s Report, it is beyond the scope of this article.

religious practices. Castillo also shares Anzaldúa's belief that imagination and intuition are as valid, if not more so, than objectivity and reason in the process of consciousness raising. Mora reiterates many of Anzaldúa's ideas about language and identity. For example, Mora reaffirms the value of code switching and decries the violence of linguistic terrorism.

Both Mora and Castillo emulate Anzaldúa's style, writing in a mixture of English and Spanish with a few words in Nahuatl. However, an interesting distinction is that Anzaldúa does not translate every phrase or paragraph that she writes in Spanish, forcing the reader to code-switch throughout the text or experience the challenge of a language barrier that impedes comprehension. However, Mora and Castillo are more careful to provide translations for the reader. Mora particularly is concerned with inclusivity and not producing a text that will alienate any potential readers. Although Castillo does not explore the complex relationship between language and identity as in-depth as Anzaldúa and Mora, she is careful to define the various Spanish terms she utilizes, such as *conscientización*, in English. Another essential difference between these Chicana scholars is that Anzaldúa combines theoretical essays and poetry in one text. In contrast, Castillo has published a collection of critical essays separate from her books of poetry and although the two mutually influence and inform each other, they are different works. Mora's style more closely mirrors that of Anzaldúa and she blends some poetry into her book of theoretical essays. However, Mora's larger collections of poetry are published separately. With a better understanding of the social historical context and theoretical framework out of which Mora and Castillo are writing and how they have been influenced by their literary foremothers like Anzaldúa, I can now examine their work in more detail. In the next section I analyze the literary work of Mora and Castillo that exemplifies the commingling of theory, criticism, and poetry and how the imbricated nature of these three phenomena serves as a powerful tool to create socio-political change.

Reading Mora's critical work in *Nepantla: Essays from the Land in the Middle* (1993) along with her collections of poetry including *Chants, Borders, and Agua Santa/Holy Water*, enhances each genre by providing a more in-depth analysis of social issues that are addressed distinctly in each of these literary forms. In her introduction to *Nepantla*, Mora addresses her audience as "my family, writers, Chicanas, Southwesterners, mothers, women of color, daughters, Latinas, college graduates, Hispanas, wives, Mexicans, U.S. citizens, readers, advocates, Mexican Americans, women, educators, learners" (7). As the broad definition of her audience reveals, Mora's aim is to be as inclusive as possible. Mora invites the reader in as a "dear guest" to "wander through these rooms, these essays" that pose more questions than reveal answers (*Nepantla* 8). "Questions" which she says, are "too often ignored-about our economic, linguistic, and color hierarchies, about the power of naming in this country, about dominance and colonization, about unquestioned norms, about the need to create space for ourselves, individually and collectively" (*Nepantla* 8-9). The theoretical essays in Mora's book provide a deeper understanding of the complex socio-historical background for her poetry.

Mora aptly chose the word *nepantla* meaning "place in the middle" in Nahuatl, for the title of her book. As a "Texican," a person born in Texas of Mexican ancestry, who grew up in El Paso on the U.S./Mexico border, Mora developed a keen awareness of straddling various cultures and languages (*Nepantla* 5). In the poem "Legal Alien," Mora articulates her experience of being "bi-lingual, bi-cultural" and "sliding back and forth / between the fringes of both worlds" (17-18). She describes the discomfort and isolation of exclusion, "viewed by Anglos as perhaps exotic / perhaps inferior, definitely different / viewed by Mexicans as alien" (9-11). Mora's

experience of living in the middle place on a “land corridor bordered by two countries” is a prominent theme in her writing (*Nepantla* 6).

The U.S./Mexico border reveals the glaring truth of poverty. The desert cannot conceal the shacks on the other side of the Rio Grande where “children go to bed hungry and stare at stores filled with books they’ll never touch, with books they’ll never read” (Mora, *Nepantla* 14). In the poem “Border Town: 1938,” Mora describes a poor Mexican girl, Esperanza, who counts cement cracks “so as not to hear / the girls in the playground singing, / ‘the farmer’s in the dell / the farmer’s in the dell’/ laughing and running round-round” (3-7). While the young white children are happily playing, “Esperanza walks head down / eyes full of tears” through the graveyard and down the dirt path “to that other school / for Mexicans” (8-9, 17-18). The border is a daily visual reminder of the extreme disparity between the First and Third Worlds.

The stark desert landscape mirrors the harsh economic reality of the U.S./Mexico border. In her poem “Desert Women,” Mora describes how “[I]ike cactus / we’ve learned to hoard / to sprout deep roots” and hide pain and sadness “safe behind our thorns” (5-6, 14). “Desert women know / about survival” and endure in spite of the severe conditions in which they live. As she states, “don’t be deceived / When we bloom, we stun” (1-2, 15-16). Mora identifies with the strength and resistance as well as the beauty of the desert landscape. Despite the extreme conditions of living on the border, Mora feels that it accorded her the privilege of daily being able to see the native land of her ancestors in the Chihuahua desert (*Nepantla* 13). While critical of the political underpinnings that create and drive the economic inequality evident on the U.S./Mexico border, Mora articulates the strength of those who live on the border and continually struggle to survive.

Having worked as a teacher and administrator in academia, Mora also inhabits the border between the academic world and her community. She lives “in the middle land between the university and the community, the Latino community, our broader civic community, and our international community” (*Nepantla* 6). In the poem “University Avenue,” Mora describes being part of the first wave of Latina writers and scholars entering the world of academia unfamiliar to her ancestors. “We are the first / of our people to walk this path / We move cautiously/ unfamiliar with the sounds / guides for those who follow” (1-5). Mora inhabits the middle place between her ancestors who did not frequent university campuses and future generations of Latina/os whose enrolment at colleges and universities is increasing nationwide.

Despite the growing number of Latina undergraduate students, Latina faculty members and administrative staff are still under-represented in academia. In the poem “Withdrawal Symptoms,” Mora articulates the difficulty of facing “bitter frowns / in committees and board rooms” that “push and pound, push and pound” forcing her to wonder, “Why am I the only Mexican American here?” (20-24). The division Mora feels pulled between the academic world and her community is expressed even more explicitly in her poem “Sonrisas.” Mora describes her compartmentalized existence as living “in a doorway / between two rooms” (1-2). In one room there are “cups of black coffee” and Mora hears quiet clicks “like facts / budgets, tenure, curriculum / from careful women in crisp beige” (3-6). Mora peeks, “In the other room señoras / in faded dresses stir sweet / milk coffee, laughter whirls / with steam from fresh *tamales*” (10-13). She describes standing in the hallway (middle space) between two adjacent rooms (worlds), one inhabited by women analyzing factual data and another where a group of señoras are gathered laughing. This image depicts her experience as a Mexican American woman in academia. As a *nepantlera* Mora slides back and forth between the world of academia and her community and thus she serves as a guide to those that follow.

Ultimately, she resists becoming absorbed in academia and challenges the institutional practices of the university that fail to consider and serve the surrounding community. For Mora “retreating from the world feels irresponsible” (*Nepantla* 173). She urges her colleagues and fellow faculty members to stay “engaged” and “not to settle for being enclaves of the advantaged” but to accept their tremendous responsibility to educate many of the country’s future leaders (*Nepantla* 153, 167). She challenges universities “to recruit and retain more women and scholars and students of non-European backgrounds” and explains that part of the social obligation of universities is “to uphold the right in this country to pursue education regardless of one’s background. The scholarly privilege cannot be tied to skin color” (*Nepantla* 162). Universities need to promote and support ethnic diversity; as Mora states succinctly, “A multicultural society deserves a multicultural education” (*Nepantla* 179).

As Mora indicates, it is essential for universities to promote diversity not just culturally but also linguistically in order to provide a strong education for our country’s future leaders. For decades Latina/os have struggled to survive in the hostile environment of the U.S. schools where they were often punished for speaking Spanish or not speaking English correctly.⁷ Mora documents incidents of what Anzaldúa refers to as “linguistic terrorism” or the process by which non-native English speakers are literally terrorized, verbally and physically into abandoning their original and/or indigenous languages to speak English exclusively (*Borderlands* 80). In the poem “Unnatural Speech,” Mora describes a young “girl / child” who used to sing to her dolls in Spanish and the words were light in her mouth. Later, as a twenty-year-old woman scared by the English language, she practices speaking to her dolls, “tongue thick, dry / pushing heavy English / words out” (2, 27-29). In the poem “Immigrants,” Mora describes how parents, even before their children can walk, “speak to them in thick English / hallo, babe, hallo” hoping they will become quickly assimilated into the mainstream U.S. culture (7-8). At the same time that parents urge their children to learn English, doing so often creates a language barrier that prevents parents from talking to their children. Mora describes a Mexican mother in her poem “Elena” who fears not being able to communicate with her children: “Sometimes I take / my English book and lock myself in the bathroom, / say the thick words softly, / for if I stop trying, I will be deaf / when my children need my help” (19-22). Mora echoes this sentiment in another poem entitled “Let Us Hold Hands” in which she refers to a mother like Elena who “trained her stubborn tongue to wrap / around that spiny language, English, to place her child in school” (12-13). In these poems Mora describes the linguistic barriers immigrants face and their struggles to learn to speak English in order to receive an education and survive in society. She urges universities to accept the responsibility they have to provide a multicultural education that includes promoting the value of and fostering an environment to speak various languages. This is particularly important, as Mora points out, in the process of preparing our country’s youth to participate and make responsible decisions in a global economy.

Mora’s challenge to her colleagues in academia to assume responsibility for providing a multicultural education underscores her commitment to the Latino community. As she states, “Like many Chicana writers, I was motivated to write because I felt our voices were absent from

⁷ Saldívar-Hull refers to the work of historian Vicki Ruiz who documented such cases like that of Rosa Guerrero, from El Paso Texas who states, “I remember being punished for speaking Spanish. *Nos daban coscorrones, pero coscorrones* (they gave us strong blows on the head) . . . *Yo no fui la única; fueron miles de gente que sufrieron* (I wasn’t the only one; there were miles of people who suffered) en Arizona, en Colorado, en Nuevo México, en Texas, en California; *que nos estereotipaban horriblemente* (they stereotyped us horribly) ‘Don’t you speak that ugly language, you are American now, you Mexican child’” (19).

what is labeled American literature, but is U.S. Eurocentric literature seasoned sparingly with a bit of Color” (*Nepantla* 15). Mora writes in order to make Latinas visible and allow them to see themselves reflected in her work. Mora knows that Latinas “need to be published and to be studied in schools and colleges so that the stories and ideas of [her] people won’t quietly disappear” (*Nepantla* 139). The act of writing is, for Mora, her contribution to and work for her community. In the face of social problems Mora feels that writing is “neither elitist nor irrelevant” (*Nepantla* 133), but that “the work of the poet is for the people” (*Nepantla* 181). Thus, for Mora, writing poetry is an act of social justice; poetic praxis urges change in the world around her.

Like Mora, Castillo’s poetic praxis is a means of using her voice to demand social justice. She has also written a collection of critical essays, *Massacre of the Dreamers* (1994) as well as many books of poetry including *I Ask the Impossible*, *My Father Was a Toltec*, and *Women are Not Roses* and various novels. The title of her book *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma* suggests a violent militancy that permeates the text. There is an urgency to Castillo’s critical essays in her demand for immediate political action and social change in the face of atrocious abuses of power and injustice. More than a provocative title, *Massacre of the Dreamers* refers to a specific historical event that took place towards the end of the Mexica Empire when Moteuczoma murdered thousands of dreamers, traditionally esteemed for their divine wisdom and vision, who “were sharing the same premonition: the prophesied arrival of Cortés and the subsequent annihilation of the Empire” (Castillo, *Massacre* 16). Unable to accept their threatening omens, Moteuczoma “murdered them out of his own sense of despair and because of his abuse of power . . . it was his fatalism that debilitated him and caused the end of the Mexica world” (16). Castillo focuses on this violent historical event because the massacre of the dreamers signaled the rise of a domineering imperial patriarchy that destroys life. As critical socio-political commentary, her text is a call to arms, a call to “unearth the female indigenous consciousness” and fight against the injustice of the patriarchy (16).

In the poem “Coatlicue’s Legacy,” Castillo calls upon the tremendous power of Coatlicue, the Aztec goddess of fertility and destruction to overcome deeply entrenched patriarchal ideas. “Sometimes I forget / all I need to do is say it / think it / breathe it / dream it / and life is at the hem of my stone skirt / a drifting feather / four hundred warriors strong” (12-19). Castillo rejects any negative force that disrespects her divine essence as a descendent of the Aztec goddess. She will “spit out the skeletons of bad boys / or shit them out / who did not learn to honor / Woman / but fear Her just the same” (37-41). Men’s fear of “Woman” leads them to dishonor her. The “terrible wrath” Castillo feels from having “been robbed and raped / to numbness” pulls her out of her forgetfulness to reestablish her connection to the indigenous female consciousness (43-45). In this poem, Castillo echoes Anzaldúa who also reclaims a connection to the Aztec goddess and refers to a “Coatlicue state,” as a moment of psychic disruption that provides an opportunity for heightened awareness or consciousness (*Borderlands* 68-69).

In addition to reclaiming positive aspects of the spiritual beliefs and practices of her indigenous ancestors, Castillo also questions the negative aspects of the Catholic religion, particularly those that promote the subjugation of women. She states, “As Christianized mestizas we have been conditioned for generations to reject our *indigena* blood, as well as invalidate folk medicine for Western medical practices and above all, to put our faith in God the Father” (*Massacre* 87). Castillo explicitly expresses her criticism of the Catholic Church in the poem “Dear Pope: Open Letter from the Americas”: “*Querido Papa* (Dear Father): We are bound to

you, the multitude of the Americas / the barefoot and patricians, the imposing politicians, / like a rosary binds a matrimony, she, promising to obey, / he, to protect” (1-4). Castillo highlights the patriarchal hierarchy of the Catholic Church in which men hold the positions of power and women are relegated to a position of submissive dependence. Castillo wonders who safeguards young women in Honduras and Mexico who slave as prostitutes to support their families. Challenging the Pope, Castillo questions: “How many candidates for beatification would you have if all / those girls said no, ‘I’d rather die, let my mother die, / my father, my baby starve? / I will not give up my virtue for the sake of beans and a pound / of cornmeal. / I will stay faithful to my church no matter what” (14-18). She indicates how absurd the church’s obsession with sexual purity and virtue is in the face of the harsh reality of poverty with the imminent threat of starvation and death.

In another passage in the poem Castillo questions whether or not a woman who has an abortion as a result of being raped will also be condemned, for committing murder. She addresses the Pope in a mocking tone, “you, who are eminent and wise / unfettered by the profane, tell me this” (32-33). Castillo wonders even if she accepted all the children God sent her, “would my passion for my beloved be an offense to God?” (36). She highlights the fact that the church condemns women who enjoy pleasure during the sexual act that should solely be engaged in for procreation. In this provocative poem, Castillo offers a scathing criticism of the patriarchy of the Catholic Church.

In addition to challenging and resisting the patriarchy of the Catholic Church which upholds traditional gender roles, many Chicana writers have reinterpreted or transformed female cultural archetypes, such as La Malinche, to depict a more positive view of women. As Castillo states: “We have taken on the revisioning of our own culture’s metaphors, informed as they are by male perceptions” (*Massacre* 166). For example, in the poem, “Malinche’s Tips: Pique from Mexico’s Mother,” Mora vindicates the “much maligned” Eve figure of Mexican history who served as a translator for Hernán Cortés (14). Mora writes the poem from La Malinche’s point of view, offering an alternate version of traditional Mexican history that blames women for the conquest of the Mexican people: “Re-view / folklore typology / and then reread / hisstory” (56-59). Mora cleverly plays with the word history to highlight the fact that it is often written from the male perspective as his story. She describes how men typically depict female icons as submissive and powerless: “Virgin mothers. / Women of closed / uterus. Women / of closed / mouths. Women / of covered / hair. Women / of cloaked / bodies” (65-73). Mora separates the lines of the poem to highlight the ways in which women are silenced (their mouths and uteruses closed) and hidden (their hair and bodies covered and cloaked). She encourages women to “Alter / the altared women” (80-81) – the female religious icons, like the Virgin Mary, that appear on the altars of Catholic Churches – and challenge the negative images of women they represent.

Like Castillo, Mora resists the Catholic Church’s obsession with controlling female sexuality. The Catholic Church perpetuates the virgin/whore dichotomy by presenting two primary female icons, the Virgin Mary, associated with purity, Divine Conception, and submission to God’s will, and Eve, associated with lasciviousness, sin, and disobedience of God’s will. These Catholic female icons were integrated into the Mexican culture in the form of La Virgen de Guadalupe and La Malinche. Mora presents a more empowered vision of La Malinche who reprimands her devotees for insulting her: “I hear / prostitute, puta, hooker, bitch. / Try saying Mamá. / Watch your tongues” (129-32). Mora re-envisioned the female Mexican cultural icon to present a more positive image of women and challenges the patriarchy of the

Catholic Church that reinforces the degradation of female sexuality in its slandering of La Malinche as a whore.

In addition to criticizing the patriarchy of the Catholic Church, Castillo also documents how the patriarchy operates within the global economic system to control and abuse women, particularly Chicanas. As the U.S. moves most of their manufacturing facilities to less industrialized nations, such as Mexico, Mejicanas and Chicanas are exploited for the benefit of a capitalist system. Castillo states, “For very little pay and with little regard to health and safety conditions and no benefits for maquiladoras and other low skilled workers, multinational investors can produce more by spending less and making bigger profits from world consumers” (*Massacre* 43). Castillo emphasizes that poor women working in the maquiladoras are the most vulnerable. Not only are these women exploited by multinational corporations as she notes, but they are also the target of violent sexual crimes and murder.⁸ Pressed with dire economic necessity, “Mejicanas and Chicanas are the majority who serve in low skilled labor jobs on both sides of the border” (Castillo, *Massacre* 43). And those Chicanas who do retaliate by going on strike or demanding protection through unions, often run a great risk. For example, although the Watsonville Women’s Strike of 1985 in which 1,600 workers went on strike against the Watsonville Canning and Frozen Food Company was successful and the women gained the wages and health benefits they deserved, it highlighted the tense reality Chicanas face (Castillo, *Massacre* 56). Castillo explains, “as women their duty was to maintain two jobs at once-with little compensation for either-at work and at home. Women who were married sometimes received little, if any, emotional support from home for their participation in the strike” (*Massacre* 56). If they retaliate, Chicanas face the economic challenge of a cessation in income and health benefits that affects their children, as well as the emotional challenge of non-support from family members.

Castillo describes the brutal economic reality Chicanas face in the poem “Women Don’t Riot.” Castillo begins her poem with vivid descriptions of the dangerous conditions in which lower-class women around the world perform manual labour: “Women don’t riot / not in maquilas in Malaysia, Mexico, or Korea / not in sweatshops in New York or El Paso / They don’t revolt / in kitchens, laundries, or nurseries / Not by the hundreds or thousands, changing / sheets in hotels or in laundries / when scalded by hot water / not in restaurants where they clean and clean / and clean their hands raw” (1-9). In this passage Castillo highlights not only the physical injuries women suffer and the endlessness and repetition of their work, but also the magnitude of the number of women subjected to such miserable working conditions. She shows how the capitalist system physically and emotionally abuses women, rendering them almost incapable of fighting back: “We women are sterilized, have more children / than they can feed / don’t speak the official language / want things they see on TV / would like to own a TV— / women who were molested as children / raped / beaten / harassed, which means / every last one sooner or later / women who’ve defended themselves / and women who can’t or don’t know how / we don’t — won’t ever rise up in arms” (“Women Don’t Riot” 20-32). By delineating a long list of physical and sexual abuses that many women endure, Castillo underscores not only how wide-spread such abuse is, but also how vulnerable and powerless women are to resist or defend themselves against

⁸ Although Castillo published her work before the maquiladora murders were exposed and under investigation the reality of these grisly crimes further bolsters her argument about the vulnerability and exploitation of these women. Many Mejitana and Chicana scholars and journalists have since written about the maquiladora murders. See for example Alicia Gaspar de Alba’s *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera* (2010) and Diana Washington Valdez’s *Cosecha de mujeres: Safari en el desierto mexicano* (2005).

such acts of violence. In light of the fact that many women are either unable or do not know how to defend themselves, Castillo urges all people, not just women and other minorities, to unite to fight against injustice. She states, we have, “so much endless misery in common / that must stop / not for one woman or every woman / but for the sake of us all / . . . / Today it was her. Next time who?” (44-47, 57). Castillo ends her poem with this haunting line startling the reader into realizing that in a capitalist system any one can be targeted in order to make more profit.

For Castillo writing is a method of (what Paulo Friere refers to as) *conscientización*⁹ or raising social awareness to create change. She states, “The work of the conscientized writer” is to “remind ourselves and others that nothing is separate from anything else” (*Massacre* 170). By realizing our interconnectedness to others, we refuse to tolerate senseless injustice and destruction. Echoing Castillo, Mora also calls us to join in solidarity with other women to resist the patriarchal, capitalist system. In the poem “Let Us Hold Hands,” Mora writes, “Let us hold hands / with the woman who holds her sister in Bosnia, Detroit, Somalia / Jacksonville, Guatemala, Burma, Juárez, and Cincinnati / with the woman who confronts the glare of eyes and gunbarrels / yet rises in protest in Yoruba, English, Polish, Spanish, Chinese, Urdu” (20-24). Both Mora and Castillo use poetry to advocate for female empowerment and solidarity among women.

The intersection of theory, criticism, and poetry is clearly evident in the literary work of Mora and Castillo. Heavily influenced by Anzaldúa, both of these writers integrate these phenomena. Their theoretical and critical essays include poetic elements and are enhanced by their larger collections of poetry. They bolster their abstract theoretical concepts and critical socio-historical commentary with specific examples from daily life in their poetry. By integrating lived experience and reflections of the real world with theory Chicanas move from intellectual reflection to social praxis. Their work demonstrates how poetry can be used as a subversive tool to resist the dominant culture and a method by which those on the margins create space to articulate their own experience. Anzaldúa, Mora, and Castillo realize the powerful political implications of poetry and urge the necessity of acknowledging poetry as a valid praxis for scholarship. Poetry serves as a link between Chicanas and other women of colour and through which they are able to stand in solidarity with one another. By combining theory and criticism with poetic praxis, Mora and Castillo facilitate social change in the academy and the larger world.

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Roll a Hard Six: Losing Your Noodle in Raymond Federman's Double or Nothing

Raymond Federman's *Double or Nothing* is a convoluted representation of the mentally-unstable mind existing as a series of six characters that are at once separate and conjoined: the horrors and traumatic events of the narrative past dismantle the unified subject into a series of schizophrenic sub-personalities, parts of the destabilized Author's psyche, existing as separate fragments that eventually collide. Further, the imaginary room emerges as the Fifth Person, promising, but failing, to be a central stabilizer of the other fractured selves. Finally, the design of the text echoes the patterns of the traumatized mind, illustrating the inability of a narrative to construct a stable, unified subject and demonstrating the inadequacy of traditional narrative forms. The text, with its obliterations, cropped phrases, and pictorial manifestations, becomes the Sixth Person. However, in the end, the text shows that the past cannot be erased, explained, or reversed; neither can the experimental nature of the novel reach beyond the traumatized, schizoid subject to represent the horrors of the past that caused the Author's psychotic breach. Federman has rolled a hard six that will repeatedly fragment and unite, just as the traumatic past continues to repeat itself as one that defies representation.

key words: surfiction, Holocaust, concrete novel, psychology.

Raymond Federman's 1971 novel, *Double or Nothing*, is a work of avant-garde fiction, or, as Federman himself calls it, surfiction.¹ Although critical focus has been given to both form and content of the novel in terms of its commentary on production aesthetics, its place as autobiography, and its postmodern approach to identity, there has been little consideration of Federman's convoluted representation of the mentally-unstable mind existing as a series of six characters² that are at once separate and conjoined. The horrors and traumatic events of the narrative past³ dismantle the unified subject into a series of schizophrenic sub-personalities. The Reporter, the Noodler, and Boris⁴ are all parts of the destabilized Author's⁵ psyche, existing as separate fragments that eventually collide. Further, the room that the Noodler imagines emerges

¹ Federman defines "surfiction" as "fiction that tries to explore the possibilities of fiction . . . that challenges the tradition that governs it" ("Surfiction" 7).

² "Federman began to detect that actually there were not two voices in the book, but several potential others" (Oppermann and Oppermann 51).

³ The experience of the Nazi concentration camps is the main traumatic event. The remembrance of, and inability to comprehend, such an experience further traumatizes the subject.

⁴ These characters appear under various names in the text. I shall refer to the First Person as the Reporter, the Second Person as the Noodler, and the Third Person as Boris.

⁵ I will continue to write Author, with initial capital, when I am referring to the character, the Fourth Person, to avoid confusion with Federman as author.

as the Fifth Person, promising, but failing, to be a central stabilizer of the other fractured selves. Finally, the design of the text echoes the patterns of the traumatized mind, illustrating the inability of a narrative to construct a stable, unified subject and demonstrating the inadequacy of traditional narrative forms. The text, with its obliterations, cropped phrases, and pictorial manifestations,⁶ becomes the Sixth Person. By the end of the narrative, the inability to forget, or give meaning to, the trauma results in the characters' collusion into a blurry mess of dysfunctional multiplicity that is doomed to relive the fracturing just as the traumatic events of the past are relived in the unstable mind.

In the prologue of *Double or Nothing*, appropriately entitled "THIS IS NOT THE BEGINNING" (0),⁷ an unknown character – alluded to at the end of the novel as "The AUTHOR (that is to say to fourth person)" (np) – provides the frame story that introduces the reader to the three persons in the novel who form concentric circles of its schizoid self: the Reporter, the Noodler, and Boris. Initially, the Author appears to function as the external authority of the main text and as other to its characters.⁸ At the end of the novel, the Author reappears to remind the reader that the fiction has been constructed in every possible sense (listing the possibilities on the final page of the book) by him.⁹ Further, the Author reaffirms his right to separate himself from his own creation and avows his totalitarian control over the subject(s).¹⁰ Neither the narrative nor the characters can exist without him, allegedly external and supposedly authoritative, if he is not part of the fractured subject. Presumably, then, the Author should be able to recognize and delineate the mental incapacitation of the trio of the first three persons.

However, the Author of the prologue and end materials is not external, but is part of the same fractured subject as the Reporter, the Noodler, and Boris, and his authority over the narrative is dubious because the other sub-personalities are equally capable of taking control. Federman claims that reality "exists only in its fictionalized version. The experience of life gains meaning only in its recounted form" ("Surfiction" 8). This recounted form is the Author's own narrative. Thus, the main narrative is autobiographical for the Author, despite his tacit denial in the prologue. The Author attempts to separate himself from his traumatic past and the destabilized sub-personalities of his own psyche that are resultant of that unarticulated, and therefore nonsensical, past. The Author, rather than being an external other, is very much part of the "US" and "WE" that the Noodler repeatedly mentions. This is consistent with Serpil Oppermann and Michael Oppermann's claim that Federman's writing is "a process of creating potentially endless editions to the authorial self" (45).¹¹ The Author in *Double or Nothing* is one edition of the narrative self. Nevertheless, the Author tries desperately to distance himself (note that he is the *Fourth* Person) from the narrative and gain control over the fragmented sub-personalities through the act of writing. This is confirmed by Federman who affirms that "rather than being the stable image of daily life, fiction will be in a perpetual state of redoubling itself" ("Surfiction" 11). The Noodler's circling back to the start of his ramblings about the room at the

⁶ The text frequently refuses to follow the conventions of prose, syntactically, grammatically, and visually.

⁷ Note the peculiar pagination of the novel. The initial pages are paginated with increasing numbers of zeroes, before the Noodler's text begins at page 1.

⁸ For a discussion of the author being part of the book, and the relationship between text and author, see Roland Barthes's essay "The Death of the Author."

⁹ For a discussion on possibilities, potentialities, and the need for one to act to create realism, see Jean-Paul Sartre's lecture "Existentialism Is a Humanism."

¹⁰ The plural applies if one considers the three persons as separate subjects.

¹¹ Here, they mean Federman as authorial self.

end of the novel indicates that the Author (and his sub-personalities) is (are) doomed to repeat pathologically this self-fracturing *ad infinitum*.

Separate from, and yet part of, the Author, the First Person¹² in the main narrative is revealed as the Recorder, a “stubborn, middle-aged man” (*DON 0*)¹³ who “trying to be as faithful and precise as possible” (*DON 000*) documents the Noodler’s story, which the Author claims is “simply a matter of keeping track of” (*DON 00*). If the Recorder is a separate subject, his presence poses several questions. This is the only mention of the Recorder, for he becomes silent, not interfering with the action being recorded for fear of corrupting the so-called truth of the narrative. He is simply a recorder. Why, then, is this First Person required? Why does the Reporter exist at all? Why can the Author not accomplish this function himself? Part of the answer lies in emotional distancing. The inclusion of the Recorder provides one degree of separation from the main story, removing the Author further from the association with the traumatic past and the psychological breakdown of himself as a singular subject. The inclusion of the Reporter also helps the Author to dissuade the reader from believing that the text is autobiographical. However, as the reader is constantly reminded by the Noodler, “you can’t avoid the facts” (*DON 181*), suggesting that, in fact, the Reporter is one of the Author’s fractured selves. As is typical of schizophrenic subjects, the Author is “driven to search for the self yet liable to destroy the self in the act of searching” (Sass 23). The Reporter’s sub-personality appears to offer protection to the Author. Unfortunately, he is equally unstable and susceptible to the traumatic past. Moreover, he has no control over the narrative, for that becomes the task of the Noodler.

Why does the Reporter (or the Author, for that matter) want to do this reporting? The description of the Recorder as trying to faithfully record any story, his own or someone else’s, reminds the reader that there cannot be one truth or one past. Yet he needs to hear the narrativized account because it is the only way of giving meaning to the past that has separated him from the Author. The Reporter’s faithfulness to the Noodler’s story is paramount, for, as the Noodler states, there should be “Nothing to distract you. Complete concentration. I begin to understand what they mean by CONCENTRATION (concentration camps)” (*DON 67*). The trauma reasserts itself, not to be forgotten, even though it threatens to destroy the already fractured subject. And just as there is no direct textual connection between the Author and the Reporter, nowhere in the text does the Noodler converse with the Reporter. The Reporter has access because he and the Noodler are fragments of the Author’s fractured self. The perspectives of the Reporter and the Noodler have become completely intertwined. Referring to a schizophrenic mental fracturing of self, Louis A. Sass writes, “the decentered or fragmented self can be no less imaginary, and no less a product of what one might call the illusions of the *cogito*, than its opposite” (3). The Noodler inadvertently confirms this theory, insisting,

TO THINK IS TO SUFFER
TO SUFFER IS TO THINK. (*DON 144*)¹⁴

¹² A first person narrator tells the story from his own point of view. Yet this Reporter is supposed to narrate from a third person perspective, through the Noodler, who is the Second Person. Federman is noodling with traditional story-telling methods.

¹³ *DON* stands for *Double or Nothing*.

¹⁴ Here is one example of the refusal of the text to follow prose-writing convention. The chiasma is presented in full capitals and separated from the text.

Realizing the futility of his task, the Reporter hides himself behind the Noodler, just as the Author hides behind the text and his many selves.

The most active sub-personality is the Second Person, the Noodler, who moves the Author another degree away from the narrative while stepping closer to the cause of the psychotic break (the traumatic past) that he will confront in his fictionalized story. Typical schizophrenic tendencies are more readily apparent in the Noodler than in the Recorder or the Author. He is “paranoiac, irresponsible” (*DON 0*),¹⁵ an “inveterate gambler” (*DON 00*), obsessive compulsive (evidenced by his constant making of lists and attention to minutia), and emotionally stunted, unable to move past September thirtieth and face the reality/fictionality of the room on October first. The Noodler himself is trapped between the desire to bury deeply his traumatic experience (resulting in permanent mental instability) and his drive to find meaning by narrativizing it, which has the potential to either heal or deepen the psychological rift. The Noodler feels the threat of disintegration – “we must forget about that about the Jews the Camps” (*DON 181*) – and acknowledges it is “me again . . . Devour” (*DON 188*). Yet he also asserts

That's what makes life bearable

and to think of

to talk about it

to get it off your chest helps. (*DON 24*)¹⁶

The Noodler's dilemma illustrates the fear facing the Author: the disintegration of his mind. The Noodler takes up this fear for the Author and the Reporter, and tries to filter it through *his* narrative, onto the Third Person, Boris, providing another degree of separation from the traumatic past. However, he is unsuccessful as his mental instability is exacerbated by the logistics of being in the room for a year and by planning out Boris's story, and by doing so mere hours before he is to be isolated in the room. The Noodler is extremely susceptible to destruction because he is closer to the narrative than the Author or the Reporter.

Boris, the Third Person, becomes the main character of the narrative that the Noodler plans to (but never does) create. The Author tells the reader that Boris is a shy, nineteen-year-old immigrant from France whose parents and two sisters are killed in a concentration camp (*DON 0*) during World War II. These details are quite specific, presumably mirroring the Author's life, and consequently, those of the Reporter and the Noodler. Curiously, the Author writes that Boris has to “wait and see how he is going to be invented . . . to submit to the second person's imagination” (*DON 00000*), as if Boris exists before he is created. Furthermore, the Author insists that Boris can “disagree with [the Noodler], argue with him [but] the young man (very unsure of himself) has really no voice, at least initially” (*DON 00000*), speculating that Boris, at the very least, is living in the Noodler's mind before the Noodler writes the story.¹⁷ Subsequently, in thinking

¹⁵His paranoia is legitimized, in part, by the fact that he is being closely observed by the Reporter, whom he would experience as an external character. That is, the Noodler does not realize, as least initially, his connection to the Author or the Reporter.

¹⁶ This passage is an example of the Noodler's inability to contain the text within conventional lines; the breaking of lines emphasize his doubt about the text's meaning and its therapeutic use.

¹⁷ Of course, this is not unusual. Characters are often described as existing in an author's mind before writing

about Boris, the Noodler writes that he “Can’t use his real name” (*DON* 19), suggesting that this Third Person is or was a real person, perhaps the Noodler himself, perhaps even the Author or the Reporter.

More intriguing, of a character that is never actually created, is Boris’s self-realization prior to his creation. The Noodler writes, “[Boris] suddenly (almost as in a dream) became aware of himself . . . even though he did not recognize himself, it made him aware of himself at some different stage of life, of being someone else than what he was before the camp” (*DON* 136). Taking his identity a step further, Boris realizes that the character who will exist in the narrative as “Boris” (and who exists in the Noodler’s mind and is known to the Author) is somehow different than he used to be, prior to the traumatic experience that has fractured the subject into several sub-personalities. The Noodler claims, “Boris has a rather fuzzy idea of himself in his mind, and this is why he is so unstable” (*DON* 137). This suggests that Boris’s instability results from the lack of his character development in the text; he is an incomplete character in the Noodler’s mind. This shifts the focus of mental instability away from the Noodler, the Reporter, and the Author, and places it on Boris’s inability to recognize himself as a fictional singular subject that has yet to be created. By this point, the subject is completely fractured and unstable.

From the beginning of the narrative, the Noodler has a great deal of difficulty maintaining a line of distinction between his self and what he considers to be his created character, Boris. He aligns what will be his daily task of writing (and surviving) with the past/present/future life of Boris. According to the Author, the Noodler “decided to limit himself to the first year only so as to have ‘the time of the story’ correspond ‘to his 365 days in the room’” (*DON* 000). Early in the narrative, the Noodler is subtle about their connection. For example, after explaining his own involvement in a poker game, he writes, “He could do the same Have the same thing happen to his fifty bucks” (*DON* 28). And when thinking about the possible plots for his story, the Noodler admits, “I suppose I’ll have him do muchthesomething as I did” (*DON* 31). Such redundancies between an author’s experience and that of his character are not unusual.

However, even though the Noodler acknowledges that “it’s just a matter of not getting confused with what’s real and what’s not real” (*DON* 104) – and what’s Boris and what’s not Boris – the instability of his own self cannot help but be confused and he admits, “Boris will do the same eventually since he and I will coincide. It’s inevitable with us” (*DON* 189). Thereafter, the Noodler starts using first person plural pronouns throughout the narrative, collapsing the distinction between his and Boris’s thoughts, actions, and personas. Michael James Rizza indicates that in *Double or Nothing* for the “borders fixed between me and not-me, the line is porous simultaneously receding and advancing, shifting in accord with the various degrees of separation” (4). The Noodler is aware of this merging of himself with Boris, and sees it as problematic:

people
will
start
identifying me with him

that’s

commences. But the Author’s meaning is suggestive of Boris’s existence as a subject that is independent of the Noodler’s mind.

dangerous. (*DON* 48)¹⁸

Why the Noodler feels it is dangerous to be identified with Boris, by others, is unclear. Perhaps he fears that it will lead people to suspect his mental instability; it may also be part of his paranoia. Perhaps the Noodler's attempt to separate himself from the traumatic past through fictionalization will be undone if the reader learns that the narrative is autobiographical. The reader will be able to break the mirror through which the Noodler transfixes his story onto Boris. The Noodler writes, "If you look at yourself in the mirror as though you were somebody else . . . you can observe your own suffering" (*DON* 136), just as the Author, Reporter, and Noodler see their suffering through Boris. Furthermore, Boris's self-realization through the mirror collapses this externalization. The Noodler writes that Boris "sees himself in the mirror . . . A disgusting picture of himself" (*DON* 134), but, by the next page, it is the Noodler in the room, looking in the mirror. The distinction between Boris and the Noodler completely disintegrates.

Just as Boris seems to realize he has an identity of his own before he is created, he seems to have an awareness that his identity is unstable and collapsing with the Noodler's. As Sass reports is typical with schizophrenics, Boris "no longer feels himself master of his own thoughts" (4) and "may begin to feel as if his sensations and thoughts originated outside his own body or mind . . . or to feel actions, sensations, or emotions are somehow being imposed upon him" (16). Boris, as a creation of the Noodler, does originate outside his own body and mind. This is a clever manipulation on Federman's part, making commentary on the act of autobiographical writing as an attempt to separate the self from the real, while illuminating the failure of that separation, particularly when that self is traumatized.

Ultimately, the Noodler's and Boris's coupled identity incorporate those of the Author and the Reporter into the unstable, decentered subject. The Noodler simply writes,

you
he
we & the other too. (*DON* 129)¹⁹

The Noodler, at some point, recognizes that the four persons are, in fact, one subject, for when he considers isolating himself in the room he writes,

I TOO WILL LOCK MYSELF me and myself
me you I he all of us together ALONE. (*DON* 92)

Federman himself indicates that he intends the characters to be psychologically-unstable co-entities: "the people of fiction, the fictitious beings, will also no longer be well-made-characters who carry with them a fixed identity, a stable set of social and psychological attributes . . . [but] changeable, as unstable, as illusory . . . as the discourse that makes them" ("Surfiction" 12). This makes sense in context of the social instability and traumatic events experienced by

¹⁸ The collapse of the Noodler's mind, and his increasing separation from people and reality is illustrated by the shape of this text: the words disconnected from each other, "people" distanced from "me," the possibility of "identifying me" as being insane; the danger he feels, justifiably or not.

¹⁹ The Noodler's language has been reduced to its simplest form here, consisting merely of the sub-personalities. The text's reduction of language and its self-conscious consideration of the psyche is reminiscent of Samuel Beckett's reconfiguration of representation (see Davies).

Federman, and by the concept of identity by the literary culture of his time.²⁰ Although Oppermann and Oppermann suggest, “In multiplying his self into an infinite potential of fictional selves, Federman tries to come to terms with his past which becomes subject to a constant process of hermeneutical exploration” (60), this exploration seems doomed to fail in *Double or Nothing*. In connecting his collapsing self with the potentially-healing text, the Noodler writes (in a falling, arced line of single words),

I
 mean
 nothing
 in
 the
 past
 in
 fact

 the
 whole
 story
 is
 a
 break
 with the past (*DON* 48)²¹

and he repeats the word “HELP” fifteen times across page 78. However, before the Noodler can even begin his isolation, he, the Author, the Reporter, and Boris collapse into one and dissolve into nothing as the novel comes to a close before October first, and the narrative terminates without resolving anything. These four persons, fragmented by a trauma-induced psychological breakdown, collapse into one dysfunctional subject destined to repeatedly fragment and converge as long as the physical text of *Double or Nothing* exists.

In addition to these four persons, a Fifth Person emerges in the narrative. The room that the Noodler intends to inhabit for the 365 days is the center of all of the characters and the narrative despite the fact that no room exists; the room, as the Fifth Person, acts as an imaginary place of orientation for the fragmented sub-personalities. As Leslie Doris Trueman writes, “Even in the midst of psychic disintegration, schizophrenics have visions and dreams of the center, a symbol of wholeness” (ii). In *Double or Nothing*, the room becomes that center, a place “of self-realization” (Trueman iv). Indeed, since the subject cannot acquire a stable identity within his world, the room becomes the potential place of psychological and physical safety, a place in which he would be safe from external threats and from reminders of the traumatic past. As the Noodler writes, “THE NEED TO ESCAPE – extremely important” (*DON* 96). But even by just thinking about the room, the Noodler begins to see the problems with this safety mechanism. He

²⁰According to Sass, the “loss of the sense of volition and activity or the self’s unity, discreteness, or consistency over time” (1) are symptomatic of “the imagination of the twentieth-century avant-garde” (2).

²¹Indeed, this line physically breaks from the text, as it reveals to its readers that the line between truth and fiction is blurry, and that meaning is not only obfuscated, but multiplicitous.

ponders that people are “scared shit of their loneliness . . . they lock themselves in a crumby room . . . and try to spit out their lives . . . on paper, thinking that this way they will exorcise their inner-self” (*DON* 137). Here, the Noodler all but admits that Boris is his inner-self, meant to be exorcised in the room. And on some level, the Noodler realizes that the room is, in fact, part of his (and the Author's and the Reporter's and Boris's) psyche, stating, “Tomorrow morning that's it you enter into the nights of your skull . . . into the chambers of the mind” (*DON* 4). The imaginary room is the Fifth Person who keeps the traumatic past and, therefore, the key to either psychological re-integration or total destruction.

Although Linda Hutcheon states that “the narrating figure is the centre of internal reference” (51)²² which, in the novel, is the Noodler, the room becomes the potential source of internal reference for the decentered, fractured subject. As the Noodler avers, “the Room is at the core of the whole thing” (*DON* 101). Richard Pearce's assessment of surfiction supports this conclusion, for he states that “the narrator is no longer situated between the subject and the reader, he no longer stands on a fixed vantage, and he no longer encloses the subject within the frame of his visual imagination” (48). Indeed, the Noodler, as narrator, wants to remove the subject (and its fractured parts) from his imagination by entering the room. He states, “October 1st and goodbye [sic] world” (*DON* 4). The room, if it were entered, would become the internal self (the central mind) and the external manifestation of the mind (as a physical place) that together provide what Sass refers to as “a systemized delusion that overcomes the chaos and disintegration” (17). The room, as it is anticipated by the Noodler, provides an escape from the outside world, real or imagined, the impending self-isolation potentially protecting the subject from reality and from the past trauma.

Nevertheless, the room remains a delusion that cannot keep the past or mental illness at bay indefinitely because the novel never moves past September thirtieth. The room never has the chance to perform its potential role as a healer or a stabilizer because it, like the other characters, has a multiplicity that is dangerous:

the camp
the room
together (*DON* 129).

The isolation provided by the room might satisfy the Noodler's insistence on having “Nothing to do with the outside world” (*DON* 37), but he admits, “it's there in the background and will always be there Can't avoid it even if you want to THE CAMPS” (*DON* 39). The room, therefore, is haunted by the traumatic event that resulted in the fracturing of the subject. Even though the Noodler tries to convince himself that it is “JUST ANOTHER ROOM – a room. without a meaning. just a wasted room” (*DON* 22), there will always be “moments of panic” (*DON* 9). In fact, there is “A STATE OF SIEGE SIEGE IN A ROOM (!)” (*DON* 4). The room, as the Fifth Person, is just as unstable as the other sub-personalities.

Furthermore, the first page of the Noodler's story visually identifies the room as the all-enclosing container, the page being encompassed by the four walls of the imaginary room from the beginning of the narrative. The room's design, as imagined by the Noodler, mirrors mental instability, with boxes of noodles symbolizing *the* noodle, as well as the potential for the collapsing of the noodles (the fractured selves) onto each other, just as the boxes could physically

²² Here Hutcheon refers to *Double or Nothing* as a narcissistic narrative, “narcissistic” being a “descriptor of engaged self-reflection” (xi).

collapse onto the Noodler. Anne-Kathrin Wielgosz concurs stating that “the spatial displacement of noodle boxes demonstrates not merely a ‘removal of a thing from its place’ (‘displacement’), but a complete collapsing of (the concept of) stability” (103). The room itself suggests the inner conflicts with which the Noodler is wrestling: his obsessive repetitions, his lists and numbering, his fears and paranoia, his inability to carry out a plan of action. The contingencies for which the Noodler plans on September thirtieth illuminate the subject’s traumatized mind, while threatening to reduce the mind to nothing. And because the Noodler never enters the room, none of the decentered selves overcome their psychological disintegration before they are obliterated by the ending of the text itself and made into a catalogue of topics at the end of the book, an act of psychological compartmentalization (and disengagement) by the Author.

Just as the first page of the narrative reflects the room as an unstable mind, the entire text reinforces the representation of the unwell mind and the traumatic disturbances that Federman constructs in his narratives, and should be considered one of the parts of the fragmented schizoid mind, the Sixth Person. Pearce agrees, stating, “The medium, instead of being suppressed, asserts itself as an independent and vital part of the subject” (56). The use of the text as part of the multiple subject functions in at least two important ways. First, the text, as the Sixth Person, becomes what Hutcheon calls “the omniscient ‘authorial’ narration . . . becomes a potentially useful self-reflecting device . . . as a mediator between reader and novel world” (51). Since the other narrators within the text (the Author, the Reporter, and the Noodler) are mentally unstable, the text asserts itself as encompassing the narrative and its narrators, “expos[ing] the *fictionality of reality*” (“Surfiction” 7). But the text is itself unstable,²³ from a traditional perspective. The reader cannot read this text as one traditionally reads fiction. The experimentation with narrative perspective, subjectivity, linguistic fragmentation, and visual manipulation; the focus on the creation of the text; and the placement of the text as a character itself, illuminate Federman’s position that “To create fiction is, in fact, a way to abolish reality, and especially to abolish the notion that reality is truth” (“Surfiction” 8). If the text is a fictional character, then mimetic representation of reality is impossible. Indeed, “The typological pulverization of language points to the fact that the historical truth defies representation” (Oppermann and Oppermann 47). This is certainly the case in *Double or Nothing*. The narrative past that has caused the fracturing of the subject into six continues to defy representation despite the efforts of the first five persons, and despite the existence, and as a result, of the fragmented text.

Second, the text functions as a link between the Author and his text, illuminating the inadequacy of traditional narrative and textual production. If, as Oppermann and Oppermann suggest, “the novel turns into a kind of dialogue between the writer and his text” (46),²⁴ then one can consider that the Author is working through his own traumatic memory within this non-traditional book form. The visual presentation of the stories in the novel reflect the Author’s (and consequently, the Reporter’s, the Noodler’s, and Boris’) crisis of representation of that which cannot or should not or will not be represented: the nonsensical horrors of Nazi concentration camps. Indeed, Wielgosz states that the inadequacy of the text, at times, prevents the Noodler from writing anything at all: “For the Second Person the concepts of past and temporality must reveal themselves and can only be designated as (blank) space” (93). These blank spaces represent “the crisis, the obsolescence of history and temporality” (Wielgosz 93), and, I would argue, the obsolescence of the singular, stable subject. Furthermore, if, as Oppermann and

²³ Wielgosz refers to “the decomposition, the destabilization, and the distortion of the conventionally prescribed positioning of words on the page” (92).

²⁴ Again, they are referring to Federman as author.

Oppermann suggest, “The complex interplay of narrative voices mirrors the novel’s mode of production” (51), the converse may also be true: the novel’s mode of production mirrors the multiplicity and instability of the narrative voices that represent a single subject, the Author.

Double or Nothing is a complex representation of the mentally-ill mind fractured into at least six persons and re-assembled into an unstable multiple subject that is ultimately unable to find a path of recovery through textual representation. The Reporter, who barely ekes out an existence in the text, the Noodler who cannot step past his obsessions and compulsions beyond September thirtieth, Boris whose confused immigrant/survivor identity cannot recognize itself, and the imaginary room functioning as the centrality of the sub-personalities all succumb to a common dissolution on the page, which itself, as the concrete re-enactment of the Authors’ psyche, fails to restore the singularity of the traumatized subject. The past cannot be erased, explained, or reversed; neither can the experimental nature of the novel reach beyond the traumatized, schizoid subject to represent the horrors of the past that caused the Author’s psychotic breach. Federman has rolled a hard six that will repeatedly fragment and unite, just as the traumatic past continues to repeat itself as one that defies representation.

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Breaking the Hard Limits: Romance, Pornography, and the Question of Genre in the Fifty Shades Trilogy

The *Fifty Shades* series has brought erotic fiction to a broader and more mainstream audience than ever before. In its wake, a number of erotic romance series have achieved unprecedented popularity, such as Sylvia Day's *Crossfire* series and Lisa Renee Jones' *Inside Out* series. These books do not fit comfortably into the genres of romance or pornography: rather, they fuse the romantic and pornographic together. This locates the multiple climaxes of pornography within the overarching emotional climax of romance and creates a structure that is both finite and infinite, allowing the books to create both instant and delayed gratification. This article examines *The Sheik* as a textual forebear to *Fifty Shades* before moving on to examine the ways in which romance and pornography are fused, overcoming the limits of serialization in romance, and creating a romantic "pornotopia."

key words: romance, pornography, *Fifty Shades*, erotic romance, genre.

"I thought you didn't make love. I thought you fucked – hard."
... 'I can make an exception, or maybe combine the two, we'll see.'
Fifty Shades of Grey

EL James' *Fifty Shades* series occupies a liminal space at the nexus of several genres. If we follow Northrop Frye, who argued that "the study of genres has to be founded on the study of conventions" (96), then it becomes clear that *Fifty Shades* contains conventions drawn from several different genres. Its original incarnation was as *Master of the Universe*, fan fiction of Stephenie Meyer's young adult saga *Twilight*, and *Twilight*'s protagonists Edward and Bella are clearly recognizable in *Fifty Shades*' Christian and Anastasia, in terms of both physical appearance and personality (albeit through an interpretive lens). However, while the characters are borrowed from young adult fiction, the conventions are not. Instead, *Fifty Shades* is an example of a modern form which draws on conventions from both pornography and the romance novel, despite the fact that these two forms are not particularly compatible. In many ways, *Fifty Shades* is, as one Amazon reviewer puts it, "Edward and Bella meet the story of O" (Iccilliyah), locating its romantic protagonists in a pornographic setting. This article will explore what it means to fuse the genres of romance and pornography, which have both conflicting structures and ideological underpinnings.

Fusing Romance and Pornography: *The Sheik* as precursor to *Fifty Shades*

Fifty Shades is not the first text of its type, nor is it the first text to attempt to co-opt pornographic tropes into a romantic narrative. EM Hull's 1919 blockbuster novel *The Sheik*, in which heroine Diana is captured, raped by, and eventually falls in love with sheik hero Ahmed, is a fascinating text to read alongside *Fifty Shades*. Like *Fifty Shades*, it was incredibly popular, and engendered considerable cultural panic about the effect it would have on the women reading it. Billie Melman writes that *The Sheik* was thought of as "pornographic literature, manufactured by female writers for the consumption of a sex-starved mass female audience" (92-93): something which is not dissimilar to the "mommy/mummy porn" moniker that has mockingly been applied to the *Fifty Shades* series. If we adopt this way of thinking about both texts, their romantic elements become a "cover." The implication is that their real attraction is the titillating content, with the romantic plotline offering a veneer of plausible deniability (apparently, in this mode of thinking, not a very good one).

This invocation of the "sex-starved mass female audience" is telling: *The Sheik* heralded and was a product of a discursive shift around sex. As Anna Clark has noted, a growing acceptance for heterosexual female pleasure in the early twentieth century was one of the hallmarks of sexual modernity (169-74). As the popularity of *The Sheik* and the response of female fans to Rudolph Valentino in the film adaptation shows, this was a text that spoke to this discursive change, in the same way that *Fifty Shades* has both sparked and been part of a growing critical discussion around female sexual agency, consent, and pleasure. The cultural conversations around *The Sheik* and *Fifty Shades* are, in fact, strikingly similar, worrying both that the texts will perpetuate negative ideas about women and sex and that women will seek to emulate the texts in their own romantic relationships, which might either lead them into dangerous relationships or make them unsatisfied with the ones that they have (concerns which speak to both the romantic and pornographic elements of both texts).

Both are texts that are intrinsically of their times, evident in the ways they seek to combine romantic narratives and pornographic ones. As Deborah Lutz writes, *The Sheik* "made fast the chain that links the erotic historical [romance] with pornography" (9). The heroine Diana's repeated rapes by Ahmed are reminiscent of nineteenth century pornographic texts like *The Lustful Turk*, in which white women were sexually enslaved by a racially othered hero (Lutz 9). However, unlike *The Lustful Turk*, *The Sheik* is recuperated into the romance plot. Diana and Ahmed fall in love, marry, and he is conveniently revealed to be European instead of Arabic, mitigating any fears of miscegenation (Teo 87-109). Karen Chow describes it as a "steamy book with a bourgeois ending" – words just as easily applied to *Fifty Shades* (76).

However, this is not to say that *Fifty Shades* is simply a revision of *The Sheik*. They are not simply the same cultural phenomenon, articulated one hundred years apart. While there are similarities – both, after all, are steamy books with bourgeois endings – there are key differences, both in the cultural conversation around the texts and the texts themselves. It is the latter in which I am most interested in this article. I agree with Lutz when she argues that *The Sheik* is essentially a romantic rewriting of *The Lustful Turk*: it is a romance novel which incorporates and romanticises pornographic tropes for a female audience. The *Fifty Shades* series, however, does something different. Instead of incorporating and rewriting tropes from one genre into the other, I contend that it attempts to fuse the two generic frameworks together.

Fifty Shades as Romance

Fifty Shades is often described as erotic romance. It contains elements of both the romantic and the erotic, with its focus on both the emotional and sexual components of Anastasia and Christian's relationship. It is hardly the first text in this mode, but it fits within the label. So, when discussing *Fifty Shades* and genre, why not just say that *Fifty Shades* is erotic romance and end there?

The reason why we cannot stop our discussion there is because *Fifty Shades* represents a different form of the erotic romance. Whether it solely drove this innovation in form is questionable: Sylvia Day's *Crossfire*, for example, follows the same narrative form, and the first instalment, *Bared to You*, was published on the same day as *Fifty Shades of Grey*. However, *Fifty Shades* has certainly popularized this new form, and has led to the publication of many texts in the same mode. *Fifty Shades*, *Crossfire*, and similar texts¹ are not simply romances with an unusually high number of sex scenes: rather, they represent a form of erotic romance in which the structures of romance and pornography are fused together.

There are key structural differences between the romance novel and pornographic texts, which makes this development somewhat remarkable. I will begin by exploring the structures of the romance novel.

There are multiple definitions of the romance novel extant, but there are two which are the most commonly cited. The first was formulated by the Romance Writers of America (RWA). RWA contends that a romance novel must contain two key elements: a central love story and an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending (RWA). At first glance, *Fifty Shades* fulfils these requirements easily. The romantic relationship between Anastasia and Christian is central to the plot, and *Fifty Shades Freed*, the final book in the trilogy, ends with the pair happily married and Anastasia pregnant with their second child, which would surely seem to qualify as an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending. The series works less well within this definition if we consider them as an individual books: *Fifty Shades of Grey*, for example, does not have an optimistic ending (where "optimistic" is read as implying that the romantic relationship will survive and thrive), as it ends with Anastasia leaving Christian, apparently never to return. When considered as a single text, however, the series certainly seems to meet the requirements of the RWA definition.

The uneasiness with which *Fifty Shades* sits within the definition of a romance novel is exposed if we examine another, more detailed, definition.² Pamela Regis has identified eight elements of the romance novel. These are structural elements, and are flexible: some may occur off-stage, some may occur more than once, and some may be emphasized more than others, depending on the text. The elements are: society defined; the meeting between the protagonists; the attraction between the protagonists; the barrier between the protagonists; the declaration of love; the "point of ritual death," where it seems like the protagonists can never be together; the recognition of the means by which the barrier can be overcome; and the betrothal (Regis 30).

All these elements can be found in *Fifty Shades*. The society we are introduced to is contemporary America, where Christian is a billionaire tycoon and Anastasia is a college student. They meet when Anastasia interviews him for her college newspaper, and their attraction is

¹ Of which there are an enormous number: notable examples include Lisa Renee Jones' *Inside Out* series, Raine Miller's *The Blackstone Affair* series, and R.K. Lilley's *Up in the Air* series.

² It should be noted here that these definitions are not mutually exclusive.

instantaneous. However, Christian's interest in BDSM is a barrier between them, and the point of ritual death is reached when he beats her at the end of *Fifty Shades of Grey* and she leaves. However, their love is too strong to be defeated by their apparent sexual incompatibility, and it is the means by which this barrier is overcome. They are married between the second and the third book, and there appears to be no danger of them ever separating.

It is this last point that makes the *Fifty Shades* series sit a little uneasily within the definition of a romance novel. The romance arc is essentially complete within the first quarter of *Fifty Shades Darker*. Once Christian and Anastasia get back together in *Fifty Shades Darker*, the work of romance is essentially complete. What drives *Fifty Shades* from this point is the sex scenes. Romance has a finite structure: the defining characteristic of the genre is that it has a definitive and optimistic ending. *Fifty Shades*, however, artificially extends its romance plot, despite its apparent resolution, to include more sex scenes. This is the hallmark of the pornographic.

Fifty Shades is hardly the first series within the romance genre to continue after the romantic relationship of the central couple is solidified. An Gorus describes such series as "romance-based serials": they focus on a single couple, developing their romantic narrative over multiple instalments. The establishment of their relationship does not have to herald the end of the series: additional instalments can explore the couple's further adventures together, taking place in what Gorus calls the "post-HEA" [happily ever after]. Diana Gabaldon's *Outlander* series, for example, sees its protagonists Claire and Jamie married in the first book, and while they are regularly separated, their romantic commitment to each other is never in doubt. The ongoing romantic suspense *In Death* series by JD Robb (a pseudonym of romance doyenne Nora Roberts) follows central couple Eve and Roarke through over forty instalments, their romance narrative providing a foil to the crime plot, although Eve and Roarke have been married since the fourth book. Gorus discusses the increased popularity of this kind of romantic serial:

Romance is a generic form defined by its happy ending, stakeholders across the board have argued. In a romance novel, the protagonists who meet, fall in love, and struggle to overcome the barriers between them are always rewarded with true love in the end. If this ending is a necessary feature of the genre, what does narrative serialization in a romance novel look like? ...Are there limits to the degree of serialization that the genre can handle, and if so what are they?

These are excellent questions to ask when reading *Fifty Shades* and other books in the same mode, such as Sylvia Day's *Crossfire* series and Lisa Renee Jones' *Inside Out* series. What are the limits of serialization in a genre like romance, which has a typically finite structure? What the existence of *Fifty Shades*, *Crossfire*, *Inside Out* and similar texts seems to indicate is that hybridization with another genre is a way of negotiating these limits: and in this case, the genre in question is pornography.

Pornography is not the only option for hybridization, as we can see by some of the texts mentioned above. The *In Death* series is hybridized with crime fiction, fusing a new "whodunit" mystery in every book with the ongoing romance narrative of Eve and Roarke. Similarly, the *Outlander* sequence, with its time-travelling heroine and eighteenth-century setting, draws on the conventions of historical fiction and fantasy as well as romance. But pornography is a particularly interesting choice for hybridization because, as I will discuss in the next section, in many ways, it stands in opposition to romance in terms of both structure and ideology.

Fifty Shades and Pornography

Infamously, there is no standard, agreed upon definition of pornography: one recalls here Supreme Court justice Potter Stewart's claim that "I know it when I see it." Brian McNair contends that pornography is a "cultural form defined by its content (sex), its intention (to sexually arouse), and its transgressive relationship to prevailing codes of sexual display and representation" (18), while Susanna Paasonen, Kaarina Nikunen and Laura Saarenmaa write that it has been "defined in terms of content (sexually explicit depictions of genitalia and sexual acts), lack thereof (materials without any redeeming artistic, cultural or social value) and effect (texts arousing their consumers)" (1). Both these definitions highlight the confusing cultural space in which pornography sits. Furthermore, as Clarissa Smith has noted, what constitutes "pornography" versus "erotica" is likewise fraught (15), with the former associated with men, the latter with women (Wilson-Kovacs 148).

This issue is one that deserves more space than I can give it here. However, for the purposes of this article, I must approach pornography from a structural standpoint. It seems relatively clear *what* is in pornography: sex of an explicit nature. (What constitutes "explicit" is another area in which there is much room for debate.) *Why* it exists likewise seems relatively clear: its purpose is to titillate, to arouse. But that leaves us with the question *how*: how are pornographic stories told?

Like many issues in relation to pornography, this is a matter of some contention. One of the ways in which scholars have grappled with this question is to consider the relationship of pornography to literature. Joel Feinberg notes three different academic approaches to the relationship between pornography and literature:

- 1) Pornography and literature are distinct.
- 2) Pornography is a perversion of literature.
- 3) There is some artistic merit to be found in pornography. (131-32)

Feinberg himself contends that pornography and literature are distinct, because one aims to titillate its audience, the other to explore a broader human condition (131-32). Bradford K Mudge explores this notion with more subtlety when he examines the intertwined literary history of the novel and pornography, arguing that the two forms evolved alongside each other, defining each other as they did themselves (14). He argues that "the novel's ascension to the hallowed halls of the 'literary' required a corresponding descent by a debased 'other' against whose shortcomings the virtues of the 'literary' could be measured" (29). This is almost a direct description of the approach Feinberg takes when he writes, "that 'high porn' is still porn, no matter how you slice it, is a point well making in reply to all the pretentious critical hogwash that would find some mysterious literary merit in the same old stuff served up by fashionable names" (131-32).

The word that is most of interest here – that offers the best clue to any generic guidelines for pornography beyond sexually explicit content – is "literary." If pornography is supposed to stand in direct opposition to literature, what does this mean?

If we think about this in generic terms, the obvious answer is a structured narrative. Although the romance novel is not generally considered to have much cultural capital in the world of literature, it is still a recognizable novel form, with a recognizable literary structure. Pornography, on the other hand, does not have this kind of structure. It is not interested in narrative progression or thematic exploration: it is interested in titillation.

The most useful description of pornography from a generic structure standpoint comes from Stephen Marcus. His work focuses primarily on nineteenth century pornographic literature,

but it can be extended to a broader corpus, and, given his focus on pornographic novels, is particularly useful when it comes to discussing *Fifty Shades of Grey*. He argues that the ideal pornographic novel is one that never ends. It has a flimsy excuse for a beginning, and, where a plot exists, it is an excuse for sex scenes, endless variations on the same theme. Pornography's defining characteristic is repetition – as Marcus puts it, the best words to describe the pornographic process are “again, again, again, and more, more, more” (279). While romance has a finite structure, pornography has an infinite one, based on cyclical repetition of sexual climaxes rather than on a journey towards an emotional climax and a happy ending.

This is certainly in evidence in *Fifty Shades*. While it takes several chapters to get to the first sex scene in *Fifty Shades of Grey*, once Christian deflowers Anastasia, they have sex frequently, repeatedly, and always orgasmically. In romance, sex scenes are generally used to move the plot forward – they might expose the vulnerability of one or both characters, or create a problematic aftermath. Some sex scenes in *Fifty Shades* do this, but the majority are simply repetitive. Where they expose a vulnerability, it is often a vulnerability already exposed – Christian's fear of being touched, for example, is tied to his troubled childhood. More regularly, the sex scenes in *Fifty Shades* fit into Marcus' characterization of pornography as “develop[ing] by unremitting repetition and minute mechanical variation” (279). This is where *Fifty Shades* differs from a text like *The Sheik*. *The Sheik* incorporates pornographic tropes into a romantic narrative. *Fifty Shades*, by contrast, fuses the two generic frameworks together: when the work of romance is done, the repetitive sex scenes continue to drive the narrative.

Other texts in the same mode – such as Day's *Crossfire* series and Jones' *Inside Out* series – arguably achieve this fusion with more success. In the latter text, an ongoing suspense plot sits alongside the romance and the pornographic elements, driving the plot even when it seems that the relationship of protagonists Sara and Chris is settled, and often threatening to part them. In the former, the ongoing success of the relationship between protagonists Eva and Gideon is also less settled, ensuring that the work of the romance narrative continues for longer than it does in *Fifty Shades*. Eva and Gideon continually repeat and recycle elements from Regis' eight elements of the romance novel, finding new barriers between them, new ways to surmount these barriers, and new points of ritual death, where it seems that their relationship is doomed. Both Eva and Gideon have significant personal demons to overcome in the form of childhood sexual abuse, and considerable obstacles to their continuing relationship, including ex-partners and Gideon's murder of Eva's abusive step-brother. Even though they marry in the third instalment, *Entwined in You*, which apparently solidifies their commitment to each other, their ongoing communication issues continue to threaten their relationship (it is noted several times that sex is the only way they can functionally communicate with each other). It is telling, however, that numerous readers have expressed frustration with the series feeling artificially extended, sex scenes added in to “pad” the books, turning what was originally intended to be a trilogy into a quintet. (The final instalment is yet to be published.) This, we can contend, represents the frustration of a reader who expects the finite structure of the romance finding themselves in the infinite structural loops of pornography.

Fifty Shades, however, is a particularly interesting text to study when looking at this fusion of romance and pornography. Unlike the *Crossfire* and *Inside Out* series, which were written as sequences of novels, the *Fifty Shades* series was originally published in serial form. EL James, under the moniker Snowqueens Icedragon, published what was then *Twilight* fan fiction *Master of the Universe* chapter by chapter online. Early readers read it in instalments, rather than as a cohesive whole, as they might with a novel. It is a reasonable assumption that they were thus

looking for gratification – including sexual gratification – in every chapter, as well as reading for the overarching romantic relationship. This is not dissimilar to the way that much pornography was consumed in the nineteenth century in the Anglosphere. In Britain, magazines like *The Pearl*, *The Oyster*, and *The Boudoir* published serialized pornography: each issue would include new instalments from several pornographic novels. Pornography is not a form that suits delayed gratification. Rather, readers expected gratification in every instalment – repeated, cyclical sexual climaxes, rather than a narrative climax. It is unsurprising, then, that *Master of the Universe* sought to fuse the romantic and pornographic genres in this way, incorporating the multiple sexual climaxes of pornography into the romantic narrative of *Twilight*.

What is perhaps more surprising is the fact that when the serialized *Master of the Universe* became the novelized *Fifty Shades* books, the resulting texts were so successful as novels. They were so successful that they ensured that this genre – the erotic serialized romance featuring a single couple in which a significant part of the narrative takes place in Goris’ “post-HEA” space – became extraordinarily popular. We can see this not just through the popularity of other series like *Crossfire* and *Inside Out*, but also because many other texts which began in the same way as *Fifty Shades* – as *Twilight* fan fiction – were “pulled to publish” and novelized. This includes Tara Sue Me’s *The Submissive* series, Sylvain Reynard’s *Gabriel* series, and Christina Lauren’s *Beautiful Bastard*, which, although they did not become cultural phenomena in the same way as *Fifty Shades*, enjoyed considerable popularity. Despite the fact that the two genres from which this new genre is hybridized seem startlingly structurally mismatched, the popularity of *Fifty Shades* and this new genre seem to signal that there is a hearty appetite among modern readers for texts which can provide cyclical explicit sexual climaxes within an ongoing emotional narrative.

The Demisexual Pornotopia

The two generic frameworks that *Fifty Shades* fuses together allow it to provide both instant and delayed gratification. For Anastasia and Christian, pleasure is infinite and infinity repeatable. There is no sense that their sex life slows down at the end of *Fifty Shades Freed*, even though they have achieved a narrative ending – the domestic happy ending of the marriage plot. Pornography is based on the repetition of sexual climaxes, while romance builds towards an emotional climax. *Fifty Shades* contains both. As noted above, we can argue that in *Fifty Shades of Grey* and the first section of *Fifty Shades Darker*, it is the romance narrative that is most important, as the tension between Anastasia’s desire for a “vanilla” monogamous romantic relationship and Christian’s “kinky fuckery” drives the plot. Once this issue is effectively resolved early in *Fifty Shades Darker* (mirroring the way the romantic tension between Bella and Edward was resolved at the end of *New Moon*, the second book in the *Twilight* quartet), and there is little doubt that Anastasia and Christian are committed to each other for life, the romance is co-opted into the pornographic structure. Anastasia and Christian’s relationship is used to engender the repetitive climaxes on which pornography relies.

Effectively, this means that the romance plot is used to create what Stephen Marcus calls “pornotopia”: a world where “reality is conceived of as the scene of exclusively sexual activities and human and social institutions are understood to exist only insofar as they are conducive to further sexual play” (194-95). This means that the plot of the pornographic text, inasmuch as there is one, is structured to revolve around sex scenes, rather than sex scenes evolving out of the plot, as they would in the romance. This is certainly in evidence in *Fifty Shades* (and, indeed, is

one of the criticisms regularly levelled at the text from a literary standpoint). Nearly every place Anastasia and Christian go together becomes the site of a sex scene: whether it be a restaurant, a car, a boat, or one of his parents' properties. Their relationship creates pornotopia – Christian is always erect, Anastasia is always ready, and the sex is always fantastic. As Marcus puts it, pornotopia is also a pornocopia, where lovers are generous, men are potent, and women are inexhaustible (273).

This has not just structural, but ideological effects, because the genres of romance and pornography are not just structurally mismatched, but apparently ideologically opposed. Romance is a literature of emotion, sentiment, and feeling; whereas pornography is not. This is the key difference between Marcus' pornotopia and the one we find in *Fifty Shades*. The nineteenth century pornography Marcus discusses is rarely, if ever, monogamous. It might revolve around a central character, but it would be highly unusual for that character to have only one lover: it is not the pornography of a central *couple*. For example, in the pornographic novel *Sub-umbra*, which was serialized in *The Pearl* in 1879-1880, protagonist Walter sleeps with sex different women. While he appears to be fond of them, he does not love them, nor do they love him. The central concern of the text is physical, not emotional, pleasure: something that can be extrapolated onto most, if not all, works of pornography. The emotions of the characters are essentially irrelevant, and heightened emotion is not felt. As Marcus writes, "It is always summertime in pornotopia, and it is a summertime of the emotions as well – no one is ever jealous, possessive, or really angry. All our aggressions are perfectly fused with our sexuality, and the only rage is the rage of lust, a happy fury indeed" (273).

This is diametrically opposed to what we see in *Fifty Shades*, which is based on heightened levels of emotion. Anastasia and Christian are obsessed with each other emotionally as well as physically, and share an almost hysterical anxiety about their relationship. She is petrified that their relationship will not fulfil his sexual needs, and that he will leave her to resume an existence more closely resembling the world of pornography, where he has purely sexual contracts with a number of women who relate to him as a submissive, not as a girlfriend. He is worried that she will find some excuse to leave him, which makes him possessive, controlling, and emotionally demanding, to the point of extreme jealousy. Their relationship is positioned as different from Christian's other relationships – relationships which were contractual and based on mutual physical pleasure – by its heightened levels of emotionality. They fall in love with each other, and Christian learns a lesson that would never be learned in Marcus' pornotopia: that sex is better when romantic love is involved. This turns out to be so true for Christian that he is able to substitute romantic "vanilla" sex with Anastasia for the BDSM he once enjoyed (although he and Anastasia still do take occasional trips to his "red room of pain").

In my doctoral thesis, I contended that the governing paradigm of the romance novel is a cultural narrative I have termed "compulsory demisexuality" (McAlister). I am borrowing here from Adrienne Rich, who developed the discursive term "compulsory heterosexuality," referring to the notion that heterosexuality is natural and innate and to have other desires makes one abnormal and wrong (632). Similarly, I contend that, in modern sexual discourse, demisexuality is deemed mandatory for women. Someone who is demisexual only experiences sexual attraction to someone with whom they have an emotional bond. Thus, "compulsory demisexuality" refers to the notion that the only acceptable time for a woman to have sex is when she is in love. This link between sex and love is frequently expressed in the romance novel, where sex and love are deeply and inextricably bound together. While two characters might not be in love when they commence their sexual relationship, it is inevitable that they will become so, and once they sleep

with each other, it will become impossible for them to experience sexual pleasure with anyone else.

This paradigm is antithetical to pornography, but it is certainly in evidence in *Fifty Shades*. Anastasia and Christian's sexual relationship is predicated on their emotional bond: Christian's attempt to have a contractual, emotionless relationship with Anastasia fails almost before it begins. The repeated sex scenes can be read not only as expressions of love but of their anxieties over love – Christian uses sex to try to possess and control Anastasia, and Anastasia is powerless to resist his sexual charisma. Christian does not understand how Anastasia can love someone who is “fifty shades of fucked up,” and Anastasia exists in a state of permanent disbelief that someone as wonderful as she believes Christian to be can love her. They exist in mutual awe of each other. It is these impulses – impulses that may be commonly observed in the romance but almost never in pornography – that create the pornotopia and the pornocopia in which Anastasia and Christian exist. The tropes of romance are used to subvert as well as construct the pornographic here – instead of love having no place in pornotopia, it cannot exist without it. The emotional bond between Anastasia and Christian is crucial to their sexual pleasure. Theirs is a demisexual pornotopia.

Conclusion

The term “pornography for women” is often applied to the romance novel. Similarly, when *Fifty Shades* became a cultural phenomenon, the phrase “mommy/mummy porn” was frequently used about it. This notion is not, one suspects, relying on – like I have in this article – structural definitions of the two forms, because they are not especially generically compatible. It does, however, point to the pervasiveness of compulsory demisexuality as a discourse in modern Western culture. If we apply this discourse, for pornography – that is, a form which has explicit sex as its only content, and is designed purely to titillate – to be acceptable to women, the sex must be located within a romantic relationship. Pornography, which takes place in an emotionless pornotopia, thus cannot be pornography for women: if women are to access titillating literature, it must be embedded in a demisexual paradigm.

This is obviously not true at an individual level: clearly, not all women are demisexual, and many do consume pornography. However, the emergence of a semi-pornographic literature that is embedded in a romance narrative – texts like *Fifty Shades*, as well as *Crossfire* and *Inside Out* – shows the pervasiveness of compulsory demisexuality as a cultural narrative. The fusion of apparently incompatible generic forms allows female readers a covert access to explicit and titillating literature, because it is contained within the boundaries of the discourse: the sex might be cyclical, repetitive, and frequent, but it takes place within a romantic context.

This simplifies the issue somewhat – as the derisive attitudes towards *Fifty Shades* as its readers show, the idea of women reading explicit literature is not one with which there is a great deal of cultural comfort, even if it is embedded in a romantic narrative. This also speaks to the way the romance novel is frequently culturally devalued: emotions and romance are considered acceptably feminine domains, but because they *are* feminine, they automatically accrue less cultural capital in a patriarchal society. However, the emergence and consequent explosive popularity of this romance/pornography fusion serial genre points markedly to the fact that there is an appetite among female readers for the dual pleasures that it offers. It offers instant and delayed gratification, sexual and emotional pleasure, titillation in a “safe” discursive space. And – although *Fifty Shades* has received a considerable amount of criticism in regards to Anastasia's

mistreatment at the hands of Christian – it offers these pleasures in a world where women are treated not as sexual objects, but as sexual subjects, a world where their desires and feelings are treated and taken seriously (one of the key ways in which this new genre has markedly evolved since the publication of *The Sheik* in 1919). “I thought you didn’t make love. I thought you fucked – hard,” Anastasia tells Christian before they have sex for the first time. “I can make an exception, or maybe combine the two, we’ll see,” Christian replies – a phrase which might as well describe the entire book (and, indeed, this fusion genre) (James, *Fifty Shades of Grey* 110). It becomes more than a steamy book with a bourgeois ending: instead of borrowing pornographic tropes, *Fifty Shades* breaks the hard limits between the romance and pornographic genres, creating a discursive space in which women are permitted to access titillating materials while also enjoying the emotional arc of the romance narrative – a demisexual pornotopia. It melts the romantic and the pornographic together, combining making love and fucking hard, until it is not entirely clear what the difference is.

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Towards a Non-hierarchical Space of Thought: Reading Roland Barthes' The Neutral

The article is devoted to *The Neutral*: the 1977-1978 lecture course developed and taught by Roland Barthes at the Collège de France. I argue that *The Neutral* is firmly rooted in the tradition that Brian Massumi defined as “nomad thought” in his foreword to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia*. The essay traces the genealogy of this tradition and the term of the neutral, beginning with Maurice Blanchot's work and his own concept of the neutral and ending with Barthes' so far largely unexplored engagement with the texts of Deleuze. Elusive as the neutral figure is meant to remain, it emerges as a theorist's effort to exercise a form of non-dualistic and non-hierarchical thinking.

key words: nomad thought, neutral, space of literature, non-dualistic thinking, writing

He found it good to talk about everything, to write on everything: thus the scattered totality of the world distracted him from the unique and rigorous totality of the work, from which he amiably let himself be diverted.

- Maurice Blanchot *The Space of Literature*¹

The epigraph from Maurice Blanchot's famous work was not, but could have been written about Roland Barthes' project of *The Neutral* developed in his 1977-1978 lecture course at the Collège de France. If Barthes ever had a desire for producing “the work” in the Blanchotian sense, the thought of the neutral, overgrown with layers of digressive reflexivity, could have easily prevented him from writing a theory rigorously complete or self-contained. Nonetheless, as Barthes said in *The Pleasure of the Text*, the neutral, which stands for the pleasure and freedom of unbounded “textual practice,” does not lend itself well to the rigid protocols of well-charted theoretical terrains, disciplinary divisions, and conceptual boundaries; rather, it reaches towards a non-hierarchical horizon of thinking and affirmation of difference (65). In this brief essay I propose to situate the neutral in the philosophical tradition of “nomad thought” defined by Brian Massumi in his foreword to Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. Massumi wrote about “nomad thought” in the context of Deleuze and Guattari's *oeuvre* as an example of “a smooth space of thought . . . [that] goes by many names. Spinoza called it ‘ethics.’ Nietzsche called it the ‘gay science.’ Artaud called it ‘crowned anarchy.’ To Maurice Blanchot, it is the ‘space of literature.’ To Foucault, ‘outside thought’” (xiii). As I intend to show, Barthesian figure of the neutral emerges as yet another expression of “nomad thought” that, to quote Massumi again, “does not immure itself in the edifice of an ordered interiority; it moves freely in an element of exteriority. It does not repose on identity; it rides difference. It does not respect the artificial division between the three domains of representation, subject, concept, and being; it replaces

¹ p. 21

restrictive analogy with a conductivity that knows no bounds" (xii). In the following sections of the paper, I will trace the neutral's genealogy as reflected in Barthes' work in and around *The Neutral* lecture series to the influence of some of the thinkers mentioned in Massumi's definition above, whose work Barthes chose to engage with most intensely, seeing in Blanchot, Nietzsche, Foucault, Spinoza, as well as Deleuze, contemporary exponents of unfettered, unorthodox thought free from dogmatism and academia's institutional pressures. Blanchot's meandering, exploratory work on some of the most influential figures of world literature, such as for instance Franz Kafka or Stéphane Mallarmé, provided Barthes with groundwork for how to approach the realm of the literary in a philosophical manner. Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* offered him exuberance and salubriousness of non-dogmatic thinking, Foucault's famous writings on power, in turn, imparted an awareness of one's inescapable implication in the often intractable orders of subjection to be found in deceptively sheltered domains. Spinoza's work on embodied ethics may have served Barthes as an impulse for advancing his own anti-dualistic argument regarding the body and mind that informs *The Neutral*. Finally, Deleuze's radical positive philosophy of difference, his famous nomadology, imbued Barthes' work with intensity and its characteristic affects. *The Neutral*, an impressive archive of Barthes' lifetime dialogic engagement with the interrelated ideas of these and many other major thinkers, emerges as a celebration of the active mind and its emancipatory potential; the will to freedom.

To begin with, if the text's marginalia are at times capable of disclosing more than the text itself, the occasional references to French philosopher's Maurice Blanchot's work on the margins of Barthes' *The Neutral*, buried under architectures of intertextual digressions, bring back Blanchot's own thought of the neuter, which germinated in his 1955 *The Space of Literature* to be developed in the 1969 *Infinite Conversation*, particularly in the section "The Absence of the Book" of the latter. Blanchot's influence on Barthes can be seen particularly in the latter's preoccupation in *The Neutral*, and elsewhere in his work, with the inexhaustible potential of writing; indeed, Blanchot's paradoxical sense of writing as an enigmatic task that is simultaneously self-consuming and self-sustaining. The way in which Blanchotian neuter is deployed in Barthes' lecture series evokes a palimpsest; a manuscript whose original text has been effaced in an effort to create space for other writing to come. In *The Neutral*, Blanchot's thought of the neuter is at the same time present and effaced in a move that could perhaps be traced to Derrida's figure of *supplement* seen as inessential but subversive surplus of meaning. In one of the actual supplements to *The Neutral*, Barthes remarks: "I realize that if I drift too complacently, soon there will no longer be a course, nothing but supplements. Supplements to nothing: that's the ideal Neutral!" (69). Along the same lines, in his characteristically metaphysical style, Blanchot writes: "The neutral is always separated from the neutral by the neutral, and, far from allowing itself to be explained by the identical, it remains an unidentifiable surplus" (*Infinite* 305). While Barthesian neutral derives from Blanchotian discourse on the neuter, Barthes' *The Neutral* is neither a sustained critique nor a faithful continuation of Blanchot's thought; rather, it is a playful dialogue with the dialectical mode of thought that Blanchot practiced in his work. To begin thinking about how Blanchot's neuter informed Barthes' neutral, let us first turn to Blanchot's thought as it was reflected upon by Foucault in his well-known essay on Blanchot "The Thought from Outside," where Foucault ponders on the uncontainable "solitary sovereignty of 'I speak'" that overcomes the paradox of self-expression, and sees language as "an unfolding of pure exteriority," to further write that "what gave rise to 'literature' is only superficially an interiorization; it is far more a question of a passage to the outside" (11-12). For Foucault, Blanchot's work rests on "the experience of the body, space, the limits of the will, and the ineffaceable presence of the other," where the other, that "background

figure of a companion who always remains hidden but always makes it patently obvious that he is there," is the Foucauldian limit, the perpetually deferred disappearance and return of the self-identical and at the same time always differentiating discourse (21, 47). Blanchot emerges here as a model for the Foucauldian "thought from outside"; a dialectical space of insistent negotiation of difference between the one who writes (the I that speaks), language, meaning, and being:

It is as if this withdrawal, this hollowness that is perhaps nothing more than the inexorable erosion of the person who speaks, cleared a neutral space of language. The narrative plunges into the space between the narrator and the inseparable companion who does not accompany him; it runs the full length of the straight line separating the speaking *I* from the *he* he is in his spoken being; it unfolds a placeless place that is outside all speech and writing . . . (Foucault 52; emphasis original)

Foucault sees in the self-effacement and withdrawal of Blanchot, a gesture toward the neutral space that "frees the space of the image" (Foucault 57). Blanchot's neuter is the literary space wrapped up in metaphysics of nonbeing, absence, and ultimately death that paradoxically releases the I. His neutral is a pure literary outside—a paradoxical and ambiguous metaphysical territory of shimmering *différance* where being unfolds only to fold back upon itself in perpetual self-effacement. Blanchot describes his neuter as "being in parentheses," and something that puts one in the position of "quasi absence" (*Infinite* 303). It is a space where the I enters into a relation with the unknown; the relation which is paradoxically neither a negation of meaning nor affirmation of its presence: "With the thought of the neutral the unknown escapes every negation as it does every position. Neither adding to nor withdrawing anything from what affirms it, it is neither negative nor positive" (*Infinite* 301). How are we to construe the elusive meanings that underlie Blanchot's figure of the neuter in relation to Barthes' neutral? Is the paradoxical opacity of the Blanchotian/Barthesian *différance*-ridden palimpsest decipherable? Whereas Blanchotian neuter certainly informs Barthes' mode of reflexivity, *The Neutral* pushes past Blanchotian metaphysical ground towards a different landscape: a nondialectical affirmation of difference as an expression of intellectual nomadism:

[D]ifference, that much vaunted and insistent word, prevails because it dispenses with or triumphs over conflict. Conflict is sexual, semantic; difference is plural, sensual, and textual; meaning and sex are principles of construction, of constitution; difference is the very movement of dispersion, of friability, a shimmer; what matters is not the discovery, in a reading of the world and of the self, of certain oppositions but of encroachments, overflows, leaks, skids, shifts, slips... (Barthes, *Roland Barthes* 69; emphasis original)

In the article on Blanchot and Heidegger titled "The Secret of the Neuter," Pascal Massie observes that the meaning of Blanchot's neuter can be construed as the "passion of the outside," and at the same time the site of indefinite articulation of the play of possibilities "pointing both to the limitlessness of language and to the limit that gives rise to meaning" (49). Massie's observation that Blanchot's neutral is a space of both the origins and the limits of language and meaning leads us directly to Barthes' project. Through a number of playful gestures, Barthes gleefully takes over a number of Blanchotian binaries deploying them in much less abstract ways as articulations of his own thought of the neutral. Indeed, the familiar binaries of presence and absence, memory and forgetting, difference and indifference, passive and active voice, affirmation and negation, as well as action and nonaction, become for both theorists targets of their deconstructive efforts to free meanings from the trap of Occidental dualistic thought fraught by ideology and conflicts of power.

Writing about Blanchot's self-effacement and withdrawal into the manifestation of his work, Foucault writes that "for us he is that thought itself—its real, absolutely distant, shimmering, invisible presence, its inevitable law, its calm, infinite, measured strength" (19). For Blanchot, presence and absence always inform each other, potentialities of presence always reside in his idea of "the absence of the book." In Barthes' thought of the neutral, moments of desire for withdrawal into a space of anonymity are also present, but, since Barthes' entire project is marked by self-reflexivity and affect, the metaphysics of self-effacement that one finds in Blanchot does not belong to Barthesian neutral. Instead of Blanchotian preoccupation with transcendence, Barthes relies in his theorization on the immanent perspective. The signature of the writer is always explicitly marked on the text, the presence of his voice is always strong, and his emotions are sometimes disclosed to the reader. And yet, *The Neutral* playfully explores all the delights that the occasional self-effacement offers. Barthes traverses the text of *The Neutral* in a series of appearances and disappearances through which his voice is constantly displaced resonating only through the voices of others, including Blanchot himself. In the Session of May 13, 1978, Barthes writes about the figure of "retreat" as a possibility of a temporary suspension of writing, but also as a way of questioning the public/private binary; "(historical) myth of two men in one subject" versus his own "fantasy of split personality" that always falls in the middle of the apparently irreconcilable dualism of "the exterior man, social, worldly, alienated by the constraints of worldliness (hypocrisy, etc.) and "interior man, true and free man → man of words/man of silence (or of pleasure = of the beyond or of the before language)" (141). In *The Neutral*, like in his famous essay "The Death of the Author," Barthes' authorial identity is accompanied by a simultaneous desire for the nomad freedom offered by disidentification, which hails the author's belonging to the becoming of the multiplicity of different voices.

In both Blanchot and Barthes, the notion of non-identity is further complicated by memory as counteracted by forgetting. In his essay on Blanchot, Foucault writes about Blanchotian forgetting (synonymous with the outside and evocative of Foucauldian conceptualization of "countermemory") as a state of "extreme attentiveness" and "wakefulness" characterized by great lucidity and directed towards the future (56). As Foucault has it, forgetting becomes a particular mode of counter-reflexivity, or a necessity for refiguration of reflexive language toward the outside. Foucault writes:

To negate one's own discourse, as Blanchot does, is to cast it ceaselessly outside of itself Not reflection, but forgetting; not contradiction, but a contestation that effaces; not reconciliation, but droning on and on; not mind in laborious conquest of its unity, but the endless erosion of the outside; not truth finally shedding light on itself, but the streaming and distress of a language that has always already begun. (22)

Traces of the kind of forgetting that Foucault has in mind can be found in *The Neutral* when Barthes writes about "nonarrogant memory," and reminds us that memory is never "an act of pure recollection of the past" (158, 39). He evokes the condition of anamnesis; "a mixture of pleasure and effort—performed by the subject in order to recover, *without magnifying or sentimentalizing it*, a tenuity of memory" (221; emphasis original), which Barthes relates directly to the process of writing as an "erratic, chaotic recall" (39). Elsewhere in *The Neutral*, he says that such a "nonarrogant memory" is postulated in the space of writing (158).

The nomad thought that Barthes enacts through his own style of *écriture* is a practice that Stamos Metzidaki defines as "an on-going quest for a '*subversion générale*'" (335). What brings about the most subversive textual effects in Barthes' project of *The Neutral* is deconstruction of the binaries of active and passive voice, difference and indifference, action and non-action, and

finally affirmation and negation. Blanchot's *The Infinite Conversation* again offers an interesting context for thinking about subversion in connection to Barthes' anti-dualistic conceptualization of the neutral:

Can one write: the neutral?; what is the neutral?; what can be said of the neutral? Certainly one can. But the neutral is not broached by this questioning that leaves it and does not leave it intact, that traverses it through and through or, more probably, lets itself be neutralized, pacified, or passified by it (the neutral's passivity: the passive that is beyond, and always beyond, and passive voice; the passion proper to it enveloping its proper action, an action of inaction, an effect of non-effect). (305)

There is uncanny progression in Blanchot's train of thought from the neutral's self-neutralization, and therefore self-pacification, through its idea of passivity itself, to, rather perversely, passion. The passivity of the neutral entails a certain degree of passion, or rather; the passivity of the neuter appears to acquire a particular intensity that opens up a space of difference in each of the binaries. The neuter's passivity becomes its active voice. Blanchot further provocatively writes that the neutral is that which "carries difference even to the point of indifference" (305), but elsewhere in the text clarifies that neutral is not indifferent, "but haunting the possibility of meaning and non-sense [but not nonsense] by the invisible margin of difference" (304). A very similar dynamics of *différance* can be observed in Barthes' lecture course. The effects that are most frequently achieved throughout the text by way of the workings of the neutral, such as suspension, interruption, and displacement, point to subversion as its underlying trait. It is through the deferral of meaning implicit in the concept of *différance* that the neutral baffles the paradigm. It is also *différance*, therefore, that the neutral insistently activates, perhaps in quest of what Barthes famously called "the middle voice" in his essays "To Write: An Intransitive Verb"; the now extinct grammatical voice capable of overcoming the negativity implied in the work of binary oppositions in language.

Reflections on neutrality in Barthes' project take a different turn in *The Neutral's* annex, in the spirit of venturing beyond the scope of the magisterial format of a lecture course. This shift shows Barthes' abandonment of Blanchotian metaphysical discourse and moving towards a different, immanent horizon of thought evocative of Deleuze and Deleuzian nomadism. The intractability of the Blanchotian neuter ("always elsewhere than where one would situate it" (*Infinite* 305)) is replaced by Barthes with the questions of spatiality and intensity of the neutral. In the Session of May 13, Barthes says: "The Neutral would be a subtle art of keeping the good distance between landmarks (including human landmarks of emotional space). . . . Neutral = spacing (production of space) and not distancing, distancing" (146). Initially discussing these issues via Blanchot and Derridean figure of "spacing," he proceeds to discuss the spatial quality of the neutral in relation to alterity and ethics. What strikes me as particularly interesting in Barthes' description of "spacing" (the figure he clearly uses via Derrida) is the fact that he defines the neutral in Deleuzian terms as "production of space." The neutral postulates a reconceptualization of space in the sense of accounting for the radical difference between self and other as well as conceptual space in which objects of thought are constantly repositioned and refigured.

In Barthes' lecture notes, the neutral is also described as a horizontally-oriented "transformation scene" (190). Barthes reflects on the notion of perspective as supplemental to the panoramic and apical vision, and then suddenly baffles his own classification by shifting to the imaginary field of "schizomorphic (heterogenizing) structures, evocative of the Deleuzian machine of schizotext (166). He further destabilizes the notion of spatiality by problematizing

and subverting *The Neutral*'s underlying figure of a palimpsest on which his entire heterogeneous text relies. Barthes writes: “[I]mage of the palimpsest: interesting, because it’s an image of complexity but not of depth strictly speaking: the multiple remains a question of surfaces: . . . the palimpsest reads from a single surface like a panorama whose planes are stacked up: without substitutes, without masks, and, one could say: without symptoms” (168). The palimpsest is turned into a panoramic view of a single immanent surface upon which all the complexities and multiplicities are simultaneously displayed. In this elegant play, the distribution of and relations between all the elements become of equal value and the neutral emerges as a non-dialectical and non-hierarchical space of thought. As a site of transformation, it comes close to Deleuzian conceptualizations of pure intensity and conductivity of “nomad thought.”

Insofar as *The Neutral* derives from the Blanchotian neutral *space of literature*, for Barthes literature “opens up an infinite, shimmering field of nuances, of myths, *that could allow the Neuter, fading within language, to be alive elsewhere,*” with the emphasis put on the joyous nomadic practice of writing and reading (190; emphasis added). In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Barthes reflects on the idea of “elsewhere” as the scene of writing upon which language “reconstructs itself . . . under the teeming flux of every kind of linguistic pleasure” (8). In *The Rustle of Language*, Barthes’ neutral is identified as the space of writing: “Writing is that neuter, that composite, that obliquity into which our subject flees, the black-and-white where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes” (49). Writing “unfailingly baffles the arrogance of discourse,” and becomes a nomadic quest for itself through the constantly fluctuating and changing mythologies and intensities of the everyday (162). In Barthes, the ordinary is what creates the strongest resonance for the thought of the neutral. At the same time, for all the repertoire of the figures of benevolence, weariness, tact, and silence that is undeniably crucial to Barthesian project, the neutral is also a figure of great vitality and force that relentlessly “plays on the razor’s edge” of ideology and constitutes “a strong, active value” (73, 211).

In the annex to his lecture course, entitled “Intensities,” Barthes roughly delineates the figure of “Neutral-intensity-structure,” situated somewhere between his “*écriture zero degree*” and what he calls “the complex degree”:

As for intensities: intensity matters for the Neutral because it’s a concept that is allergic to the paradigm → we therefore call neutral the field of nonparadigmatic intensities (those introducing a trick into the paradigm), and in consequence we ask that the Neutral not be conceived, connoted as a flattening of intensities but to the contrary as a bubbling us {émoussillement} (<champagne foam). (197)

In Barthes, intensity is related to the linguistic process through affect, which in turn effects “semantic individuation.” *Écriture* is performative and affective writing *par excellence*. In the Session of June 3, he reflects upon the relationship between the neutral and discourse suggesting that “discourse comes to the Neuter by means of the affect” (190). It is through *affect*, as James Michels aptly observes in his essay “Roland Barthes: Against Language” that *écriture* turns discourse into “a mere backdrop or occasion for the play of *signifiance*” (155; emphasis original). Michels further explains *signifiance* as “closely allied to what in *Writing Degree Zero* Barthes termed ‘style,’ a certain something which is outside of Art. . . . It is the grain of the voice. It is ‘obtuse’ as opposed to obvious meaning” (166). In Barthesian thought of the neutral, therefore, affective *signifiance* emerges as the indelible signature of the writer’s textual practice that baffles the paradigm of discourse, and, as Michels remarks, “escapes the endless deferral of meaning” (165; emphasis original). “The grain of the voice” is the underlying quality of Barthesian *écriture* that determines his position as a nomad writer who simultaneously participates in the

poststructuralist discourses of his time and refuses to accept their insistence on the erasure of emotion.

By way of conclusion, I turn to Deleuze's essay "Nomad Thought" to examine the extent to which Deleuzian understanding of nomadism corresponds with Barthes' textual practice of both writing and reading (after all, *The Neutral* was intended to be "a research seminar on the theory of reading" (212)). Deleuze's essay was written as a tribute to Nietzsche, whom the author of *Anti-Oedipus* considered to be the main exponent of his nomadology—a thinker who expressed "something that can not be codified, confounding all codes" (143). Reflecting on Blanchot's "thought of the outside," Deleuze writes: "Now, to hang thought on the outside is what philosophers have never done, even when they spoke about, for example, politics; even when they treated subjects as walking or fresh air. It is not sufficient to talk about fresh air or the outdoors in order to suspend thought directly and immediately upon the outside" (145). Deleuze arrives here at the onset of the idea of nonphilosophy that, as he further argues,

is a kind of nomadism, a perpetual displacement in the intensities designated by proper names, intensities that interpenetrate one another at the same that they are lived, experienced, by a single body. Intensity can be experienced, then, only in connection with its mobile inscription in a body and under the shifting exterior of a proper name, and therefore the proper name is always a mask, a mask that masks its agent. (146)

The nomadic intensity of the outside that permeates Nietzsche's writing is also an underlying trait of Barthes' writing. The work in which Barthes comes closest to Nietzsche's thought is *The Pleasure of the Text* and its treatment of textual *jouissance*, written, characteristically for Barthes, somewhat in the spirit of and yet somewhat at a remove from *The Gay Science*. Barthes only comes thus far in his engagement with Nietzsche, and it is precisely the distance he maintains towards the thought of other writers and philosophers he references so profusely throughout his entire *oeuvre*. Barthes' nomadism, like Nietzsche's, was not so much practiced on the move, but rather, as Deleuze puts it, was one of those "voyages [that] take place *in situ*, are trips in intensity" (149).

The final sections of *The Neutral* indicate Barthes' so far largely unexplored engagement with Deleuzian thought, affect, and ethics. Barthes makes a foray into the territory that Deleuze and his student Claire Parnet delineate in their *Dialogues*, where they speak about "[i]ndividuation without a subject"; a mode of subjectivity that rests on disidentification as well as intersubjective reciprocal "collections of intensive sensations" that produce "so many 'unique chances'" for a multiplicity of ongoing dialogues that become "acts which can only be contained in a life and expressed in a style," which could have easily been articulated by Barthes himself (*Dialogues* 40, 3). Engaged in the daily practice of bringing writing to the surface of everyday life and thought, the fleeting "punctums" of which Barthes wanted to capture, thought is refigured in the non-hierarchical space where it "assumes an air of freedom" and "gives birth to Dionisian laughter" (*Nomad Thought* 147). Poised somewhere between the paradigms of structuralism, which his *écriture* challenged, the emancipatory potential of poststructuralism, and boldly unorthodox Deleuzian nomadism, Barthes continues to be read today as a nomad thinker whose intellectual play is inextricably linked to the future-oriented semiotics of the everyday and ordinary, perpetually adrift, and "always on the blind spot of systems" (*Pleasure of the Text* 35).

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Vision and Violence in Virginia Woolf's The Waves

Virginia Woolf describes her artistic goal in *The Waves* as an attempt to create “an abstract mystical eyeless book.” Yet, in creating her eyeless book, one that eschews a single narrative perspective, Woolf amasses abundant visual details. For each of her six characters, visual images mark significant moments of being. In fact, Woolf emphasizes the characters’ capacity for sight as a vulnerability that allows them to be violated and wounded over and over. This article analyzes connections between visual imagery and themes of violence in the novel to demonstrate how they cohere into an extended metaphor for the ways in which acts of looking can elicit powerful emotions that threaten to fragment individual identity in painful ways. While Woolf’s novel has received critical commentary that focuses on the role of vision in the narrative and critics have also noted how violence in the text supports other themes, the explicit relationship between sight and violence has not yet been fully explored. A close examination of the visual imagery in key scenes of the novel demonstrates how Woolf engages the reader to participate in the characters’ deepening sense of fragmentation as they are repeatedly assaulted by experience, as the eyes themselves become symbols of the twin dynamics of desire and destruction.

key words: Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, visual imagery, violence

That Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves* defies conventions of plot, character, and setting is a given. The novel fits the modernist artist’s agenda of questioning not only the representation of reality but reality itself. David Bradshaw, in his 2015 introduction to the Oxford World’s Classics edition of the novel, points to passages from Woolf’s diaries and critical essays to show how the author intentionally set out to create in this work an alternative genre, neither prose nor poetry nor drama but an altogether different and more accurate invocation of lived experience (xvi). Woolf’s own description of modernist fiction can be said to illustrate her artistic goal in *The Waves* as well as other novels, such as *Jacob’s Room* and *To the Lighthouse*, to mention only two. She writes, “Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel” (“Modern Fiction” 154). Thus she lays out her personal experiment with fiction, her desire to produce an alternative to the novel as she knew it. *The Waves* indeed tests the limits of language, constituting what many consider a “lyrical tour de force” (Bradshaw xii).

Woolf’s experiment with narrative led her to question the relationships between fiction and the other arts, painting and music in particular. As she says in “A Sketch of the Past,” it is not necessary to separate one art from another nor ourselves from the arts: “[T]he whole world is a work of art . . . we are parts of the work of art” (62). As an artist of words, she envisioned a book that would immerse the reader in the sensory impressions – the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures – of the lives of abstract characters. Rendering experience through images that would evoke strong emotion was her goal, the goal of a poet as much as a novelist. She records her own

immersion in sensory impressions in "A Sketch of the Past." Here she details a childhood moment of singular experience with light and sound: "It is of hearing the blind draw its little acorn across the floor as the wind blew the blind out. It is of lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light, and feeling, it is almost impossible that I should be here; of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive" (64-65). She goes on to say, "Sound and sight seem to make equal parts of these first impressions" (66). Her senses, however, she acknowledges, have the power to wound as well as delight. In this first instance, she recalls her received impressions of sight and sound as "ecstasy," yet in another reminiscence from the same piece, she describes the horror of suddenly catching sight of an apple tree in moonlight. She recalls feeling assaulted by this sight that she connects with having just overheard her parents talking of a neighbour's suicide. Woolf refers to this and other horror-inducing sights and sounds as "shocks" and describes a compulsion even in adulthood to "take away the pain" by "put[ting] the severed parts together" through writing (71-72).

In *The Waves*, Woolf's desire to transform powerful fleeting sensory impressions into a transcendent whole is evident in the character of Bernard, whom numerous critics describe as her artistic alter-ego (Fand, Griffin, Ender, Kelley). Ender remarks how Bernard "evokes . . . the persistence of violent non-integrated sensations. Looking at paintings, he sees them as emblems of pain" (211). For the characters in the novel, pain is inherent in perception, often experienced as an act of violence. In the episodes related through the voices of her six characters, Woolf reveals a paradoxical premise; i.e., that in perceiving this work of art that is the world, the perceiver will be wounded. A reading of the novel, therefore, must take into account not only the novel's signature narrative structure, a mosaic-like juxtaposition of images, but also the many ways in which sensory apprehension, even of the most enchanting sights and sounds, brings pain.

All the senses are exaggerated in the novel, but the sense of sight especially exposes the characters' vulnerabilities. The author's own description of her artistic goal reveals a preoccupation with sight. In an attempt to wrench fiction away from the hold of novelistic conventions such as the single narrator and the linear narrative, Woolf imagined her book as "an abstract mystical eyeless book" (*Diary Volume 3*). Her choice of the word "eyeless" here is fraught with contradiction, for, even as she works to escape the limitations of a conventional realist narrator, to escape the limits of a single perspective in order to avoid violating the truth of lived experience, she uses the characters' capacity for sight to violate and wound them over and over again. Those impressions, "engraved with the sharpness of steel," that mark significant moments of being for Jinny, Percival, Neville, Bernard, Susan, and Louis are repeatedly experienced as violence and represented through images of violence. In fact, in *The Waves*, images of violence cohere into an extended metaphor for the ways in which acts of looking can elicit powerful emotions that threaten to fragment individual identity in painful ways.

While Woolf's novel has received critical commentary that focuses on the role of vision in the narrative and critics have also noted how violence in the episodes supports other themes, the explicit relationship between sight and violence has not yet been fully explored. For example, critics who have analyzed *The Waves* through its memes of sight have tended to focus on the eye as a metaphor for the self-creating self, as in Luttrell's "Virginia Woolf's Emersonian Metaphors of Sight." Luttrell contrasts Woolf's depiction of the relationship between the working of the eyes and the working of the mind with Emerson's version, Woolf's being characterized as inward-oriented while Emerson's is outward-oriented (72). She says that for Emerson, sight moves from the circle of the eye to the circle of the horizon and then beyond to the transcendental. Woolf, however, according to the critic, posits that in focusing close-up on a material object (its colour, shape, mass), there is promise of achieving momentary transcendence, especially if in the

company of others also focusing on the object. While there are moments in the novel when an object draws the six characters into temporary communion, as in the dinner scenes of sections four and eight, I argue that such moments, rather than emphasizing the temporary transcendence achieved through apprehending a striking object, highlight instead the opposite as the characters quickly return to their own separate, isolated musings. As to analyses of violence, critics who have examined relevant images in the novel, notably knife and blade, have usually done so only tangentially in support of other assertions about the characters' fragmentation. Monson, for example, relying on Kristeva's philosophy of the subject-in-process and Levinas's ethical philosophy, proposes a reading of violence in the novel as a metaphor for the inherent violence of subjectivity, wherein the subject, Bernard in this case, attempts to use language to reduce the others to his story of them while also constructing himself as something distinctly other than his friends. According to Monson, both selfhood and language are revealed in the novel to be "necessarily violent modes" (183). When Bernard finally "acknowledges the violence of perception," Monson claims, it is the realization that what he sees no one else sees in the same way (189). The "infinity of [Bernard's] experience . . . is reduced in the eyes of another to a single signifier: that of 'a rather heavy, elderly man, grey at the temples'" (189). While Bernard may have figured himself as a type of artist-redeemer, the one who will make sense of all their lives through language, he is struck in this moment by the power of an observer to reduce him to a caricature.

Although it has much in common with the critics mentioned above, this study focuses neither on the self-creating function of sight in the novel nor on the violence that a perceiver necessarily inflicts on the object of vision but rather, from a counter perspective, on the ways in which images from the world and those who inhabit the world inflict violence on the perceiver. Through the symbolic use of sharp weapons, bladed and blade-like objects, many of them drawn from myths and fairy tales, Woolf demonstrates how the act of seeing inflicts psychic pain in the lives of six personalities, all struggling with perceptions that threaten to deconstruct their illusions of a stable and thus knowable reality. Seeing implies light, light invites recognition, but recognition is thwarted by constant changes in an unstable world. Through a series of dramatic monologues, Woolf invites the reader to participate in the characters' deepening sense of fragmentation as they are repeatedly assaulted by experience, as the eyes themselves become symbols of the twin dynamics of desire and destruction.

From the novel's very beginning, Woolf poses the mystery and vulnerability inherent in the act of seeing. She invites speculation about issues of illusion-reality by centring the novel on a basically unchanging scene that nevertheless appears to change before the reader's eyes as the novel progresses. Placing readers inside the narrative eye, she first projects a world in darkness, where the "sea [is] indistinguishable from the sky" (7); then, as we watch, the gathering light gradually exposes colours and shapes, creating a landscape. Throughout the nine sections of the novel, lyrical interludes establish the visual effects of the sun's rising and setting through time. Woolf paints the same scene over and over, showing the perceptual effects of sunlight on objects in much the same way Monet returned to his haystacks again and again to explore the distortions created by sunlight playing upon objects, where the question of the real haystacks is rendered absurd. They remain the same even as they change under the artist's eye. Similarly, Woolf, in *The Waves*, establishes a scene that will both change and remain the same throughout the novel.

At first lyrical and subdued, this changing scene, over the time span of the novel, reveals increasingly disturbing images of violence and death. In the beginning, sunlight striking objects of the landscape gradually focuses on the house, which, along with its garden, provides a grounding image for ensuing interludes. The children playing in the garden imagine the familiar

activities of their day as adults rise and a meal is prepared. Yet in the background, “the great brute on the beach stamps” (10). Soon after in this section, a second and fantastically forbidding house appears: Elevedon, where a “lady sits between the two long windows, writing” (17) and also where, “if we died here, nobody would bury us” (17).¹ The children have encountered images of both life and death in the garden, from which the two houses are visible. As if to emphasize the complexity of this act of seeing through the narrative eye, Woolf has the encroaching light in succeeding interludes gradually reveal also a mirror in the house on the dining room wall, which, by section eight, has taken on the form of another kind of eye: “Rimmed in a gold circle the looking glass held the scene immobile as if everlasting in its eye” (208).² In the various scenes of the novel, the author invites readers to look in, not from one perspective only, but through an eye that changes constantly, each character reacting to a personal vision and doggedly attempting to draw a circle around the illusion, to wall it in, to contain it and hold it steady.

While the scenes of the opening interludes of the nine sections of the novel function as a useful stylistic device for investigating effects of the passage of time through days, seasons, and years of the characters' lives, they would be far less memorable if not for their emotionally packed and highly evocative, many times frightening, mythic images.³ Each interlude is threaded with suggestions of violence and disintegration that create mounting anxiety as the novel progresses. In the opening interlude, for example, Woolf describes the sunrise in foreboding terms: “The light struck upon the trees in the garden” and the “sun sharpened the walls of the house” (8). In the second interlude, “sharp stripes” shadowed the grass and “broader blades” lay upon the house as flower buds “split asunder” while “the concussion of the waves breaking” sounded on the shore (9). In interlude three, the reader perceives a new image, “the ribs of the eaten-out boat” (73), and hears a new song, fearful and anxious, as the birds begin “pecking each other” (74). A sense of horror arises (“their eyes became gold beads”) as violence erupts: the birds “spiked” and “pecked” a worm, then “plunged the tips of their beaks savagely” into the soft bodies of slugs (74). Meanwhile, the waves have been transformed into “turbaned warriors . . . with poisoned assegais” (75).⁴

Through repetition and variation of violent imagery, each interlude resonates in the section that follows it, and each section in turn builds upon preceding sections through memories and experiences provided by the narrative voices. Borrowing from patterns of symphonic composition, Woolf uses these interludes to set the mood and establish the themes to be elaborated in the six-voiced choruses that follow; for the mounting tension revealed in the scenes of the interludes has its response in the unfolding lives expressed, each stage marked by the

¹ Could the woman be Virginia Woolf's way of including herself in the novel, as Roxanne Fand suggests? This would add an interesting dimension to the story, calling attention to the process of fiction-writing itself and the creation of character. If we are to understand the characters as fictions only, with no pretense to reality, then Bernard's statement that “if we die here, no one will bury us” becomes a witty assertion.

² N.C. Thakur's *The Symbolism of Virginia Woolf* compares Woolf's use of the mystic eye to various ideas in Persian, Christian, and Buddhist mystical writings but does not try to establish her direct borrowing from these works. Thakur also cites Nietzsche's Ring of Recurrence as a similar idea. Using these symbols that exist so widely in myth seems to be part of Woolf's agenda to render the workings of the human mind.

³ Woolf's essay “The Sun and the Fish” discusses the mental process of recording memory and establishes an essential connection between visual image and emotion in the individual's long-term memory. Also, details recorded in her diary about an experience of watching a solar eclipse may have been source material for this novel as well.

⁴ *Assegais* are slender hardwood spears with iron tips of African origin.

increasingly painful awareness of separation and individuation from the other voices.⁵ Woolf's language increasingly poses *seeing* and *being seen* as acts of violence in themselves.

The painful revelation of identity begins in section one when Jinny kisses Louis and he feels the violence of the act that separates him from the others, along with a sense of revulsion at his physical response: "I am struck on the nape of the neck. She has kissed me. All is shattered" (13). Susan, too, is shattered by the divisiveness of the act: "I saw her kiss him . . . Now I will wrap my agony inside my pocket-handkerchief" (13). For Susan, this awareness of vulnerability through the connected acts of seeing and feeling leads immediately to an awareness of death: "I love . . . I hate. I desire . . . I shall eat grass and die in a ditch in the brown water where leaves have rotted" (15).

Woolf expands the theme of painful self-recognition by showing the effects of the kiss on the other characters. Bernard notices Susan's agony and follows her, absent-mindedly taking Neville's knife, "the sharp one that cuts the keel," and leaving Neville powerless (19). Metaphorically, Neville will spend the rest of the novel searching for his lost power, not even sure what power it is that the keen blade of the knife symbolizes.⁶ Bernard creates a story and leads Susan on an adventure, to take her mind off her grief, showing her the forbidden house and garden beyond the wall where the bearded gardener sweeps brown leaves; they run back together, fearing that, if he catches them, he might kill them and nail their bodies to the wall. These horrible images lie buried in the consciousnesses of Bernard and Susan, emerging in their language at times of crisis. That same night, Bernard has his own painful self-revelation when his nurse squeezes water from a sponge over his body, making him feel "arrows of sensation shoot on either side" (26). These sensations, he notes in section four, mark the beginnings of his own recognition of separateness and vulnerability, the moment when he "became clothed in this changing, this feeling garment of flesh" (124). Each voice in its own way in section one experiences a fall from innocence that is equated with seeing and being seen, with a shock of recognition that combines perception and emotion in such a way as to preserve itself forever in the memory of the individual.

Through these initial experiences, each voice awakens to the understanding of the fragmentation that marks his or her humanity.⁷ Only Rhoda refuses identity, as symbolized in her resistance to looking into mirrors. In a desperate effort to avoid the pain of her own identity, she lives in dreams, identifying with the one white petal that sails alone in the basin where the broken blossom floats. She will finally only "trust solitude and the violence of death" (231). Woolf emphasizes Rhoda's desire for non-identity through details such as the vacant moon of her face, her identification with darkness and sleep, and the absence of a father. She unequivocally claims, "I am not here. I have no face" (43). True to her self-image, Rhoda finally takes her own life near the end of the novel by leaping from a high place (289). Her confidante is Louis, the outsider who speaks with a different accent and who hates being laughed at, who wears a belt with a snake buckle; Louis identifies himself with discord and claims rejection as his signifier.

Although the progress of the novel pivots on increasingly painful perceptions of separation for these characters, the scenes in which they receive the most violent shocks of self-awareness are those in which they come together as adults to share a meal, in scenes where

⁵ A number of critics (Bradshaw, Clements, Cuddy-Keane, Ferguson, Thakur) describe Woolf's conscious making of the form of this novel into a kind of symphonic poem to incorporate elements of music into the work.

⁶ Neville's knife is also symbolic of his sexuality, his intense attraction to Percival being physical as well as idealistic.

⁷ Harvena Richter's *The Inward Voyage* discusses this effect in Woolf's work and points out a reference to the ideas in Woolf's essay "The Moment: Summer's Night."

knives and forks repeatedly catch the light, appearing as strange sorts of weapons against disillusionment. The first dinner scene occurs in section four as the six friends gather for a farewell to Percival, who is leaving for India. Percival never speaks in the novel and he alone never sees – “His blue, and oddly inexpressive, eyes are fixed with pagan indifference upon the pillar opposite” (36) – although he draws all eyes to himself. Percival has no substantive identity, not even a shadow, as revealed in Louis’s comment, “A wake of light seems to lie on the grass behind him” (37); yet, paradoxically, he is adored by all (37). Percival is the symbolic lost knife for which Neville, “scissor-cutting, exact” (117), has been searching since the first scene of the novel. Waiting for Percival to appear, Neville stares at his dinner knife, straightens his fork (120). Of Percival, Louis says that his presence turns one’s heart into “a file with two edges” (37). He is the true knight on a quest for the Holy Grail. When he takes his seat at the table, the kingdom is in order. But this sword has a double edge, for in its blinding light is death.

The interlude for this dinner scene is appropriately filled with lances, swords, claws, beaks, knives, and daggers as the midmorning sun bears down on the beach. Seeing has clearly become dangerous: “A jar was so green that the eye seemed sucked up through a funnel by its intensity (110). Percival functions in the same manner as the jar, as an icon. With his arrival, chaos is undone, the pain of separation is sucked away: “He has imposed order. Knives cut again” (122). Percival is portrayed not as an identity but as the ideal that brings them together and endows them with meaning: “We have come together . . . to make one thing, not enduring – for what endures? – but seen by many eyes simultaneously” (127). Yet the “authentic ones” – Louis and Rhoda, the outsiders who prefer solitude – resist Percival’s fascination, not duped by the false illusion. They seem to know that Percival’s reality is death itself (he will, in fact, die in India before the next scene) as they whisper together about the others. Louis says, “Their eyes are like a moth’s wings moving so quickly that they do not seem to move at all” (140); like moths, they are attracted to the flame that draws them toward death. These two alone are aware of how soon the celebration festival for the coming of the hero can end in a slanting shadow, a cold urn, where “[d]eath is woven in with the violets” (141).

The next dinner gathering occurs in section eight, where the six meet again, middle-aged now, years after Percival’s death. With Percival dead, their illusions have died as well, and the light of idealism has dimmed: “Custom blinds [their] eyes” (212). The friends, who as children were shocked by the pain of their first seeing, now ironically seek a replacement for the razor edge of brilliance they have lost, for the flash of Percival that once drew them. Only Rhoda has gained meaning from his death; looking at his grave, one stone placed on another, she has found it a “perfect dwelling place” (163). The stones that mark his grave are the reality she has recognized. She has answered her own question, “[B]ut what is the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing? . . . Percival, by his death, has made me this gift, let me see the thing” (163). She tells Louis that they can “trust only in solitude and the violence of death” (231). Finally understanding that the only way to escape the prison of the body and the pain of seeing is through death, she chooses suicide.

With Percival gone, the other friends attempt to piece their diminished worlds back together in their own separate ways. As they look for meaning, their searches are expressed in caricatures of the hero’s weapons. Louis, a successful businessman, loves the “sharp edge” of his desk and his appointment book with its appointments at four-thirty “sharp”; he wears “the sharp-pointed pyramid” of responsibility on his shoulders (202). Susan sees her identity in motherhood, the children whose “eyes will see when mine are shut” (172), who sleep while she pushes the needle through the cloth and snips with the scissors. Jinny and Neville look to sex for fulfilment. Jinny pencils in her eyebrows at a sharper angle to attract new lovers while Neville lives with the

constant threat of abandonment by his lover, imagining disaster with each public appearance: "We were cut up, we were dissevered by all those faces . . . I sat staring" (178).

Bernard alone, the writer, continues the heroic search for a vision that will, as Percival did, hold the promise for something good and whole in their fragmented lives. Just as he once comforted the wounded Susan as a child by creating a story, he now searches for a symbol, something to pull out whole from the depths, something like a live fish. But the moving fin that would break "the leaden waste of waters" eludes him (245). Hoping for insight, he gazes at the sea; he looks through his wine glass, but finally wonders, "Are there stories?" (187). He suspects that his attempts to capture all the moments of being in a person's life as a set of connected instances, one following the next, of placing one word after another to make a coherent narrative, may be an illusion. In the final scene of the novel, Bernard desperately attempts to heal them all by setting the story of his own life whole before a stranger in a restaurant late one night. The scene has the effect of a caricatured Last Supper. The interlude for this scene includes images of garden, broken vessel, rotten apples, adder's skin, nail and thorn tree. The story that Bernard tells is full of violent language – broken, tattered, arrows, skeletons, holes, growling, scratching, flicking, cutting, smashing, splintering, evisceration. Having offered up his life to the stranger – "If it were possible, I would hand it you entire. I would break it off as one breaks off a bunch of grapes. I would say, 'Take it. This is my life'" (238) – Bernard feels as though he is disintegrating into "a dust dance," a shadow talking of shadows. Just as he has finally begun to find transcendence in the illusion of the moment, he suddenly catches the eye of his listener. Then he sees himself in a mirror. The two instances of seeing shock him into a painful return to self-awareness – "the blow you have dealt me" (293) – that echoes the childhood bath scene in which he first recognized the sensations on his bare skin as manifestations of an embodied self. Now at the dinner gathering, noticing the greasy knife on the table, he becomes even more intensely aware of his humanity: "We have been taking into our mouths the bodies of dead birds. It is with these greasy crumbs, slobbered over napkins, and little corpses that we have to build. Always it begins again . . ." (293). The "it" in his statement suggests "the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again" (297) of the waves that have dominated the imagery of the novel from the first scene.

So, fully recognizing the futility of words, Bernard nevertheless takes them up again. Once again, he begins his story: "It is death against whom I ride with my spear couched and my hair flying back like a young man's . . . I strike spurs into my horse" (297). Having faced death both personally in the loss of Percival and existentially in his realization of a simple fact of humanity, Bernard understands that to live is the painful daily flinging of oneself against the enemy, the daily allowing of oneself into the sensory onslaught that eventually consumes all. As day breaks and the waves break, he acknowledges his status as "an elderly man, stand[ing] in the street looking up rather dizzily at the sky" (296). He will not call it dawn because a dawn implies teleology, a destination. Instead, sunlight strikes the eye once again. To the assault of another day breaking he responds with a counter assault. Rather than tell a story, he chooses to juxtapose the two images: an elderly man looking dizzily at the sky and a young man riding into battle. The composite image is a caricature, a comic image of an aging Don Quixote.

Considering this caricatured figure that Bernard's words suggest, one is reminded of Woolf's self-expressed artistic purpose, to "take away the pain" of what one has seen and recognized by "put[ting] the severed parts together" to create a new artistic form ("A Sketch of the Past" 71-72). Bernard realizes the absurdity of what he intends to do yet is compelled to relieve his anxiety by constructing a new image of himself in the world. As Ender notes, Bernard is Woolf's alter ego. He understands the connection between vision and violence. When looking

at paintings, he “sees them as emblems of pain” (211), perhaps as attempts, like the author’s, to take away the pain of dis-integration. In Woolf’s expression of her desire to write a novel based on “myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel” (“Modern Fiction” 154), the phrase “engraved with the sharpness of steel” seems an apt expression of her rendering of the experiences of Jinny, Neville, Bernard, Susan, and Louis as they recount and revisit the images of childhood that inhabit their maturing consciousnesses. Those images, as has been elaborated, are often violent and leave the characters with impressions of fragmentation that they continue to try to repair throughout their lives. Bernard, in the end, remains struggling to create something whole of the “myriad impressions” of his life.

Roy Johnson in his review of Sarah Latham Phillips’s *Virginia Woolf as a “Cubist Writer”* refers to *The Waves* as “a narrative often described as a mosaic of fragments” (Johnson). The “mosaic of fragments” that Johnson describes captures both the visual elements and the violence that characterize Woolf’s experimental novel. From fragments, disjointed images from the characters’ lives that represent moments of painful realization, she has created a complex, balanced composition that, rather than attempting to soften the jagged angles of the pieces, juxtaposes them in ways that invoke both emotion and contemplation. Like the cubist artists, Woolf created in *The Waves* a piece that is both absurd and beautiful, her text made of images evoked in words. Recognizing that these images are presented in patterns that specifically and consistently combine vision and violence throughout the novel supports a reading that reveals the novel’s artistic unity as well as its linguistic virtuosity.

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Laying Bare: Agamben, Chandler, and The Responsibility to Protect

This paper demonstrates the hidden similarities between Raymond Chandler's prototypical noir *The Big Sleep*, and the United Nations *Responsibility to Protect* (R2P) document. By taking up the work of philosopher Giorgio Agamben, this paper shows that the bare life produces the form of protection embodied by Philip Marlowe in Chandler's novel and by the United Nations Security Council in R2P. Agamben's theorizing of the extra-legal status of the sovereign pertains to both texts, in which the protector exists outside of the law. Philip Marlowe, tasked with preventing the distribution of pornographic images, commits breaking-and-entering, withholding evidence, and murder. Analogously, R2P advocates for the Security Council's ability to trespass laws that safeguard national sovereignty in order to prevent "bare" atrocities against human life. As Agamben demonstrates, the extra-legal position of the protector is made possible by "stripping bare" human life. This paper also gestures towards limitations of Agamben's thought by indicating, through a comparison of these two texts, that bare life produces states of exception as the object of protection rather than punishment.

key words: The Big Sleep; R2P; Agamben; Bare Life; States of Exception

As two texts whose primary concern is the suspension of law, Raymond Chandler's novel *The Big Sleep* can be thought alongside the United Nations *The Responsibility to Protect* document (R2P). This paper demonstrates that the prioritization of protection over legal representation in both of these texts emerges from the production of bareness. In *The Big Sleep*, Philip Marlowe is hired as an extra-legal investigator tasked with preventing the distribution of pornographic images. Similarly, the R2P document argues for the ability to suspend state sovereignty in order to protect human life that has been stripped of national character. In order to explain the hidden similarity between these two texts, this paper takes up the philosopher Giorgio Agamben's argument that the production of bare life facilitates the creation of states of exception in which sovereign violence can exceed legal limitations. By drawing on the logic of exception that underlies the strategies of protection that are represented in each document, this paper also points out possible reworkings of Agamben's thesis.

Agamben argues that states of exception can occur through the production of bare life by the sovereign, which enables sovereign violence to be deployed without juridical limitations. Agamben explains that a state of exception is when the law is temporarily suspended by the state due to emergency circumstances. Citing 9/11 as a state of exception in his book *Homo Sacer*, Agamben points out that "President Bush's decision to refer to himself constantly as the 'Commander in Chief of the Army' after September 11, 2001 . . . entails a direct reference to the state of exception . . . in which the emergency becomes the rule, and the very distinction between peace and war (and between foreign and civil war) becomes impossible" (22). Agamben explains that the "emergency" of 9/11 permitted the US government to perform increasingly invasive and unconstitutional practices of protection, such as "the USA Patriot Act issued by the U.S. Senate

on October 26, 2001, [that] allowed the attorney general to ‘take into custody’ any alien suspected of activities that endangered ‘the national security of the United States’” (Agamben *State of Exception* 3). Bare life enables this seemingly occasional state to become the rule, for the state of exception to become the norm.

Hannah Arendt describes bare life as occurring “when a person becomes a human being in general – without a profession, without citizenship, without an opinion, without a deed by which to identify and specify himself” (182). Agamben departs from Arendt’s formulation of power by showing that “the production of bare life is the originary activity of sovereignty” (*Homo Sacer* 83). Bare life is not a product of power, as Arendt argues in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, instead it constitutes the very foundation of sovereignty. Bare life is a mode of being that permits the sovereign to enact violence without constitutional restraint, “sovereign violence is in truth founded not on a pact but on the exclusive inclusion of bare life in the state” (*Homo Sacer* 106). Bare life lacks political representation, yet it is subject to political forces – it is an inclusive exclusion of *oikos* in the workings of the *polis*, of the unpolitical being in the administration of power. The expression that Agamben uses for naming this formulation of bare life is *homo sacer*, they who can be killed without being murdered. During a state of exception, such as the one that Agamben links to the Patriot Acts, specific members of society become reduced to *homo sacer* when they are stripped of legal representation, left defenceless, utterly vulnerable to the state. States of exception thereby form a necessary component of sovereignty. It is during a state of exception that the necessary *inclusive exclusion* is produced, the scapegoat that is within the city but is not protected by its laws. This paper demonstrates that *The Big Sleep* as well as the R2P document expose the ways that bare life permits increasingly invasive and illegal forms of sovereign power, but through reversing Agamben’s logic, whereby bare life becomes that which must be protected instead of expelled.

In Raymond Chandler’s prototypical noir, Philip Marlowe is hired by General Sternwood to “handle” the extortion efforts being made by Arthur Gwynn Geiger, who has been blackmailing General Sternwood with gambling debts accrued by his daughter. Marlowe proves to be the ideal man for this assignment because of his ability to ensure privacy and to work outside the law. Through several acts of trespassing and deceit, Marlowe eventually uncovers Geiger’s pornography studio: “Miss Carmen Sternwood was sitting in a fringed orange shawl...it had a profile like an eagle and its wide round eye was a camera lens. The lens was aimed at the naked girl in the chair” (Chandler 36). Marlowe eventually tracks down the photographs to Joe Brody and retrieves them by blackmailing Joe into releasing them, stating “You knew *she* was there, because you had your girl friend threaten Mrs. Regan with a police rap. The only ways you could know enough to do that would be by seeing what happened or by holding the photo and knowing where and when it was taken. Cough up and be sensible.” (83) Marlowe’s shady approach, his playing loose with the law, is what makes him the ideal protector. In a conversation with Carmen’s sister Vivian, Marlowe reminds her how valuable he is, not simply because of his confidentiality: “‘How about telling the police?’ ‘It’s a good idea. But you won’t do it.’ ‘Won’t I?’ ‘No. You have to protect your father and your sister. You don’t know what the police might turn up. It might be something they couldn’t sit on’” (59). The appropriateness of Marlowe’s methods is rationalized by what he has been hired to protect: photographs of Carmen’s bare, entirely uncovered body.

The United Nations document, *The Responsibility to Protect* (R2P) argues that the sovereignty of individual nations can be suspended in order to prevent “bare” atrocities against humanity. This marks a significant shift in international relations, since it prioritizes the protection of human beings regardless of nationality, race, or religion – in other words, human

beings that have been stripped of any qualities. This is supported by the document's rhetoric of "bareness." For example, article 1.5 argues that disagreements between state leaders over the permissibility of intervention have "laid bare basic divisions within the international community," and concludes by stating, "in the interest of all those victims who suffer and die when leadership and institutions fail, it is crucial that these divisions be resolved" (2). In describing past atrocities, R2P emphasizes how situations like "Rwanda in 1994 laid bare the full horror of inaction" (1). What is "stripped away" by these events is their national specificity, since "in the aftermath, many African peoples concluded that, for all the rhetoric about the universality of human rights, some human lives end up mattering a great deal less to the international community than others" (R2P 1). The "bareness" of these atrocities is what makes them "conscience-shocking situation[s] crying out for action" (R2P 55). This paper makes two claims: that the R2P document produces "bare life" by reversing Agamben's formulation, and that the R2P document argues for a strategy of protection that exploits bare life in order to violate individual state sovereignty.

By placing Marlowe alongside the R2P document, a correlation emerges which shows that the R2P document operates according to a logic that can only be called pornographic. By "laying bare" our responsibilities, the R2P document argues that atrocities such as genocide have made the issue of preventing these crises the obligation of the international community. Since the prevention of these atrocities is no longer solely the concern for the nation in which it occurs, this responsibility justifies the violation of laws that protect state sovereignty. When the R2P document states "the [Security] Council is already prepared to authorize coercive deployments in cases where the crisis in question is, for all practical purposes, confined within the borders of a particular state" (34), this authorization depends on the degree to which the crisis is an obligation to the international community. In other words, this depends on how "bare" the crisis is – how much it lacks national specificity, to what degree it is a concern about "human life" regardless of what national, cultural, or religious qualities it may possess. Similarly, Marlowe's protection of Carmen's nudity involves having to work outside of legal limitations. His methods include blackmail, breaking and entering, withholding evidence, and murder. During a conversation with the District Attorney, Marlowe states, "my client is entitled to that protection, short of anything but a Grand Jury. I have a license to operate as a private detective. I suppose that word 'private' has some meaning" (Chandler 111-12). For Marlowe, a "private" investigator is one who is not beholden to the public, with all of its rules and regulations. The way that R2P advocates for the protection of human life, and Marlowe protects Carmen's nude photos, corresponds with Agamben's formulation of sovereign power as that which operates outside of juridical limitations. In both cases, this is enacted by the production of bare life, but in a reversal of Agamben's logic, since bare life becomes that which is protected rather than expelled.

In his article, "'You're a Watcher, Lad': Detective Fiction, Pornography, and Ellroy's L.A. Quartet," Jim Mancall argues that pornography is frequently found in detective fiction because crime and pornography both need to be restrained. He states that "crime can never be completely eradicated, but it can be carefully controlled and confined" (3). Likewise, "containment is a fixture in debates about the regulation of pornography" (3), which makes "pornography . . . a signifier for the detective story itself" (12). This can be seen in *The Big Sleep* by considering how Carmen's pornography exceeds confinement. Marlowe discovers that pornography is being distributed through secret deposits on the street, "I watched him out of sight and went up the central walk of the La Baba and parted the branches of the third cypress. I drew out a wrapped book and put it under my arm and went away from there" (Chandler 27), "a racket like that, out in the open on the boulevard, seemed to mean a lot of protection" (30).

The conspicuousness of the pornography ring, contrasted with the images of Carmen that are taken in a “wide room, the whole width of the house . . . there were four cushions, bits of odd silk tossed around, as if whoever lived there had to have a piece he could reach and thumb” (34-35) emphasizes how pornography disrupts confinement. Marlowe is specially equipped to protect an object like pornography because he is also capable of breaking spatial limits. In the chapter “The Synoptic Chandler” from *Shades of Noir*, Fredric Jameson states that the various “offices” in Chandler’s novels “are able in a satisfactory and satisfying manner to span the breadth of the social system from wealth to poverty and (in the area of crime and vice) from public to private” (44-45). He goes on to argue that the structure of *The Big Sleep* “organizes people and their dwellings into a cognitive map of Los Angeles that Marlowe can be seen to canvass, pushing the doorbells of so many social types, from the great mansions to the junk-filled rooms on Bunker Hill or West 54th Place” (53). Marlowe’s Los Angeles is an area without limits, and his ability to trespass borders is appropriate for securing an object like pornography that also resists containment.

Various passages in the R2P document state that violations against human life constitute a threat that supersedes national borders, “the Commission believes that they will strictly limit the use of coercive military force for human protection purposes . . . in those exceptional circumstances when violence within a state menaces all peoples” (35). “Human protection” is an international, rather than domestic, responsibility. R2P thereby advocates a method of protection that is capable of trespassing national limits, even arguing that it is the obligation of the international community to intervene during “a breakdown or abdication of a state’s own capacity and authority in discharging its ‘responsibility to protect’” (39). Not only are all nations responsible for protecting human life, but all nations are obliged to intervene when human life is threatened. R2P does not simply argue for the permissibility of violations of sovereignty, it advocates a radically deterritorialized model of international relations.

The objects of protection in both of these texts challenge territorial separations: the nude photographs of Carmen are private images made public, and in R2P, human life belongs to the citizens of a specific country but are also of international concern. The insistent assurance that “when the call goes out to the community of states for action, that call will be answered . . . there must be no more Rwandas” (R2P 70) continues to draw attention to the pornographic aspect of these crises within the framework of protection advocated by R2P, as private affairs that are made public. Because the responsibility to protect human life is both domestic and international, R2P argues that the means for protecting it should likewise cross over these territorial distinctions. These means are reflected by the topographical subversion of sovereignty that Agamben discusses in *Homo Sacer*. Agamben describes the sovereign as existing both within and outside the juridical order, “the sovereign, having the legal power to suspend the validity of the law, legally places himself outside the law” (*Homo Sacer* 15). This inclusive exclusionary status is made permissible by the production of bare life, which is the included exclusion to the city. Agamben states that “in the city, the banishment of sacred life is more internal than every interiority and more external than every extraneousness” (*Homo Sacer* 111). It comes from without, but it is within, thus granting the sovereign the ability to punish *homo sacer* without respecting the rules of the city. Bare life also collapses the separation of private and public spheres because of its necessarily biopolitical aspect. Biopolitical life is produced when the traditional distinctions of *bios* and *zoē*, or of political life and private life, have been joined,

together with the process by which exception everywhere becomes the rule, the realm of bare life – which is originally situated at the margins of the political order – gradually begins to

coincide with the political realm, and exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, *bios* and *zoē*, right and fact, enter into a zone of irreducible indistinction. (*Homo Sacer* 9)

If we consider how Agamben's argument may be reversed, then the protection (rather than the punishment) of bare life as a category that subverts topographical separation explains the extensions of sovereignty occurring in *The Big Sleep* and R2P. Just as the protection of Carmen's nudity requires somebody who is capable of trespassing, so does R2P advocate for a method of protection that rejects national borders. The dissolution of territorial demarcation in *The Big Sleep* and R2P can be explained by considering how the object of protection works against these limitations in virtue of its bareness.

Marlowe protects Carmen's body in several respects. To begin with, his destruction of the pornographic photographs is an act that protects the use of her body against her consent. Elaine Scarry discusses the relationship between consent and the body in her book *Thermonuclear Monarchy*, wherein she states, "what we call a 'constitutional principle of authorization' embedded in a legal document, and 'social contract' when embedded in a philosophic document, we call 'consent' when embodied in a living human being" (263). By referring to the influence of medical discourse on John Locke and John Stuart Mill, Scarry argues that "the body is inseparable from the deep structure of consent" (275), forming "the lever across which sovereignty is gained, authorization achieved" (276). The relationship between the body and consent is key for understanding the kind of violation that is produced by Carmen's pornographic photographs. By working to prevent the nonconsensual distribution of her pornographic images, Marlowe's first assignment is the protection of her body. Throughout this investigation, Marlowe also protects Carmen from physical harm: "Agnes turned the gun away from me and swung it at Carmen. I shot my hand out and closed my fingers down hard over her hand and jammed my thumb on the safety catch" (Chandler 86). Yet despite the fact that Carmen's body is an object that requires protection, it is revealed by the end of the novel that Carmen is the true threat. Marlowe explains how Carmen attempts to murder him for refusing to consent to her sexual advances, "she was in my bed – naked. I threw her out on her ear. I guess maybe Regan did the same thing to her sometime. But you can't do that to Carmen" (227). As for Rusty Regan, "she turned the gun and shot him, just the way she tried to shoot me today, and for the same reason" (226). Referring to Scarry's statements on consent, Carmen's behaviour represents a fundamental violation of bodily respect. Despite the fact that Marlowe is hired to protect Carmen, Marlowe has to protect himself from Carmen. Carmen is paradoxically both vulnerable and dangerous, and although Marlowe is employed to protect her body, she herself constitutes a threat of bodily harm and violation.

The UN Security Council can be thought through a similar paradox: of representing a body that must be protected while also being capable of violating sovereignty. Judith Butler argues in *Precarious Life* that "the body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all these as well" (26). Considering the ways in which R2P responds to the vulnerability of human life, the use of bodily rhetoric demonstrates how the representation of human life by "international or regional bodies" (R2P 31) and "non-governmental bodies" (R2P 42) suggests that these organizations are vulnerable in a specific, corporeal way. This is evidenced by the defensive rhetoric that is employed in R2P for protecting the legitimacy of these bodies, reflecting the concern "that intervention for human protection purposes, including military intervention in extreme cases, is supportable" (R2P 16). R2P explicitly calls on the need to defend the Security Council from any objections, stating that "there

is no better or more appropriate body than the United Nations Security Council to authorize military intervention for human protection purposes” (XII). For these reasons, organizations such as the UN Security Council are appropriately called “bodies” because they represent vulnerable bare life and are themselves vulnerable. In her dissertation “The Body of International Relations,” Lauren B. Wilcox builds on Butler’s analysis of the body’s vulnerability by showing that the R2P approach towards security regards “the body of security [as] an exogenous, natural body that is free to go about its business in the absence of violence. By reproducing the sovereign state, R2P reproduces this ‘natural’ body” (247). Wilcox’s argument points out how the rhetoric of R2P emphasizes the vulnerability of international security itself. Yet despite the vulnerability of R2P and its associated international bodies, they are also capable of violence. This is evidenced in Section 4 of R2P, “The Responsibility to React,” which emphasizes the capability of the United Nations for launching aggressive action. Not only does this section convey the UN’s military capability, it also draws attention to the UN’s ability to transgress rules of sovereignty. The international “bodies” that protect bare life while nevertheless demanding to be protected, are paradoxically also the agents capable of violating international contracts of state independence. Considering the connection that Scarry outlines between bodies and consent, these organizations function like bodies that demand for their consent to be protected while also violating the consent of others.

Carmen and the UN Security Council are bodies that paradoxically require protection while acting as aggressive agents. Carmen’s body is an object of protection, but Carmen also violates bodily rights of consent. The international bodies specified in R2P are objects of protection that are also responsible for protecting, while within the R2P document they nevertheless represent a force that can violate rules of state sovereignty. This paradox can be understood by considering the dual ways in which bodies are “stripped.” On the one hand, a body can be thought in terms of a bare life that lacks representation (political “clothing”), while on the other hand a body is one without insignia, without a uniform, and without the obligations that come with this apparel. Agamben describes both of these situations of bareness as *homo sacer* and the sovereign respectively. Both of these paradigms for power exist outside of a juridical order of representation, which permits the sovereign the ability to exercise greater control over *homo sacer*. According to Agamben, sovereign power arises from the inclusion of a pre-representational and pre-contractual State of War within a State of Society,

it is important to note that in Hobbes the state of nature survives in the person of the sovereign . . . sovereignty thus presents itself as an incorporation of the state of nature in society, or, if one prefers, as a state of indistinction between nature and culture, between violence and law, and this very indistinction constitutes specifically sovereign violence. (*Homo Sacer* 34)

This included exception is exhibited in the production of states of exception and bare life, which facilitate the suspension of contractual protection that comprises a State of Society. Because of this inclusion, Agamben describes the sovereign as appearing like a wolf-man, “when Hobbes founds sovereignty by means of a reference to the state in which ‘man is a wolf to men,’ . . . at issue is not simply *feria bestia* and natural life but rather a zone of indistinction between the human and animal, a werewolf” (*Homo Sacer* 106). Marlowe even remarks that Carmen appears like a dog as she is rolling on the floor, “Carmen was crawling on her hands and knees, still hissing . . . ‘Get up, angel. You look like a Pekinese,’” (Chandler 87) adding to the irony that Carmen is in fact a murderer. Likewise, the fact that “there is no better or more appropriate body than the United Nations Security Council to authorize military intervention,” a “body” that consists of “unrepresentative membership . . . and its inherent double standards with the

Permanent Five veto power” (*R2P* 49), brings to mind Agamben’s formulation of the sovereign as an included exception to representation that administers the law without being beholden to it. The bareness of Carmen’s body makes her vulnerable, but also excepts her from having to respect rules of consent, while the international bodies of R2P require protection from its critics even as the document advocates for their ability to violate state sovereignty.

Marlowe is the permanently clothed figure who refuses to be reduced to bare life. The protection of Carmen’s body permits exceptions to the law, the distorting of private and public spheres, and excepts Carmen herself from having to respect the bodies of others. The protection of bare life in R2P permits exceptions to laws governing state sovereignty, blurs territorial distinctions, and grants international bodies the ability to break contractual obligations. Marlowe represents the antithesis of bare life, “wearing my powder-blue suit, with dark blue shirt, tie and display handkerchief, black brogues, black wool socks, with dark blue clocks on them” (Chandler 3). Marlowe even refuses to undress at Carmen’s advances, stating instead ““Don’t make me dress you again . . . you and I have to keep on being friends, and this isn’t the way to do it. Now will you dress like a nice little girl?” (155). In the Agambenian framework of bareness as it relates to sovereignty, Marlowe is the political subject who deals exclusively with representation. Marlowe remains wholly *bios*, nothing but political being, refusing to expose his *zoē*. While this may protect Marlowe to a degree, it also takes away from his power – as he explains, “for twenty-five bucks a day . . . I risk my whole future, the hatred of the cops and of Eddie Mars and his pals, I dodge bullets and eat saps, and say thank you very much, if you have any more trouble, I hope you’ll think of me . . . and that makes me a son of a bitch” (228). If we consider Marlowe’s obsession with clothing within an Agambenian framework, we can see how Marlowe refuses to become *homo sacer* but also refuses to become the sovereign. Ironically, his clothing excludes him from occupying either of the positions of power produced by states of exception. When Marlowe enters General Sternwood’s house at the very start of the novel, he notices a stained glass window: “there was a broad stained-glass panel showing a knight in dark armor rescuing a lady who was tied to a tree and didn’t have any clothes on” (Chandler 3). Clothing is like armour because it is a protection against bareness, and Marlowe protects himself very well.

The role of Carmen’s naked body in *The Big Sleep* and the bareness of human life in *The Responsibility to Protect* both show how protection can permit the suspension of law. This paper takes up Agambenian thought in order to demonstrate the hidden similarity between these two texts as it applies to the theme of protection, while also pointing out ways that Agamben’s political theory can be rethought. Although Agamben’s theorizing of bare life focuses on its vulnerability and its subjection to power, bare life – as it is represented by Carmen Sternwood in *The Big Sleep* and human life in R2P – also enables others to become more vulnerable. Sovereign power can be extended in order to protect bare life, and “elaborate smut . . . seemed to mean a lot of protection” (Chandler 30).

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The American Dream and American Greed in Fanny Fern's Ruth Hall: Sentimental and Satirical Christian Discourse in the Popular Domestic Tale

Although Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall: A Domestic Tale of the Present Time* originally was a widely popular book in the nineteenth century, Fern and *Ruth Hall* were criticized after readers learned about the similarities among Fern's life and book. Contemporary critics have recovered *Ruth Hall* from the literary margins and situated Ruth's story in the context of the popular American dream story while emphasizing the book's satirical elements. Reexamining the novel's originally popular sentimental elements alongside the novel's more recently popular satirical elements expands the literary critical focus from Ruth's sentimental struggles and Fern's satirical accomplishments to *Ruth Hall*'s equally important critique of American greed, especially among wealthy and socially-conscious Christians.

key words: domesticity; literary marketplace; sentimentality; social class

Mid-nineteenth-century responses to Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall* have ranged from tearful praise of Fern's writing to scathing criticism of Fern's intentions. In 1854, New York publishers represented Fern as "the most popular of American writers" and *Ruth Hall* as a best-selling book (*Ruth Hall* 183). *Ruth Hall* became an almost instantly popular book, and multiple editions were published in the United States and Great Britain (F. Adams 10; Allibone 1520; Derby 219; Fatout 282; Hart 94; McGinnis 20; Papashvily 124; Smith xxxiv; Warren, "Introduction" xvii). But readers' initial appreciation of Ruth's sentimental story of familial loss and authorial success turned into scathing criticism after they learned more about Fern. Already in April 1855, *The National Era* printed that "Ruth Hall, in despite of the cruelty of her trials, is a book not to be commended or justified" due to its depiction "of those real persons whom the author of *Ruth Hall* had, under a very thin veil of imaginary names, severely castigated by her wit and satire" (55). Publishers stopped printing Fern's writing after her death in 1872 (Warren, "Sara" 239), and literary critics did not recover *Ruth Hall* from the margins of literary history until the latter half of the twentieth century, when scholars started commending the same literary elements that were condemned by mid-nineteenth-century readers.

Contemporary critics have emphasized the degree to which *Ruth Hall* diverged from other mid-nineteenth-century women's fiction, focusing on the novel's satirical criticism of male behaviour (Berlant 430; Grasso 253; Hiatt 39; Huf 21; Larson 538, 540; Newberry 148; Warren, "Fanny Fern's *Rose Clark*" 101), as well as Ruth's independent socioeconomic advancement in the literary marketplace (Gura 39; Walker 51-62; Warren, *Fanny Fern* 139; Warren, "Legacy Profile" 55-56). A contemporary edition of the novel in the "American Women Writers" series at Rutgers situated Ruth's story in terms of "the American dream" (Warren, "Introduction" xx), a

phrase that historian James Truslow Adams popularized decades later in *The Epic of America* (Adams 31; Cullen 4), and which historically has focused on boys and men (Hearn 4; Long 64; Warren, "Introduction" xx); however, in a more recent Penguin Classics edition, Susan Belasco Smith clarifies that when *Ruth Hall* was published, "[n]o reviewer seems to have considered *Ruth Hall* a novel about the American story of individual success translated into a woman's terms" (xlili). Reexamining the novel's originally popular sentimental elements alongside the novel's more recently popular satirical elements expands the literary critical focus from Ruth's sentimental story and Fern's satirical intentions to *Ruth Hall*'s equally important critique of American greed, especially among wealthy and socially-conscious Christians.

In *Ruth Hall*, Christian discourse sentimentalizes and satirizes characters' romantic, familial, and professional relationships. Jane Tompkins's analysis of another popular mid-nineteenth-century novel, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, equally applies to Fern's *Ruth Hall*: "The figure of Christ is the common term which unites all of the novel's good characters, who are good precisely in proportion as they are imitations of him" (138). In *Ruth Hall*, Biblical allusions, characters' comments, and Ruth's own thoughts, words, and actions consistently represent her as an authentic Christian figure even as others challenge her goodness. The challenges emerge early in *Ruth Hall*, which begins on the eve of Ruth's marriage, especially from wealthy family members who identify as Christians.

Although Ruth marries Harry Hall because she loves him, their families regard their marriage as a business transaction. After Ruth leaves boarding school, her father advises Ruth "either to get married or teach school" (7). Ruth's mother-in-law, Mrs. Hall, similarly considers Ruth and Harry's marriage as a labour arrangement, albeit a flawed one; Mrs. Hall already does the domestic work conventionally performed by a wife. Since Ruth seems ill equipped to fulfil that domestic role, Mrs. Hall references the Bible to remind Ruth that "[w]ives should be keepers at home" (13). Mrs. Hall also uses religion to ridicule Ruth's leisure and question her spirituality, explaining that if Ruth has time to read, then she should do "*rational* reading" about crucial theological matters, such as predestination, rather than read "novels and such trash" (14). In effect, the fiction of "True Womanhood," which according to Nicole Tonkovich, "assumed that women did not stoop to trifle in marketplace exchanges," emerges early in *Ruth Hall* (54): Ruth's marriage clearly straddles the conventionally private domestic sphere and the public professional sphere.

Dr. and Mrs. Hall, who represent themselves as authorities on authentic Christianity, use Christian terms to extend their criticism of Ruth to her entire family. While questioning Ruth's humanity, maturity, and character, Dr. Hall explains to Mr. Ellet, "I don't believe in your doll-baby women; she's proud, you are all proud, all your family – that tells the whole story" (78). In private with Dr. Hall, Mrs. Hall also criticizes Ruth's father as an "avaricious old man" (78). But Dr. Hall identifies Hyacinth as his "*especial* aversion" due to the superficiality of his life and work (83). When Mrs. Hall reminds Dr. Hall that Hyacinth's writing has been received favourably, Dr. Hall still responds critically, saying that Hyacinth describes "The Savior" "as he would a Broadway dandy. That fellow is all surface, I tell you; there's no depth in him. How should there be? Is n't he an Ellet" (83-84)? Although Dr. Hall repeatedly states that their portrayal of the Ellet family members is "the whole story" (51, 71-72, 83, 149, 166, 178), the narrator explicitly and repeatedly refutes the Halls' criticism of Ruth while supporting the Halls' criticism of Ruth's father and brother.

Ruth cherishes marriage, and soon after, motherhood, which the narrator repeatedly describes as a form of sacred authorship: "Joy to thee, Ruth! Another outlet for thy womanly

heart; a mirror, in which thy smiles and tears shall be reflected back; a fair page, on which thou, God-commissioned, mayst write what thou wilt; a heart that will throb back to thine, love for love" (19). The narrator reiterates the sacred and creative significance of Ruth's motherhood later in *Ruth Hall*:

trembling fingers must inscribe, indelibly, on that blank page, characters to be read by the light of eternity: the maternal eye must never sleep at its post, lest the enemy rifle the casket of its gems. And so, by her child's cradle, Ruth first learned to pray. The weight her slender shoulders could not bear, she rolled at the foot of the cross; and, with the baptism of holy tears, mother and child were consecrated. (25)

These melodramatic passages exemplify the novel's sentimentality, align Ruth's story with Christ's story of personal sacrifice for others, and link Ruth's marriage and motherhood to authorship. Ruth's story of romance, marriage, motherhood, and authorship is so compelling because she excels in spite of so many personal challenges, which began in her youth with the death of her mother and extend through her adult years with the deaths of her first-born daughter and her husband, Harry.

After Harry dies from typhus fever, Ruth's father figures, Mr. Ellet and Dr. Hall, recommend that Ruth separate herself from her daughters. In addition, Ruth's father and father-in-law discuss Ruth and her young daughters, Katy and Nettie, as part of Harry's estate, haggling over their respective economic responsibility for Ruth and their granddaughters. Mr. Ellet implies that Ruth entered the care of her husband's wealthy family following their marriage. Dr. Hall reminds Mr. Ellet that Ruth remains Mr. Ellet's daughter, and therefore, he only wishes to "take Harry's *children*" (77-78). Since Mr. Ellet suspects that Ruth will not want to part with her daughters, he appeals to their economic self-interest in order to persuade her to leave Katy and Nettie with the Halls; then he only would have to help support Ruth. But Ruth states that she "can *never* part with [her] children," and her father questions her sanity (80). More specifically, Ruth's father retorts, "Perfect madness," because the Halls possess the economic means to provide Ruth's children with a comfortable country home, food, and education. Mr. Ellet also warns Ruth that if she refuses the Halls' offer and dies, the Halls would no longer take her children.

Despite the cruelty of her father's and father-in-law's responses, Ruth responds with scripture: "Their *Father in Heaven* will"; "He says, 'Leave thy fatherless children with me'" (80). In contrast to the primary patriarchal figures in the novel, and in accordance with her "*Father in Heaven*," Ruth views her children as valuable people rather than as economic liabilities. The Biblical source of Ruth's motherly convictions substantiates her criticism of her father and supersedes her father-in-law's recommendations. Although Mr. Ellet states that Ruth's scriptural explanation for caring for her daughters is "[p]erversion of Scripture, perversion of Scripture," the narrator clarifies that it was Mr. Ellet who was "foiled with his own weapons" (80). In other words, both Ruth and the narrator clearly use scripture to sentimentalize good behaviour, such as maintaining mother/daughter relationships despite economic hardships, and to criticize bad behaviour, such as rupturing father/daughter relationships due to economic costs.

Although Ruth eventually wins the verbal battle regarding maintaining her maternal right to care for her daughters, Mr. Ellet and Dr. Hall are more motivated by the social consequences of their actions than Ruth's Biblical convictions. After Dr. Hall learns that villagers have been discussing Dr. Hall's lack of support of Ruth, Nettie, and Katy, Dr. Hall uses Nettie's and Katy's appearance to question his biological connection with them in order to argue that Mr. Ellet should take more responsibility for Ruth, Nettie, and Katy. But Mr. Ellet and Dr. Hall eventually agree

to economically support Ruth in order to prevent future criticism of their actions from “church members” (85). Although the fathers verbally agree to equally support Ruth, Nettie, and Katy in order to maintain their public image as upstanding Christians, Mr. Ellet refuses to put their agreement in writing, because “parchments, lawyers, witnesses, and things, make [him] nervous” (86). In other words, Ruth’s wealthier Christian family members seem much more comfortable with legal documents and procedures when they are used to secure their own desires than when they are used to protect Ruth’s rights.

Contemporary scholars have focused on *Ruth Hall*’s criticism of this kind of cruel, greedy, and exploitative male behaviour; however, Fern similarly criticizes women who value appearances and social status more than people. Ruth’s familiarity with “common female employments and recreations” during her earlier years at boarding school and her loss of access to these social activities after Harry’s death results in Ruth’s female acquaintances’ and family members’ strategic disassociation from Ruth in order to maintain business profits and social status (56). After Ruth seeks employment as a seamstress to support herself and her daughters, Mrs. Slade, an acquaintance of Ruth’s former school friend, refuses to hire Ruth for the following reason: “she never employed any of those persons who ‘had seen better days;’ that somehow she could n’t drive as good a bargain with them as she could with a common person, who was ignorant of the value of their labor” (97-98). Whereas Mrs. Slade only allows historically poor women to work in her business in order to maximize her profits, one of Ruth’s former acquaintances admits that she “can’t keep up her acquaintance” with Ruth due to Ruth’s lower social position (99). Ruth’s former acquaintance, Mary, also defends Hyacinth’s disassociation from Ruth: “Hyacinth has just married a rich, fashionable wife, and of course he cannot lose caste by associating with Ruth now; you cannot blame him” (100). While standing outside of Ruth’s house, Mary admits to another of Ruth’s former acquaintances, Gertrude, that Ruth’s well-being “is clearly none of our business.” Rather than visit with Ruth, Mary and Gertrude discuss fashion and shopping and leave Ruth’s house to visit a saloon. Although Gertrude at least seems to sympathize with Ruth, none of these wealthier women make a significant effort to use their power and resources to meaningfully help Ruth and her daughters.

Whereas *Ruth Hall* satirizes the ways in which wealthy men and women disassociate themselves from Ruth after Harry’s death, it also sentimentalizes the ways in which working-class men and women consistently help those in need while asking nothing in return. Ruth’s former employee, Johnny Galt, visits after she moves from the country to the city, and he comes bearing gifts of apples and flowers. A male stranger in her working-class neighbourhood offers medical assistance when he notices her daughter’s illness. Ruth’s nursery maid offers to accompany Ruth without pay after Harry’s death. Other working-class women who learn of Ruth’s poverty and her relatives’ wealth sympathize with Ruth rather than her relatives. As Nancy A. Walker has explained, *Ruth Hall* “carries with it an implicit set of values that favors the working poor over the ideal upper class” (56). Indeed, working-class men and women repeatedly treat Ruth better than her wealthier family members and acquaintances, who are repeatedly depicted and described as “stony-hearted” (101), “calloused by selfishness” (104), and “heartless” (205, 231).

Ruth’s movement from her secluded country home to a more densely populated urban migrant neighbourhood increases her alienation from wealthy American society and her solidarity with the working class, especially working women. After Ruth observes “gray-haired men, business men, substantial-looking family men, and foppish-looking young men” and “half-grown boys” visit sex workers in her working-class neighbourhood, she tearfully compares their

circumstances: "She knew now how it could be, when every door of hope seemed shut, by those who make long prayers and wrap themselves in morality as with a garment, and cry with closed purses and averted faces, 'Be ye warmed, and filled'" (112). Ruth's sympathy for the female sex workers in her new neighbourhood cultivates readers' sympathy for Ruth, and by extension, Fern, at a time when female authors were associated with whores. As Lara Langer Cohen has explained in a discussion of Fern's writing that compares nineteenth-century American female authors with British female authors of this period, they "'did not enter an inappropriately male territory, but a degradingly female one' organized by 'the metaphor of the author as a whore'" (Gallagher 39-40 qtd. in Cohen 62). Ruth's complicated authorial history gestures towards her awareness of the negative connotations of paid female authors.

Although Ruth had been writing successfully for most of her life, she only pursued a writing career after more conventionally feminine options failed. As a young girl, Ruth would "right" Hyacinth's papers (4), in boarding school, she wrote her peers' papers (6), and as a young wife, she wrote poetry at home (29). Susan K. Harris has argued that Ruth's entrance into the working class "free[d] her from the gender definitions and restrictions of the middle and upper middle classes. For the heroines of these [women's] novels [of the mid-nineteenth century], such freedom and consequent self-definition comes only in isolation, in the *lack* of protection by others" (621). But after Harry's death, Ruth initially sought gendered work according to her perceived social "capital" and connections rather than her authorial skills and desires, such as by requesting to sew parts of women's clothing for old acquaintances and applying to teach at a primary school where her cousin served on the school committee (96, 122). Both of these positions only were filled by women: "girls" completed the sewing (96), and "ladies" applied for the teaching position (129). Ruth only actively pursued a writing career after she failed to earn these gendered positions vis-à-vis her social connections.

Shortly after she learned that her "dear" friend, Mrs. Mary Leon, died alone in an insane asylum (139), Ruth strategically negotiates publishing her writing to provide for herself and her daughters. As an impoverished mother and aspiring author, Ruth first consults her brother, who has literary connections as the editor of *The Irving Magazine*. But Hyacinth recommends that Ruth "seek some *unobtrusive* employment" (147), as if Ruth's ideas should not be made public through writing, and then he refuses to help her publish her writing. Meanwhile, when Dr. and Mrs. Hall realize that Ruth and their granddaughters hardly have enough money for food and clothes, they resume manipulative strategies to separate Ruth from her daughters. Mrs. Hall, for example, invites Katy to visit their home "for a week or two" and then informs Mr. Ellet that Ruth had decided to let them raise Katy and Nettie in their country home (150). Although Mr. Ellet supports the Halls' plan, which apparently would stop his economic support of his granddaughters, Ruth feels deceived. Ruth's wealthier Christian family members repeatedly choose bolstering their social position and advancing their own economic interests over the desires of Ruth and her daughters.

Ruth responds to her family members' lack of support by looking for more work, including at *The Daily Type* and the *Parental Guide* (153). After being rejected at both offices, "she knew that to climb, she must begin at the lowest round of the ladder" (155). Although Ruth's path to literary success in *Ruth Hall* is difficult, it is purposeful and situated in relationship to Christ's own suffering and ascension, such as when Ruth attends church with her daughter, Nettie: "The bliss, the joy of heaven was pictured; life, – mysterious, crooked, unfathomable life, made clear to the eye of faith; sorrow, pain, suffering, ignominy even, made sweet for His sake, who suffered all for us" (156). In *Ruth Hall*, short heartwrenching scenes of Ruth and her

daughters struggling to survive at home are juxtaposed with Ruth's family acting generously with others to maintain their positive public image.

For example, shortly after Ruth's father invites a clergyman into his home and serves him a lavish meal, the clergyman tells Mr. Ellet, "You have, I bless God, a warm heart and a liberal one; your praise is in all the churches," and Mr. Ellet "uttered an usually lengthy grace" (159). The narrator's commentary paired with the following scene demonstrates that Mr. Ellet is performing a generous role for his Christian community even as he neglects his own family; the chapter concludes with these words from Ruth's daughter, "'Some more supper, please, Mamma,' vainly pleaded little Nettie" (159). This narrative technique of pairing wealthy Christians' pious performances with their family members' real needs exposes Ruth's family members as hypocrites and conveys a Biblical message for an even broader audience: "You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (Matt. 7.5). Over the course of the novel, the artificiality of Ruth's wealthy Christian family and acquaintances emerges as part of a larger pattern of patriarchy in mid-nineteenth-century America.

In the literary marketplace, Ruth negotiates what Nina Baym describes as a "man's game" (253) according to Christian principles with two strikingly different editors while she publishes her increasingly popular writing under the pseudonym Floy. Ruth's first editor at *The Standard* exudes the individualistic economic greed that Ruth criticizes throughout the novel. Mr. Lescom refuses to give Ruth an advance or increase her pay even though her writing substantially increases the paper's subscribers. *The Standard's* title associates Mr. Lescom's business practices with standard editorial practice during the era of emerging mass-market capitalism (Harer 7). After Ruth's manuscript was accepted at *The Standard*, Ruth walks from the city to the country to reclaim Katy (166).

While caring for her daughters and publishing in *The Standard*, the editor at *The Household Messenger* writes Floy because he values her "genius" and her writing as "a wail from her inmost soul" (180). Ruth resigns from *The Standard* and accepts Mr. Walter's offer to write exclusively for *The Household Messenger* because of his "warm, brotherly interest," his "respectful" tone towards her, and his paper's editorials, which were "always on the side of the weak, and on the side of truth" (184-85). Ruth responds to Mr. Walter's letter with "a long letter – a sweet, sisterly letter – pouring out her long pent-up feelings, as though Mr. Walter had indeed been her brother, who, having been away ever since before Harry's death, had just returned, and consequently, had known nothing about her cruel sufferings" (186). The familial terms of their literary relationship indicate a much more equitable distribution of power than Ruth experienced at *The Standard*. Ruth also earns substantially more money writing exclusively for *The Household Messenger* than she earned writing more articles for *The Standard*.

Ruth Hall's readers learn the most about Floy's writing through letters from her readers, which are included with Ruth's responses rather than her articles. In a section of *Ruth Hall* that includes multiple letters from Floy's readers, who range from men like the editor Mr. Walter to a young girl, *Ruth Hall's* readers also are directly addressed as possibly writing "in a delicate, beautiful, female hand; just such an one as you, dear Reader, might trace, whose sweet, soft eyes, and long, drooping tresses, are now bending over this page" (174). The logic, authenticity, and success of Floy's writing as well as her intellect, business acumen, and character are reoccurring themes in the letters to Floy, such as requests from male and female readers of varying ages for Floy to publish a book (173), speculations of Floy's expected literary wealth (200), and a request from an orphaned mother that Floy raise her child (212-13). In *Ruth Hall*, the pseudonym Floy

frees Ruth to write openly about her hardships in order to provide for herself and her daughters and emphasizes that her writing is judged by its quality rather than her literary and social connections.

Whereas Ruth initially disregarded readers' recommendations to publish a book because her "articles were written for bread and butter, not fame; and tossed to the printer before the ink was dry, or I had time for a second reading" (174), Ruth more seriously considers readers' recommendations when she receives two unsolicited offers from publishers to publish her articles as a book (197). One of these publishers offers Ruth \$800 in copyright money, which she could use to support herself and her children; however, Ruth rejects this offer for a percentage of book sales (197-98). Michael Newbury clarifies the legal and economic significance of this decision: "Ruth chooses to maintain her copyright—what this novel understands as the full and adequate ownership of her property—and through this copyright becomes a woman of independent means beyond the power of exploitative publishers, family, and any others who might show her disrespect" (193). In other words, Ruth's legal knowledge of domestic and professional issues grows significantly following her husband's death.

Fern's critique of the individualist and patriarchal elements of romantic, familial, and sexual relations extends beyond the literary marketplace to academia. Shortly after Ruth decides to publish her writing as a book, she receives a letter addressed to Floy from William Stearns, a college professor and author, who admits, "The rest of the world flatters you – I shall do no such thing" (213). Stearns explains why in a lengthy and critical letter of females' intelligence, where he admits, "that it is my opinion, that the *female* mind is incapable of producing anything which may be strictly termed *literature*" (213). This chapter concludes with Ruth's light-hearted response, "Oh vanity! thy name is William Stearns" (214), and the next chapter begins with a medical refutation of Stearns' analysis. Following Mr. Walter's encouragement, Ruth undergoes a "phrenological examination" (215), in which a different professor shares the following assessment: "In conclusion, I will remark, that very much might be said with reference to the operations of your mind, for we seldom find the faculties so fully developed, or the powers so versatile as in your case" (220), demonstrating the systematic inclusion and refutation of the criticism of Ruth, and by extension, all female authors.

Ruth Hall similarly exposes and deconstructs binary conceptions of "private and public spheres," which Mary Kelley has reconsidered in *Private Woman, Public Stage*, since "the boundaries are far more porous than the binary category allows" (xii). Although María C. Sánchez has concluded that Ruth's literary success results in her "isolation, ostracism, abandonment," and this, the "narrative of what fails," "represents a truly separate sphere" (51), the narrator describes Ruth as "our heroine" and "a regular business woman" when Ruth finalizes the edits of her first book, *Life Sketches*, and corresponds with her editor and publisher at home while caring for her youngest daughter, Nettie (Fern 223). When *Life Sketches* is published, Ruth's literary work also is inextricably tied to her domestic life as a mother: "Little shoeless feet were covered with the proceeds of this; a little medicine, or a warmer shawl was bought with that. . . . One [article] was written with little Nettie sleeping her lap" (225). The narrator's description of Ruth as "our heroine" and "a regular business woman" while mothering at home signifies the normalization of women and domesticity in the conventionally male-dominated and public literary marketplace (223).

Throughout the novel, Ruth excels in conventionally private and public spheres despite cruel criticism, and she performs her domestic and authorial roles according to Christian principles. Even after Ruth learns that strong sales are expected for her book, Ruth's in-laws

continue to threaten to separate Ruth from her children, whom they still treat as their property. Dr. Hall tells Ruth, "The law says if the mother can't support her children, the grandparents shall do it" (238). Ruth continues to speak and work for her daughters, clarifying that "[t]he mother *can* – the mother *will*," before leaving the Halls' country home with her daughters. After Mrs. Hall, who her husband affirms is the "master in this house," decides to ban Ruth from their home (237-38), she praises Floy's "common-sense" and calls her a "good writer" before learning that Ruth wrote *Life Sketches* (260-61). Ruth's faithful pursuit of Christian principles facilitates her success with her family and career; she successfully uses her domestic and professional knowledge to voice and secure her maternal and literary rights.

Ruth even maintains her authentic Christian identity after she achieves socioeconomic success as the popular writer Floy. As her editor, Mr. Walters, tells another gentleman surprised by Ruth's humble response to Floy's success: "'Floy' knows every phase of the human heart; she knows that she was none the less worthy because poor and unrecognized; she knows how much of the homage now paid her is due to the *showy setting* of the gem; therefore, she takes all these things at their true valuation" (247). After Mr. Walter learned of Floy's true identity as Ruth Hall, he describes Ruth's story as religious allegory, explaining that Ruth has moved through "gloomy valleys," "the promised land" and "the Dead Sea." In this Judeo-Christian context, "true valuation" refers to the sacred valuation of love and people over the secular valuation of money and self-interest. As Stephen Hartnett clarifies, *Ruth Hall* "illustrates in a uncannily precise manner what Friedrich Von Schiller recognized in *Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* as one of the driving impulses of sentimental fiction: to envision 'the complete reconciliation of all opposition between actuality and ideal'" (12). In *Ruth Hall*, Ruth consistently acts in the loving interest of her daughters, and in the concluding sentence, Mr. Walter gestures towards even more familial, literary, and economic success for Ruth: "Life has much of harmony yet in store for you" (272). *Ruth Hall* originally achieved such widespread popularity because Ruth remains a good Christian throughout the novel and despite challenges.

In *Ruth Hall*, Fern offers authentic Christian love as a means to improve the physical, emotional, economic, and social conditions of romantic, familial, and professional relationships. If Ruth's mother-in-law loved Ruth as a daughter rather than as a hired domestic servant for her son, then Ruth would have been much freer within the Halls' home. If Mary's husband would have treated her as a desirable and valuable human being rather than as a piece of property, then she might not have died alone in an insane asylum. If wealthy employers paid their employees a living wage, then working-class women might not feel the economic need to heighten their risk of gender-based violence by selling sex. In *Ruth Hall*, Fern repeatedly exposes the injustices of these romantic, familial, and professional relationships to reform them. Furthermore, Fern represents the humanization and equalization of romantic, familial relationships, and professional relationships as a Christian process. Like early American feminists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott (Askeland 180-81), Fern uses Christian discourse to represent equal access to legal rights and fair wages as God's will for men and women, regardless of social class (Stanton and Mott 829).

More fully acknowledging, analyzing, and embracing *Ruth Hall's* more sentimental aspects, such as Ruth's romance, motherhood, and melodramatic Christian discourse, creates a more meaningful American dream story of individual economic advancement, which both sentimentalizes equitable relationships at home and work and satirizes American greed and artificiality, especially among wealthy Christians. Although Ruth's story of socioeconomic advancement in the literary marketplace contributed to its resurgence as a popular American book

and even an exemplary American dream story, *Ruth Hall* is not inherently good because Ruth achieved the American dream of independent socioeconomic advancement.

On the contrary, Ruth's story of literary success is so good, and originally was so popular, because she holds true to Christian principles while pursuing personal, professional, and social goals through her published writing. As Fern writes in the concluding sentence of her preface to the reader, "I cherish the hope that, somewhere in the length and breadth of the land, it may fan into a flame, in some tired heart, the fading embers of hope, well-nigh extinguished by wintry fortune and summer friends." From the very beginning, *Ruth Hall* is inspirational as well as aspirational for readers, especially female readers, whom the narrator directly addresses in the novel (174). *Ruth Hall* shares Ruth's struggles as a daughter, wife, mother, friend, sister, and author to criticize bad behaviour, especially greed and artificiality, and to inspire better behaviour, ranging from reconsidering the value of women's Christian convictions regarding romance, marriage, motherhood, and authorship to equally executing the law and paying fair wages.

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