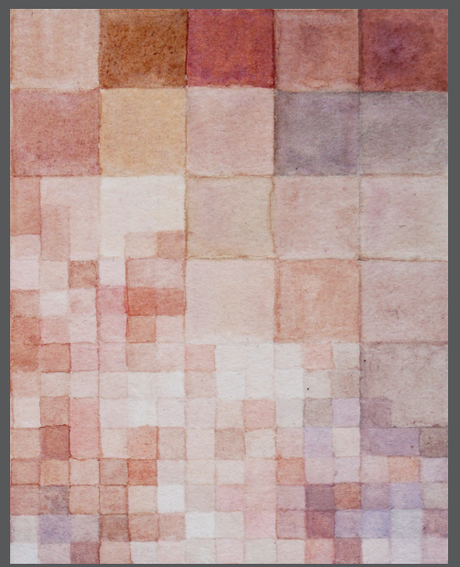

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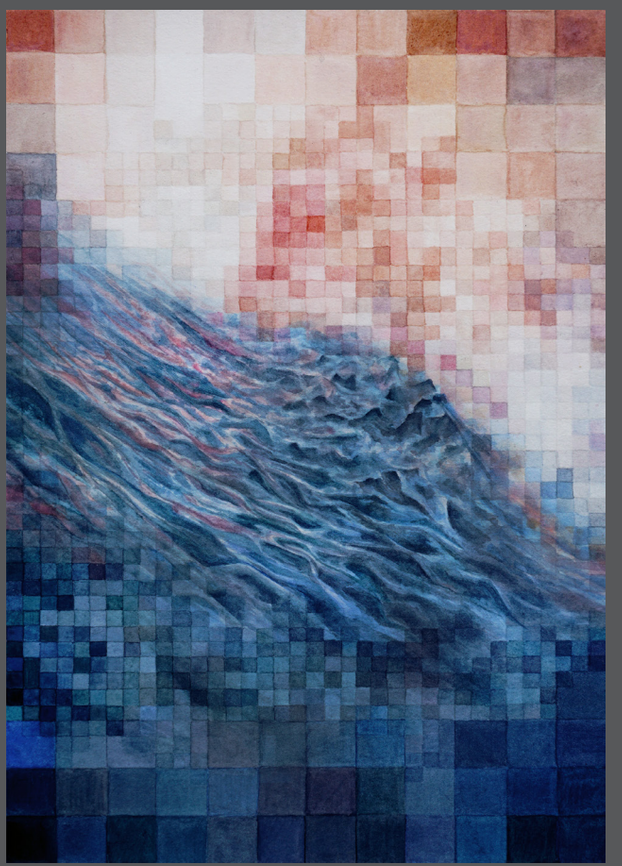

New Waves: Twenty-First-Century Feminisms

Edited by Blythe Worthy and Chris Rudge

Philament

A Journal of Literature, Arts, and Culture

Volume 23 • 2017

New Waves: Twenty-First-Century Feminisms

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Editorial Note

Chris Rudge

WITH THIS SPECIAL volume of *Philament*, edited by Blythe Worthy and myself, the journal moves into a new stage of its life. For our last published volume, number 22, "Precarity," we decided to print a small number of physical copies, largely to satisfy our own curiosities about the cost of the printing process, but also to see whether the aesthetic value of these digital pages, lovingly typeset as they are, would carry over to the parchment. Happy with the results of our experiment, we have decided that we shall this time print a few more copies than the last time, an opportunity made possible thanks to Blythe Worthy's strong advocacy of the journal and the resultant support we have received from the Sydney Social Sciences and Humanities Advanced Research Centre (SSSHARC).

Recently, *Philament* has been fortunate enough to harvest other strong voices of support from within the University of Sydney's Department of English, as well as from SUPRA, the University's Student Postgraduate Representative Association. Zushan Hashmi, SUPRA's Director of Student Publications, has ably publicised *Philament*'s mission—to facilitate the publication of excellent postgraduate scholarship in the arts broadly defined—in two issues of the student newspaper *Honi Soit*. We look forward to working with our supporters to continue refining and developing the journal, which is now in its fourteenth year.

And a final note. We have decided from this volume forward to describe issues of *Philament* as "volumes," seeing as though we might, at some point in the future, produce multiple "numbers" or issues within the same single volume. This decision is in some respects problematic. We are aware, for instance, that, most of the time, an academic journal's volume number will correspond to the number of years for which that journal has been published; a journal that produces a "volume 3," for instance, will usually have been in production for some three years, regardless of the total number of discrete issues or numbers it has published in any of those years. And, alas, *Philament* has been in production only for fourteen years—not twenty-three.

Nevertheless, we are encouraged to make our decision because, as noted in the *Chicago Manual of Style*'s "Books and-Journals" section, "some journals . . . publish two or more volumes in one year, depending on the frequency and length of issues."[1] Given, then, that there is some historical precedent for organising a journal by volume numbers in the way that we propose (that is, by volume numbers that are not denotative of the years for which the journal has been published), we shall forge ahead on our instincts, and designate this issue of *Philament* volume 23.

Of course, it is a matter for future editors whether this organising principle is to be maintained or discarded—and perhaps another matter again whether future scholars, citing this journal in their own works, will recognise or indeed consider this eccentricity. In any case, our adoption of this system should not affect the standard citation of our journal as recommended by rule 14.187 of the *Chicago Manual of Style* for special issues, according to which this volume may be cited as follows: Worthy, Blythe and Rudge, Chris, eds. "New Waves: Twenty-First-Century Feminisms." Special issue, *Philament* 23 (2017).[2]

Notes

1. See *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th. ed., 36, rule 1.75.
2. Ibid., 735, rule 14.187.

Editor's Introduction

Blythe Worthy

> Speaking of my experiences, as an artist, an organiser, and as a "voice from the field" implies putting myself at the centre of this narrative and speaking with some authority. My authoritative position, however, doesn't come from status, success or expertise but from being a participant.
>
> — Jude Adams[1]

AS REBECCA L. BORDT has argued, there have been almost no successful feminist movements that did not also begin, in some shape or form, as collectives.[2] This special volume of *Philament* draws together selected papers from the University of Sydney Feminist Theory Reading Group (FTRG), one of the only postgraduate women's collectives at the University. Founded in early 2016 by a small group of writers and postgraduate students, FTRG began with a two-pronged intention. Many of us were motivated not only to explore and promote the foundations of feminist theory but to meet other inspired and progressive thinkers. Though the academic environment encourages rigorous research, we felt that opportunities for peer-to-peer support were rare in the postgraduate setting, which limited the dissemination of ideas and opportunities. I myself also noticed how the competitive nature of academia seemed to divide us, promoting isolation and paranoia. I started to think about how demoralis-

ing the situation was for early-career researchers, especially as I met newer generations of feminist scholars who had experienced the same age-old frustrations inspired by isolating environments. Friends had stopped supporting and celebrating each other's achievements and had instead adopted an attitude well expressed by Gore Vidal, who said "Every time a friend succeeds something inside me dies."[3] And once again, individualism seemed to reign over collectivism.

After a fairly lacklustre beginning, FTRG grew exponentially (our Facebook group now has over 50 members), with a core group assembling regularly in the University of Sydney's Department of English. There we tried to understand feminism, to evolve as feminists, and to implement feminist ideas into our own lives. I was curious to find out whether our interrogations into various foundational feminist principles, including those that have been manipulated, dismissed, and celebrated in the decades since the early nineteenth century, might reinforce feminism in this allegedly postfeminist age.[4] The conversations at FTRG began to focus on relearning and reinforcing the importance of solidarity and support, and to celebrate the founders of the movement. Amid conversations about K-Pop, we debated the merits of cyborgs; soon thereafter, visual texts became a major focus, as the group slowly developed its own identity. Two years and many weekly meetings later, FTRG has consumed and argued over many feminist theorists, extracting meaning from an array of texts published more than a half-century ago—texts now given new life within the pages of this volume. Last year, FTRG received funding from the University of Sydney and voted to use it to support local feminist artists. The group sponsored a range of low-SES students to attend festivals and conferences, all with the aim of producing this publication. We wanted to share what we had learned. This volume, at least in the group's opinion, is perhaps the most crucial product to emerge from our many successful and productive meetings.

This special volume of *Philament,* which we have titled "New Waves: Twenty-First-Century Feminisms," explores the feminisms discussed in our weekly seminars, and promotes

a diverse range of emergent thinkers and new conceptions of feminism and its foundations. For me, the group's discussions of the variety of feminisms inherent in modern thought only confirmed the importance and necessity of intellectual clutter, where older ideas serve to feed new ones. Our discussions began to interlink across the semesters as we drew dots between theorists like Luce Irigaray, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Jack Halberstam, and as we discovered the desperate need to recognise the pluralities of feminism—or of "feminisms," as this volume has it. As such, the papers collected here present divergent approaches to feminist critique and expression.

While rereading the essays in this volume, I was struck by how much currency there is in the idea that language can change, progress, and shape culture. Though there are many varied expressions of feminism within these pages, the three essays together seem to affirm the power of language as a force of change.[5] In "The Importance of Transpoetics," Oliver Moore examines experimentations in poetic form as a refuge for and affirmation of trans folks' experiences; Stella Ktenis's essay seeks to recuperate the critical dismissal of scatological imagery and the feminine body in Jonathan Swift's famous poem "The Lady's Dressing Room." Similarly, Sabina Rahman's article, which focuses on female speakers in the Grimm brothers' fairy tales, provides fresh insights into the way in which these tales shape children's assumptions about women's gender role.

Rahman, Ktenis, and Moore treat language as a tangible object, turning it this way and that so as to undertake a range of innovative critical readings. But dominant narratives about gender and sexuality are questioned in this volume's creative works too; however, there is an additional vector running across these Excursions, typified by a whimsical, playful attitude toward language. Cecily Niumeitolu's collection of short stories unfolds elegantly into vivid and sprawling vignettes that provoke nostalgia, while Emma Rayward's "The Consumption o*f*(You)" is a playful experiment with language that leads us not only to question the topology of the body but to ask how we might rethink the borderlines that delineate our insides and outsides,

interiors and exteriors. The volume's reviews introduce questions of historical memory and narrative to respond to feminist authors, filmmakers, and academics, highlighting various modes of feminist thought and expression. Artists Josephine Mead and Olivia Louella contribute the wonderful images to this volume, with the latter providing the illustration for the cover. By engaging multiple perspectives and forms of art, this special volume of *Philament* has sought to provide a space for scholars and artists from various disciplines to exchange knowledge, collaborate, and strengthen bonds.

My sincere gratitude goes to SSSHARC for sponsoring this initiative, and I must also thank Rebecca Johinke, Sarah Gleeson-White, Samantha Poulos, Ella Collins-White, Kerry Stevenson, Enoch Mailangi and especially Chris Rudge, without whose assistance, good will, and encouragement this volume would not have been possible.

Notes

1. See Jude Adams, "Looking from With/In: Feminist Art Projects of the 70s," *Outskirts Journal* 29 (2013): http://www.outskirts.arts.uwa.edu.au/volumes/volume-29/adams-jude-looking-with-in.

2. Rebecca L. Bort, "How Alternative Ideas Become Institutions: The Case of Feminist Collectives," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (1997): 132–55.

3. Jay Parini, *Every Time a Friend Succeeds Something Inside Me Dies: The Life of Gore Vidal* (London: Little Brown Books Group, 2015).

4. Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 14.

5. Howard S. Schwartz, "Introduction" in *Political Correctness and the Destruction of Social Order: Chronicling the Rise of the Pristine Self* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1.

Peer-Reviewed Article

Stella Ktenas

"Such Gaudy Tulips Raised from Dung": Gender Performance in Jonathan Swift's "The Lady's Dressing Room"

EVER SINCE THE British novelist William Makepeace Thackeray made a series of critical remarks about Jonathan Swift in his *Lectures on the English Humourists of the 18th Century* (1851), Swift has been maligned and calumniated as a misanthrope.[1] As this essay argues, however, Thackeray's charges are largely baseless, and may be criticised and rejected themselves. Indeed, Swift's poetic reputation should be restored, for his acerbic poems remain valuable to modern readers in many ways. To this end, this essay takes as its object of study Swift's "The Lady's Dressing Room" (1732), which I will interrogate through a feminist lens.[2] This poem views the scenario of Celia's dressing room through the focalised perspective of a judgemental narrator who describes how "Strephon the rogue" furtively steals into his "goddess" Celia's dressing room, which is vacant, to discover its secrets. There, Celia has spent the better part of "Five hours, (and

who can do it less in?)" dressing; although, when Strephon sees the dressing room, he feels great disillusionment, surprised by its filthy state (1).

While the poem mocks womanly vanity, it also mocks the illusions and delusions that males possess regarding female bodies and the gendered performance of woman. Commencing with an image of the woman paragon, the poem describes the way in which Strephon's sense of taste and propriety is pushed over the precipice as he clumsily uncovers the baseness of the human body's function and the innumerable accoutrements that attend the woman's gendered performance, all of which repulse him. My primary argument is that Strephon is himself mocked and castigated by the narrator for the naive revulsion he feels upon discovering that Celia is, at least in his mind, disgustingly human, particularly as she prepares to enact the gendered performance of a woman. In this sense, this close reading of the poem adopts Judith Butler's theories of performance and performativity, and Naomi Wolf's formulation of the beauty myth, to newly demonstrate that Swift's poem criticises rather than reinforces the patriarchal culture of his day, which underpinned the gendered performance of woman.[3]

Born in 1667, Swift was an Anglo-Irish prose writer, poet, and cleric who, in 1713, when 46 years old, was appointed to Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin. As a writer, Swift presented himself, as Anthony Kamm observes, as "a thorn in the flesh of the British Government," particularly by writing comically vexatious political commentary.[4] The influence of Swift's literary activism was immense, and with his *A Letter to the Whole People of Ireland* he ignited the boycott of a proposed new coin system, one that was eventually abandoned by the government.[5] The appeal and relevance of Swift's most acclaimed and recognisable work, *Gulliver's Travels*, has persisted to the present, in part due to its satirical insights into human nature and behaviour. Swift's later years were dedicated to his satirical pamphleteering, when Swift wrote such satirical essays as *A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People from Being a Burthen to Their Parents or Country, and For making them Beneficial to the Publick*

(1729).[6] Commonly abbreviated to *A Modest Proposal*, the essay proposed the extensive and indiscriminate consumption—which is to say the cannibal eating—of poor Catholic children, and came complete with culinary recipes for cooking them. Swift's relentless *saeva Indignatio*—his fierce indignation—was the impetus for his writing, and his uniquely facetious verse has ensured his veneration in literary history.[7]

Despite Swift's widely acknowledged talent, "The Lady's Dressing Room" has been maligned by literary critics who have, for the last two-hundred-and-fifty years, psychoanalysed and diagnosed the poet for his "excremental vision."[8] But then, some critics, such as Pat Rogers, also argue that Swift's long poetry, composed during the 1730s, represents his most superlative work.[9] "The Lady's Dressing Room" is but one of many scatological poems that Swift wrote; others include "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed" (1734) and "Strephon and Chloe" (1734).[10] These scatological poems often invoke romantic and idealised notions of femininity, but soon interrupt and supplant these visions with revolting and voyeuristic portraits of female intimacy and "base" humanity, presented through graphic and grotesque imagery.

Swift's apparent fixation on such grotesque scatological imagery has led critics to question his sanity, diagnose him with various psychopathologies, and consider at length varied evidence of his dysfunction, neurosis, and perverted sexuality.[11] The biographer Middleton Murry, for instance, has famously described Swift's scatological poems as "so perverse, so unnatural, so mentally diseased, so humanly wrong."[12] Similarly, Geoffrey Hill categorises Swift as "coprophilious," seemingly unable (as Thomas B. Gilmore notes) to imagine a purpose for his scatological writing "beyond [that of] amusement."[13] The almost unilateral critical response to and engagement with Swift's scatological vision is, I argue, a disservice to the poet's imagination and poetry. Of course, some critics have offered favourable assessments of Swift's scatological work. Norman O. Brown's renowned defence of Swift, for example, argues that psychological diagnosis is the remit of psychoanalysts, and should be avoided by literary critics.[14] In addition, Brown praises Swift's imaginative

and even prescientific understanding of the notions relating to repression and sublimation, asserting that art is just as effective as science in unveiling and exploring perversion.[15] Moreover, as Joseph McMinn observes, Brown's defence has been influential in quelling the widespread indictment of Swift as a neurotic, an indictment that his scatological poems have incited.[16]

Critical Responses to Swift

Critical responses to Swift's scatological poems have included embarrassment, rage, diagnosis, and, finally, serious and careful examination of the poetry.[17] The careful examination commenced with Herbert Davis, with his seminal essay "Swift's view of Poetry" (1967) and with Irvin Ehrenpries, who wrote *The Personality of Jonathan Swift* (1958).[18] But even these appraisals of Swift ignore the humour of the poems, as Davis perceives the poetry "to make every sense revolt with disgust" at "all the bestialities hidden beneath the surface of polite society," and at "the insane pride of these miserable vermin, crawling about the face of the earth."[19] Ehrenpries posits that Swift's poem satirises "the stale conventions of love songs," and is something of an afflicted paean whose calamitous portrayal of humans foments revulsion on the part of the reader.[20] Nevertheless, scholars have been reticent to embrace the aesthetic and affective possibilities opened up by Swift's scatological imagery. There is therefore a need for new analyses of Swift's scatological poems that do not have recourse to emotional interpretations characterised by repulsion or frivolous embarrassment.

Other appraisals of Swift's poetry include that of Donald C. Mell Jr., who persuasively argues that Swift's poem thoroughly scrutinises the limits of both moral truths and aesthetic ideals.[21] For the critic Tita Chico, the poem raises questions regarding privacy and autonomy, questions that loom especially large when one examines one of the poem's central tropes—the satirical chamber pot—as a regulatory strategy imposed on women's bodies.[22] Past critics have fixated on the poem's alleged immorality, while ignoring its comedy, disserving both the poem and Swift's

ingenuity.[23] Even the contemporary critic Laura Brown, in *Ends of Empire*, critiques Swift's poem on moral grounds, questioning "the status of misogyny" in Swift's work, and underlining the fact that Celia is completely absent from the poem; indeed, as Brown notes, it seems that Swift "substitutes the accoutrements and ornaments of the female body for the woman herself."[24] While Brown's critique is in many ways questionable, her characterisation of "mercantilist capitalist expansion" as an "essential female corruption" is specious too, as it reduces the mistreatment of women to a simple and superficial cause (namely, capitalism).[25] Similar to Brown, Laura Baudot asks if the poem is "extravagantly misogynistic." However, Baudot is less certain of the poem's meaning, and asks whether it is better understood as, on the one hand, "exposing an essential female corruption, as embodied by Celia" or as, on the other, "an indictment of the objectifying and self-deluded male gaze, as represented by Strephon."[26] Given that the poem's narrator overtly assails Strephon's naivety and subtly mocks his impossible idealisation of Celia, Baudot's latter interpretation seems far more convincing and compelling than the former.

One important rejoinder to the allegation that Swift, or his work, is misogynistic, is that a poem, or even the oeuvre, of an artist cannot suffice to expound or exhibit the author's true or sincere personal prejudices. As Roland Barthes and others have famously postulated, the author's identity—their feelings, ideas, beliefs—are immaterial to the interpretation of their work itself.[27] What is more, it appears fruitless to question deceased figures. The accessibility to social intercourse with figures like Swift is no longer available, and so, as there can be no answer, the question dissipates into the unknowable realm. The question loses all merit. The objective is to engage with the poem. Sticking to this objective we observe several features that will be developed later once the specific feminist lens is accurately positioned for the correct optical experience.

Gender Performance and Feminism in History

Notions of femininity and masculinity indicate attributes of gender, which are marked on the body as codes or specific signifiers. Performances of gender may involve the making of gestures, sartorial choices, and the possessions or accoutrements of the applicable woman or man.[28] However, received notions about what a woman or man is, both socially and behaviourally, only confine humans, excluding and ignoring the lives of those who live outside of these parameters. Petrarchan sonnets, popularised during the Renaissance, use the blazon, a form that details the perfection of feminine features; but this form, at least from our immediate vantage point, also demonstrates the *perversion* of femininity.[29] Blazon poetry influenced many leading figures of English literature, including Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Shelley. In typical blazons, beatific figures are elevated for all to witness, while failed attempts to emulate the paragon of femininity are mocked, and subject to deliberate distortions of the female anatomy.[30] According to Efrat Tseëlon, not just poetry but mythology and theology disseminated the propaganda: the idea of "woman as dissimulation," of woman as a synonym for artifice and duplicity.[31] Appearance and essence in relation to woman was much discussed in the early twentieth century, when theology continued to view femininity as fake, and when psychoanalysts came to regard women's bodies and minds as little more than the products of a socially constructed masquerade.[32] The creation of Eve was frequently cited, and her "derivative nature" said to be "predicated on dissimulation."[33] Schopenhauer made similar claims, writing that "nature has equipped . . . women with the power of dissimulation as her means of attack and defence."[34] And Nietzsche, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, defined woman as false, as someone who rejects truth in so much self-adornment:

> What is truth to a woman! From the very first nothing has been more alien, repugnant, inimical to woman than truth—her great art is the lie, her supreme concern is appearance and beauty.[35]

In the fifteenth century, Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger faulted woman: "there was a defect in the formation of the first woman," they wrote, "since she was born from a bent rib" and "through this defect she is an imperfect animal, she always deceives."[36]

Feminism attempts to demonstrate the shared humanity of females and males, removing the segregations and divisions of the past. In *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler asks "Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives?"[37] This question has been the focal point of movements that endorse unity among minorities, such as Black Lives Matter, a movement that campaigns against systemic racism in America, particularly as it inheres within the police enforcement and judicial systems.[38] Various strands of feminism, at least implicitly and for the present, attempt to affirm the value of all lives (notwithstanding the avowed offensiveness of the slogan "All Lives Matter."[39]) In so doing, feminist discourse attempts to unveil patriarchal and capitalist impositions, while navigating collectively toward the achievement of a culture in which equality among humans is a shared value. As Mary E. Hawkesworth suggests, one of the common goals of feminism is to define and exercise the political, economic, and social rights of women, furthering equality among sexes and genders for the betterment of all humans.[40]

Swift's "The Lady's Dressing Room"

"The Lady's Dressing Room" articulates the indiscriminate suffering of women through its portrait of their mandatory adherence to unrealistic gender roles. Swift's poem presents the unpleasantness of humanity, exposing the fraudulence of the women's gender performance, as well as the pretentions and illusions of men, which are likewise defined by performances of gender and the depraved vanity of narcissism.[41] The poem most strikingly mocks and shatters gender codes at the point at which we discover, with the protagonist, that Celia (and therefore all females) defecates—that is, that "Celia shits!"(118) Strephon's belief in and adherence to gender roles has prompted a departure

from reality, so much so that his discovery that women's bodies function in the same way as men's elicits his earnest (yet ironic) exclamation of surprise. The ideal image that Strephon envisages of Celia as woman here metamorphoses into a different image altogether—one of the baseness of humanity, now symbolised by Celia the human. And the narrator, in their ironic focalisation of Strephon's shocked response, castigates and mocks the shocked protagonist's blind acceptance of the improbable gender ideal.

This poem comments on the role of the woman, exposing the theatrics of her performance. Celia possesses many dresses, or costumes, many vials of ointments, considerable amounts of makeup for her masquerades, and several brushes to complete her character's appearance. Historically, however, cosmetic alterations to enhance the feminine illusion were achieved not just by means of these external objects, but also by other means, such as through the use of deadly nightshade, or *atropa belladonna*.[42] The word *atropa* derives from Atropos, one of the fates who in Greek mythology cut the lifestrings of men, while the name *bella donna* derives from the Italian, meaning "beautiful woman."[43] Turned into a liquid, the ostensibly innocent herb was used by women to dilate their pupils and so to increase the seductiveness of their appearance.[44] Part of the Solanaceae family, belladonna is one of the most toxic plants in the world, and its continual use in the eyes would result in blindness—a shock for the women who had merely attempted to increase their desirability.[45] Not to mention the story of Oedipus, it is both a symbolic and poignant agent that women have used to attempts to adhere to the visual presentations of femininity, sometimes resulting in losses of vision.

Of course, it is notable that (while on the subject of symbolism) psychoanalysis has long explored femininity as masquerade, with Joan Riviere and Jacques Lacan having both addressed the topic.[46] In 1929, Riviere wrote of the masquerading women who exposed their femininity as both non-threatening and purely a charade.[47] Femininity had become, Riviere observed, a disguise of the female desire for the phallus or power, a desire that was thus worn like a masquerade.[48] Masquerade emerged while the West underwent civilization, as a kin of the concept

of privacy, which was largely absent in the Medieval period.[49] As Richard Sennet has argued, the emergent belief that people's thoughts and characters could be read on their faces led to a situation in which privacy was required, and this naturally inaugurated not just the construction of private spaces but the creation of privatising devices in public, including the uses of masks and cosmetic disguises.[50]

When one considers the signifiers that Strephon expects to encounter in the case of Celia, as well as of women and girls like her, one may be reminded of the nursery rhyme in which girls are said to be "made of sugar and spice and all things nice."[51] Strephon's preconceptions evoke this same system of thought, a system in which women are denoted by attributes clearly absent from the scene (after all, "sugar and spice" are not women's true constituents, any more than perfume or makeup). Instead, however, Strephon discovers that filth fills up the very space in the room he expects will be reserved for Celia's grooming apparatuses. The many types of filth he discovers includes "litter" (8), a "dirty smock" with its "armpits well besmeared" (12), combs overflowing with "dirt" (21), "[s]weat, dandruff, powder, lead and hair; A forhead cloth with oil upon't" (24–25) and "sour unsavoury streams" (28). But Strephon also comes upon "night-gloves made of Tripsy's hide" (29), "a filthy basin" (37), "scrappings of her teeth and gums" (40), "spit," "spew" (42), and atrocious, stinking towels that are "Begummed, bemattered, and beslimed/ With dirt, and sweat, and earwax grimed" (45–46). In addition, Strephon finds "frowzy heaps" (48) of petticoats, handkerchiefs encrusted with "snuff and snot" (50), stockings that are "Stained with the marks of stinking toes; or greasy coifs and pinners reeking/ Which Celia slept at least a week in" (52–54) and, finally, a "reeking chest" (110) with an "excremental smell" (111)—the item that confirms to Strephon that, yes, "Celia shits!" (118). The nature of the filth is inexplicable: "few words are best" (15), the narrator affirms, despite the many words devoted already to the mise en scene.

In *The Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva uses the term "abject" to describe the "jettisoned object" that "lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree with the . . . rules of the game."[52]

The agglomeration of Celia's possessions, including her dirty tools and costumes, which are also covered in her excretions—the "bemattered" clothing, such as the smock, the fetid towels, and the stockings marked by "stinking toes" (52)—registers Celia's "abjection," which is to say her "immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady" force.[53] Other excretions include the dirty combs, which are filled with sweat, dandruff, and hair, the cloth, which is covered in forehead oil, and the filthy basin, in which "scrappings of her teeth and gums" reside (40). The abjection of the scenario encompasses Celia's shitting, spewing, spitting, and general scrapping of her overall hygiene. The excretions that appear on the towels cause Strephon's to turn "away from [this] defilement, sewage and muck," as repulsed as Kristeva herself, who describes what it means to feel a strong loathing for the unclean.[54] Of course, the reverse also occurs too, for Strephon ventures into Celia's dressing room "resolved to go through thick and thin" (80), venturing to look into the proverbial Pandora's box, Celia's chest, with its "excremental smell" (111) and, whereupon opening it, to observe how her "human evils upwards flew" (86). This revelation of the woman's abject humanity, and this exposure of her "secrets of the hoary deep" (98), is staged and executed in such a way as to perfectly titillate and amuse the reader. And while it is in many ways sexist, and perhaps knowingly so, the poem's distinctively humanist theoretical and philosophical implications are striking.

The critic Stephen Karian has underlined the classically literary "Miltonic allusion" in the phrase "Those Secrets of the hoary deep."[55] However, it is possible to identify an alternative reading of Swift's multivalent meaning in the adjective hoary, which means "ancient" or "venerable from age, time-honoured," but also "overused and unoriginal; trite."[56] Swift's expression suggests not only that Celia's "secrets" are ancient, are as old and as universal the secrets of all women, but also that they are also trite, and in fact so universal in humans as to be entirely unremarkable. After all, each human requires sustenance to live, and so all humans require a place in which to excrete waste. The moral sensibilities of the modern reader are not disturbed when they are informed that, in case we did not already know, "Celia

shits!" (118) However, it is possible that the reader in Swift's era was more threatened by such descriptions of the abject, perhaps because they espoused a Christian theological attitude towards excretion as indecent and unholy. In the Bible, Deuteronomy instructs the reader to defecate in a hole that has been dug outside the sand digger camps; it must be hidden and buried, because the excrement is "indecent," and when "God walks in the midst of your camp" it "must be holy."[57] The imagined awkwardness and avowed immorality of God amid the defecation served to direct civilisation's drive toward more hygienic practices. Explaining Hansen's disease to juveniles or non-specialists may present pedagogical complications, while underscoring the embarrassment and immorality associated with God's presence amid the faecal matter is more effectively didactic, overt, and persuasive.

Another reading of the term hoary might focus on the usage of the chamber pot itself, which, though crass, is in many literal ways a "hoary" object. That is, the chamber pot is both trite and overused in a functional sense: first, the purpose for which it is used is ordinary (as it is regular), and second, it used more frequently than daily, and possibly even overused. Furthermore, the noun "deep," which is often used to denote "the sea," also alludes to Celia's womanly waters—the amniotic fluid of her womb—and the terrors they represent. Interestingly, water and freezing have been associated not only with women's bodies but were features of Dante's infernal Hell, where "The emperor of all these realms of gloom / stuck from the ice at mid-point on his breast.[58] Moreover, the noun secret, which means "something unknown or unrevealed or that is known only by initiation or revelation; a mystery; the hidden affairs or workings," clearly denotes Celia's hidden affairs, her body's ordinary functions.

The dirty clothing in the dressing room resembles costume apparel. The besmeared smock, the hide of Tripsy (Celia's deceased dog), which has been fashioned into night gloves, and the heap of dirty petticoats, handkerchiefs, and stockings: all of these items suggest that Celia has collected the garments for their presentational or performative uses rather than for the mere utility of body covering clothing. Dresses, handkerchiefs, and gloves are

quintessentially theatrical items, integral components that mark one's sartorial identity. The significations of these elements of costume denote not only Celia's abjection, however, but her role as a woman: they indicate the way in which Celia plays her role as woman and—just as any theatrical role requires backstage preparation—so does Celia's role require that she maintains her sartorial identity and masquerade. Thus, Celia's dressing room is described as the backstage of a theatre. However, no accompanying actors are present in the room, for they would distract from the mise en scene, and from the tools of transformation that are left idle and unprotected, vulnerable to Strephon's surveilling gaze.

In his isolation, Strephon is able to guess from what and where these marks of grime derive, and the uses to which the tweezers are put, and so to conclude that these artefacts, the tools of Celia's performance of a woman, are "Begummed . . . with dirt" (45–46) from overuse. The condition of the tools, however, suggests not simply Celia's failure to clean them, but the fact that Celia habitually uses them, these tools of transformation, often, and presumably every day. The tools are not merely tools of beautification, then, but aids of humanly function, used as often as the "reeking chest" (110) is used for daily excretion. In this way the poem reflects what Butler claims is at the essence of the performance of gender: that gender is constructed through a *repetitive* performance of gender, commonly in time with the "repetition of heterosexual constructs within sexual cultures."[59] Performativity "produces a series of effects" in consolidating the impression of gender, and that, following this process, the impression becomes an internal fact, a real and "true" aspect of the subject's identity.[60]

Celia's gender performance becomes performative in her habitual enactment of her womanhood, as well as through her repeated uses of her tools of transformation. The consequence of this recurrent performance is that Celia can only ever be understood as this performance: hence Strephon's disillusionment in the dressing room. However, the importance and existence of the concept of the woman is cyclical and evolutionary. Celia's

habitual transformation into (and in conformity with) the socially constructed concept of woman, serves to reaffirm and reify the concept of woman in the broader social consciousness. In this way, Celia's performance (and others like it) renders the concept of woman as truer and more essential as a category; indeed, her performance begins to appear as something that is not a performance at all, but a "natural kind." Butler states explicitly that "gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed," but instead is a loose and volatile phenomenon, furnishing "an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts."[61] If gender is constructed through repeated performances of normalised acts, then Swift's poem stands as demonstration or instance of this very procedural construction of gender. At the same time as Celia is "arrayed in lace, brocades and tissues," so is Strephon led to spuriously conflate her gender performance with an imagined (and fictitious) concept of her sexual biology.

But it is not only Celia's clothing that makes her a woman; her possession of innumerable vials and other objects allows her to adhere to gender norms too. Celia slavishly performs the role of woman with such conviction that her performance ensures she is only ever intelligible as a woman. Hence Strephon's horror when he discovers that Celia is not this construction known as woman but is, rather, a seemingly disgusting human. Heavily but covertly critical of the construction of gender, the poem comments on the assumptions and conclusions that the viewers of such performances as Celia's make and draw. Strephon cannot appreciate women as humans or simply delight in the masquerade of her performance—at least not while the poem proceeds. However, as the narrator suggests, there is hope. We are told that Strephon "soon would learn to think like me, / And bless his ravished sight to see / Such order from confusion sprung, / Such gaudy tulips raised from dung" (141–144).

The chest is also described as performing a significant role in the poem: "In vain the workman showed his wit / With rings and hinges counterfeit / To make it seem in this disguise / A cabinet to vulgar eyes" (75–78). Here the use of the terms "coun-

terfeit" and "disguise," which denote the chest and represent Celia's performance through prosopopoeia, implies the theological interpretation of woman as false, duplicitous, and innately deceptive, at the same time as it characterises the workman and his crafted object, which is also deceptive, as witty.[62] Unlike the workman, Celia presumably does not expose her wit by using or possessing the chest, but only the obverse: that is, she exposes only her abject nature. In this way, Swift's poem identifies the gender of woman as not only theatrical but depraved; although performativity as such, in its contemporary Butlerian definition, may have been beyond Swift's understanding. Nevertheless, Strephon is a misogynist writ large. The narrator commences the poem by informing readers that Strephon has been obsequiously pondering his "goddess" Celia's dressing routine. Strephon places Celia on a pedestal to be adored as an inanimate object; and yet he also transgresses her right to privacy, knowingly violating the restricted space of her dressing room, quietly entering the locus while Betty, one of the maids, is "otherwise employed" (6). Strephon then compiles "[a]n inventory" (10) of Celia's possessions, perhaps reflecting the popularity of inventories in the early eighteenth century, when ordering systems and taxonomies were burgeoning in literature, and when Enlightenment philosophers and scientists continued their attempts to systematise nature.[63] In another way, we could also read Strephon's use of an inventory as his method of documenting Celia's value, as a business owner might calculate and enumerate the value of their on-hand product.

Before entering, Strephon is praising of Celia; however, now we find him appraising not just her, but her possessions, and examining them, perhaps in the manner of a man who seeks a dowry. Strephon, amid the action of his discovery, soon begins to curse the men who have falsely narrated Celia's sweetness and cleanliness. He then confronts the comb "Filled up with dirt" (21) and oily cloth, taking notice of the varied odours emanating from the clothes and the chest. They vary, we learn, from "sour unsavoury streams" (28) to "excremental smell[s]" (111), the latter of which "waft[s] a stink round every room" (114). But the smell

is not new: Strephon, we are told, has "smelled it all the time before" (82).

This olfactory assault mirrors that which triggers Gulliver's revulsion in the face of the odours of the female Yahoo's: "she had a most offensive smell," Gulliver's master notes, later in the book; and earlier, Gulliver himself expresses a similar disdain for such smells, bemoaning the odours of his family: "During the first year, could not endure my wife or children in my presence; the very smell of them was intolerable." Nevertheless, Gulliver soon discovers that her prefers the natural smell of a the Lilluputians than their perfumes: "I found their natural smell was much more supportable, than when they used perfumes."[64] Swift's fixation of smells and their properties and interactions sometimes reveals his surprising prescience. His observation that "Here alum flower to stop the steams" (27), for instance, exhibits some knowledge of alum, a natural anti-microbial that inhibits the growth of odour-causing bacteria.

In "Womanliness as a Masquerade," the psychoanalyst Joan Riviere discusses the mask of femininity. "Womanliness," she writes, is "worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it."[65] In Riviere's theory, femininity operates as a defensive mask that is worn by the woman to disguise their masculinity. But femininity also requires all the accoutrements and trappings of a masquerade, which accounts for Celia's prodigious collection of vials. Strephon observes Celia's glut of "gallypot and vials" (33), which are variously "filled with washes, some with paste, / Some with pomatum, paints and slops, / And ointments good for scabby chops" (34–36). Beguiled, Strephon asserts that femininity is a "natural kind" rather than a masquerade designed to disguise those traits a woman may possess that are sooner associated with masculinity. His repulsion in the face of such a masquerade demonstrates his sheer naivety, and makes him the helpless dupe of the patriarchal system, with its intrinsic mythologisation of normative gender categories. However, while Strephon understands gender as essential, the poem views gender as performance. Gender plays—and so its characters play along in obedience.

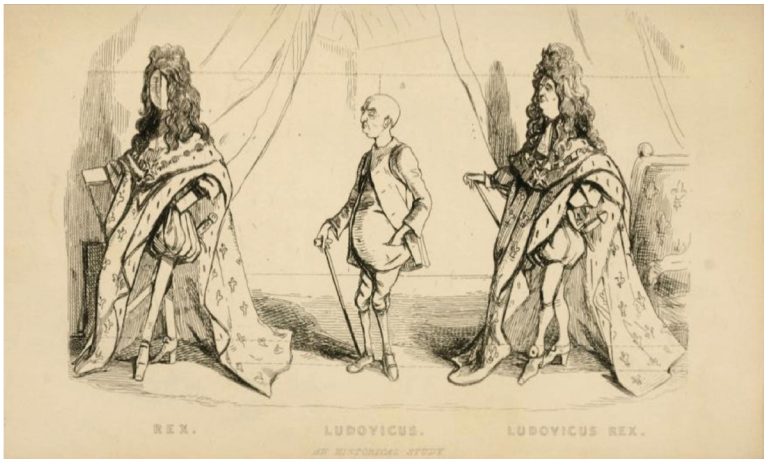

Figure 1. William Makepeace Thackeray, "Meditations at Versaille," in *The Paris Sketchbook* (1831; repr. London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1870), 435.

Costumes and masquerade that denote status and character are required, as are gestures that denote motive, whether concealed or overt.

Costuming is centrally important in performances of gender, as well as for marking social status. During the first century AD, Quintilian asserted that "*Vestis virum reddit*"—the clothes make the man—giving expression to what was an acute awareness among Roman citizens that clothing was an index of social status.[66] One example is the toga, which marked out Roman citizens from slaves. Hence Virgil's Jupiter will assert that they are the "masters of the earth, the race that wears the toga."[67] If it is not the man but his clothes that engenders his majesty, then, the point is amply demonstrated in William Makepeace Thackeray's 1840 cartoon (figure 1), which accompanies his essay "Meditations on Versaille."

The cartoon contrasts the fragile, unimpressive body of Louis the XIV, seen without his costume, with the garments of royalty that adorn him at other times.[68] Naked humans, or even humans out of costume, have no influence on society, perhaps with the noted exception of Hans Christian Anderson's political satire of 1837, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, where the same point

is made but in a different manner.[69] The idea that clothes and costumes serve to construct, manage, and reveal one's identity has remained in currency since the seventeenth century. Virginia Woolf draws attention to the role of clothes and costumes in her 1938 book-length essay *Three Guineas*.[70] Woolf specifically identifies clothing and costumes as revealing of the social positions held by men, and comments on the concealed nature of gender distinctions in public life. In written argument and photographs, Woolf's essay illustrates how the grand, opulent finery and constructed accoutrements of male attire in both office and public life serve to construct and manage male identity and authority.

Similarly, in *The Beauty Myth* (1990), Naomi Wolf discusses how the beauty myth is the formation and performance of femininity, and a component of gender performance that is perpetuated in magazines through costume and masquerade, both in clothing and makeup styles.[71] Wolf defines the beauty myth as the field of symbols and signs that define the standards of physical beauty, and the cultural movements that promote some of these signs and demote others.[72] Wolf's conceptualisation follows the lead of other formative critics, such as Betty Friedan, who described the system by which standards of beauty were imposed as the "feminine mystique."[73] But an equivalent prescription of beauty standards was also operative during the eighteenth century, during Swift's historical milieu. Then, this myth operated with as much (if not more force) as the system of today. For instance, in *The Ladies Dictionary*, published in 1694, the author explicitly defines the appropriate beauty and behaviour standards and codes for women. This text presented definitive rules and influenced seventeenth- and eighteenth-century womanly behaviour. These culturally prescriptive images of femininity nourished and informed the beauty myth of the era, just as they continue to do so today. As Wolf asserts "the myth isolates women by generation," and so forms and reifies the applicable conventions of gender performance in different eras.[74]

Costumes narrate how agents of both fiction and fact perceive themselves, and they illustrate how their wearers perceive others. That is, the costume marks the wearer not only as

distinguished but as distinguishable from others. The rituals and performances of public life are always constitutive of an external show, of a theatre performance or lavish spectacle. Clothes and costumes demonstrate meaning, expressing the gender roles that the actors and wearers perform. However, the material construction and cultivation of this identity continues even when the audience is absent. In *Robinson Crusoe*, the novel of 1719 by Daniel Defoe, the eponymous protagonist stands solitary on an island and distinguishes himself as civilised by donning a hat.[75] In the words of W. S. Gilbert, "Darwinian man, though well-behaved, At best is only a monkey shaved!"[76] The insight is significant, as humans are distinguishable as apes who wear hats and other garments made of other species' skins, such as the gloves made from Celia's dog "Tripsy's hide" (29). Costumes, then, can also sometimes distinguish human animals from nonhuman animals.

At one point of the poem, a self-referential moment occurs in which the conventions of theatre are referred to: "To him that looks behind the scene" (133), the narrator notes, referring to the behind-the-scenes space of the dressing room. Here Strephon acts as a disgusted child who discovers the fantasy of Christmas has been merely the conjuring of their parents to please and appease him in his naivety. When Strephon walks behind the scenes, the suspension of disbelief engendered by the performance is lost, and the illusion of the theatre is broken, with the mechanics of Celia's performance laid bare. Strephon is powerfully exposed to the theatre of Celia's gender, with the accoutrements, tools, costume, and masquerade before him in the dressing room. The room itself is called a "dressing room" for a reason: it is for dressing, particularly in preparation for theatre, performance, and costume. Strephon's inability to apply realism and logic to his thinking about Celia and this space is depicted as a comedic and culpable offence, for his guilty enjoyment is rudely annihilated, returning the sullen Strephon to reality. For Strephon, it is time to set aside his childish ways, and to become one who understands that women, just as men, are humans, with all that being human entails.

At many stages of the poem, the speaker describes Strephon in such varied pejorative adjectives as "poor" (43), "frightened" (61), "disgusted" (116), "punished" (120), and "wretched" (129). These words, articulated by the narrator, expose Strephon's subjectivity, conferring agency on him. By contrast, Celia is never realised, and is made to exists only through her varied accoutrements, which are distant metonyms for her subjectivity. The narrator, who is perhaps unable to access Celia's consciousness, offers only the singular adjective "haughty" (2), which means "arrogantly superior and disdainful," to describe her.[77] The question, then, is whether the narrator is projecting Strephon's assumptions of Celia onto the poem, through focalisation, or whether the narrator also regards Celia in such a way.

Wolf identifies "beauty-without-intelligence" as a value that has been attributed to women as a cultural stereotype for centuries, from Edmund Spencer, with his catalogue of feminine features, through Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Jane Fairfax in *Emma,* Rosamond Vincy in *Middlemarch*, Ginevra Fanshaw in *Villette*, and to Amy March in *Little Women*.[78] But this particular notion of femininity continues to pervade works of literature today. Wolf identifies one Western beauty myth as requiring women to be young, undergo surgical alteration, be of a Caucasian appearance, as well as to possess a slender and tall physique. Wolf also asserts that this beauty myth functions as political distraction, citing the flapper ideal of the 1920s as a distraction to women globally at a time when they had only recently become politically enfranchised. The proposition that the beauty myth serves as a distraction finds evidence throughout the twentieth century: in the mid-1960s, for instance, the ideal of the model Twiggy served to combat and counter the image of the empowered, hairy-legged woman activist of second-wave feminism.[79] It seems that the effort toward political and social liberation cannot exist without some necessary distraction from these pursuits. Indeed, the notion that women are susceptible to distraction is very convincing when we return to the poem and note that Celia, who is absent from the verses, is unable to defend herself precisely as she is elsewhere and distracted, per-

forming the role of woman for which she has obviously prepared. If not compelled to perform her femininity as such, then Celia would not have a dressing room to be trespassed upon at all, and Strephon would be disabused of his naivety in regard to her biological reality.

When Strephon discovers Celia's performance, she is transformed in his mind from a woman into a "careless wench" (71; 108). That she has not adhered to the performance defies intelligibility, which explains why "Disgusted Strephon stole away" (116) upon discovering the truth. Strephon, as the narrator states, has been hitherto "blind / To all the charms of female kind" (129–30)—blind, that is, to the fact that Celia's femininity is constituted by charms and artifices. The gender performance has had such an impact on Strephon that he believes "All women his description fits" (117). In other words, he identifies all women to be so because they perform the gendered role, and thus each who performs this gendered role to be a woman. The "gaudy tulip" (144) to which the narrator refers is the gender performance is not Celia but the performance itself, as its theatricality, something of which the narrator is aware, is indeed extravagant and showy—it is "gaudy"—and far from the essential or natural norm that Strephon identifies it to be. Ultimately, as the poem suggests, Celia's adherence to the performative codes of her sex divorce her from her own bodily functions, refiguring her not as a human but an image.

In reaction to Swift's poem, an offended reader, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, wrote a poem titled *The Reasons that Induced Dr. S. to Write a Poem Call'd the Lady's Dressing Room*.[80] A masterly piece of satire itself, the poem parodies patriarchal gender roles in the early eighteenth century. These two poems, those of Swift and Mantagu, may be read as a duel between their authors, with Montagu's poem openly slandering Swift, depicting him as impotent and emasculated. In Montagu's poem, Swift is accompanied by a sex worker who bemoans his feebleness, while Swift can do no other than embarrassedly attempt to excuse his sexual incapacity by complaining of the room's unhygienic nature. Montagu portrays Swift as intimidating the "saucy Queen" (92) by

threatening to tell the world of her filthy room—"I'll so describe your dressing room" (94). In response, the sex worker says, "I'm glad you'l write, / You'l furnish paper when I shite" (96–67).[81] Here, the woman speaker's allusion to her intended use of paper from his letter—to "wipe her arse," as the expression goes—illustrates her sheer contempt of the work the male speaker produces. The image, however, is not new, and the same threat has been made to poets before this, such as by John Dryden in his *Mac Flecknoe* (1682), in which the speaker writes the following: "From dusty shops neglected authors come, / Martyrs of pies, and reliques of the bum."[82] The image subverts and undermines the esteem in which these works might otherwise be held, and reconfigures them as no better than toilet paper. Montagu's poem attempts to claim that a hatred of women pervades Swift's poem—a spurious allegation; though Montagu's poem also rightly mocks the double standards of patriarchal gender roles, illustrating the way in which men, as well as women, adhere to gender stereotypes.

While Montagu's poem certainly takes Swift's own assumptions to task, it also seems to consider the extent to which hygiene is a class issue, even becoming something of a prescient voice for intersectional feminism. After all, dirt in Swift's era was commonly associated with blood, and it was typically thought that filthy blood led to filthy habits. Conversely, clean blood was associated with morality, and this ideology was encapsulated not only in the Spanish notion of *limpieza de sangre*, which literally means "purity of blood," but in the blood purity laws of in sixteenth-century Spain. [83] Moreover, since the Ancient period, physicians emphasised the important of blood to humoral balance, and, together with the Spanish description of their Royal family as *sangre azul*, the epithet of the "blue blood," meaning a noble, arose in Britain.[84] Physiognomists and later phrenologists saw anatomy as dictating the characteristics of a person, venerating the cranial while denigrating the stomach, which was associated with the ignoble desires, and the lower organs—those for sex and excretion—as the most immoral and base of all. In this context, those whose genealogy or parentage implied mixed blood were generally regarded as at the lowest social status.[85]

This essay has argued that critics have been generally reticent to read Swift's "The Lady's Dressing Room" as a poem that takes up and criticises gendered and patriarchal assumptions about the role of the woman and the body. I have sought to show how Swift ironises and slanders Celia's compulsory performance of her gender role; I have also sought to illustrate how, happily, Swift's poem reveals the reality of women's human bodies, and derides Strephon for his naïve subscription to the heteronormative delusion that women's bodies are essentially different from those of men. Images of women's humanity and their bodies can greatly assist in furthering the rights of women as human beings, and future research should explore women's exploitation as a fundamental part of their performance of a gender role. And while I have only touched on it briefly in the above paragraphs, further research should explore the relationship between eighteenth-century capitalism and the contemporaneous patriarchal understanding of women's bodies as commodities.

Notes

1. See William M. Thackeray, *Lectures on the English Humourists of the 18th Century* (1851); see also Merrel D. Clubb, "The Criticism of Gulliver's 'Voyage to the Houyhnhnms', 1726–1914," in *Stanford Studies in Language and Literature,* ed. Hardin Craig (Stanford: School of Letters, Stanford University, 1941), 221.

2. Jonathan Swift, *The Complete Poems,* ed. Pat Rogers (New York: Penguin Classics, 1989). This essay quotes from this edition, and all subsequent references to this edition are incorporated into the text.

3. See, by Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge,1990); *Precarious Life* (London: Verso, 2004); and "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519–531; and see, Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women* (London: Vintage, 1991).

4. Antony Kamm, *Collins Biographical Dictionary of English Literature* (Glasgow: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 457.

5. Ibid.

6. Jonathan Swift, *A Modest Proposal and Other Writings,* ed. Carole Fabricant (London: Penguin Classics, 2009).

7. This epitaph was composed by Swift and was translated by Yeats; see William Butler Yeats, "Swift's Epitaph," in *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (London: Macmillan& Co., 1933), 86.

8. John R. Clark, *The Modern Satiric Grotesque and its Traditions* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 117.

9. Joseph McMinn, "Swift's Life," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Swift,* ed. Christopher Fox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 27.

10. Swift, *The Complete Poems,* 448–66.

11. Ibid., 27–28.

12. John Middleton Murry, *Jonathan Swift* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1954), 440.

13. Geoffrey Hill, "Jonathan Swift: The Poetry of Reaction," in *The World of Jonathan Swift: Essays for the Tercentenary,* ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968), 207, 209; also see Thomas B. Gilmore Jr., "The Comedy of Swift's Scatology," *PMLA* 91, no. 1 (1976): 33.

14. Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1985), 179–201.

15. Ibid.

16. McMinn, "Swift's Life," 28.

17. Gilmore, "The Comedy of Swift's Scatological Poems," 33.

18. Herbert Davis, "Swift's view of Poetry" in *Fair Liberty was All His Cry: A Tercentenary Tribute to Jonathan Swift* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1967); Irvin Ehrenpreis, *The Personality of Jonathan Swift* (New York: Methuen, 1958).

19. Herbert Davis, "A Modest Defence of 'The Lady's Dressing Room,'" in *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Literature: Essays in Honor of Alan Dugald McKilliop*, ed. Carroll Camden (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 39–48.

20. Ehrenpreis, *The Personality of Jonathan Swift,* 36, 42.

21. Donald C. Mell Jr., "Imagination and Satiric Mimesis in Swift's Poetry: An Exploratory Discussion," in *Contemporary Studies of Swift's Poetry,* ed. John Irwin Fischer and Donald C. Mell Jr. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1981), 134.

22. Tita Chico, "Privacy and Speculation in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Cultural Critique* 52 (2002): 47.

23. Murry, *Jonathan Swift,* 440.

24. Laura Brown, *Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in Early Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 177.

25. Ibid., 182.

26. Laura Bardot, "What Not to Avoid in Swift's 'The Lady's Dressing Room,'" *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 49, no. 3 (2009): 637–38.

27. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Image—Music—Text,* tr. Stephen Health (New York: Hall and Wang, 1977), 142–48.

28. See Butler, *Bodies That Matter,* 30.

29. On the blazon, see, for instance, Grant Williams, "Disarticulating Fantasies: Figures of Speech, Vices, and the Blazon in Renaissance English Rhetoric," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (1999): 43–54.

30. Ibid. Also see Laura Friedman, "Displaying Stella: Anatomical Blazon and the Negotiation of Male Social Status," *Sidney Journal* 30, no. 1 (2012): 101–115.

31. Efrat Tseëlon, *The Masque of Femininity* (London: SAGE Publications, 1995), 33–34.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid., 35.

34. Arthur Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms* (London: Penguin, 1970), 83–84.

35. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (1885; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 145.

36. Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. and introduced by Montague Summers (1489; repr. London: Pushkin Press, 1951), 44.

37. Butler, *Precarious Life*, 20.

38. For an insightful discussion of feminism and Black Lives Matter, see Cathy J. Cohen and Sarah J. Jackson, "Ask a Feminist: A Conversation with Cathy J. Cohen on Black Lives Matter, Feminism, and Contemporary Activism," *Signs* 41, no. 4 (2016): 775–92.

39. See, for instance, Kat Blaque, "This is Why #AllLivesMatter is Ridiculous—and Offensive," *Everyday Feminism*, May 19, 2015, http://everydayfeminism.com/2015/05/alllivesmatter/.

40. Mary E. Hawkesworth, *Globalization and Feminist Activism*. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 25–27; see also Chris Beasley, *What is Feminism*? (New York: Sage, 1999), 3–11.

41. Edward W. Rosenheim, Jr., *Swift and the Satirist's Art* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), 231–32.

42. Edward Harris Ruddock, *The Homoeopathic Vade Mecum of Modern Medicine and Surgery: For the Use of Junior Practitioners, Students, Clergymen, Missionaries, Heads of Families, Etc.,* 2nd ed. (London: Jarrold and Sons, 1867), 503–8; *R*. Groombridge, *The Naturalist: Illustrative of the Animal, Vegetable, and Mineral Kingdoms* (London: R. Groombridge, 1839), 193.

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Peer-Reviewed Article

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The Importance of a Forward-Looking Trans Poetics

DURING THE FIRST wave of queer American politics in the 1950s and '60s, queer poetry was, as Eric Keenaghan writes, "regularly included in nationally circulated activist publications."[1] From its very beginnings, then, queer poetics has focused on relating experiences and affirming identities. As Keenaghan continues, these early activist publications "helped raise other LGBT individuals' consciousness that a queer community could exist because others had similar experiences." Moreover, for many of the poets and writers who produced these pamphlets,

> self-expression had to be coupled with an impulse to construct, to reimagine one's social and political world, because minority life, as it was known in later decades, simply did not exist.[2]

Not only must the political begin with the personal, then, but so must the *poetical* begin in this same way. And a queer poetics in particular must always draw attention to human rights abuses and experiences of oppression by individuals, for being alive and

queer is an inherently political act.[3] Thus, in queer poetry, there is a tendency toward autobiography, a tendency that recognises how lived experience is the most important tool in understanding oppression.[4] Articulating a sense of shared lived experience becomes a mode of creating communities; and, in turn, the poetics produced by these communities reflects the everyday reality of queer lives.

The purpose of this essay is to draw attention to works by transgender (or "trans") poets and to illustrate the way in which these works are always inherently tied to a project that might dubiously be called "queer progress," one that orients itself to the advancement of the rights of the queer community. More specifically, I will examine the pairing of the poetic and the political in the work of trans poets Steph Burt, Alok Vaid-Menon, and Joshua Jennifer Espinoza. Each of these poets focuses on a different project of rights-based activism, using poetry as a means both to respond to and transcode the manifold struggles facing the LGBTQIA+ community.

Queer poetics are focused on multiple reclamations—on the reclamation of rights, of lives, and of language. Drawing on postcolonial language theory, Bruce Boone finds gay language to be "a *coded* language—whose opposition is expressed only in 'deformed' or distorted fashion."[5] This point about codes, which itself implies the possibility of "code-switching," is furthered by Michael Dowdy, who writes that

> code-switching not only reflects the reader's experiences and serves as a means to establishing and recognising group identity, it is a strategic, creative device for activating a specific type of poetic agency.[6]

Interrogations of language after Dowdy have added to Boone's original work. According to poet and critic Trish Salah, language is violent in its production; while, for Gayle Salamon, language permits only an obfuscation of identity.[7] These contributions confirm Boone's assertion that "a sense of community is produced by referring to certain traditional artefacts of the community."[8] By speaking with the words of a marginalised group, and by

continually referring to that group's history, the community is not just preserved but strengthened. Indeed, the notion that a community is built around its materials, its "artefacts," has continued to hold true for contemporary queer poetics, and especially for transgender poetics in the twenty-first century.

Despite the multitude of complex political issues that face the queer community, queer poetics are not exclusively concerned with queer political issues. Keenaghan finds that rather than focusing solely on matters of interest to queer poets, "contemporary queer poets . . . tend to use their LGBT identities as springboards for poetically addressing issues which affect all populations." It is for this reason, Keenaghan argues, that these authors deploy the term "queer" rather than "LGBT," for instance, as the former term "tends to challenge rigid and potentially divisive identity logics so as to forge new connections and alliances between communities and groups."[9] In practice (as well as theory), Keenaghan's theory holds true, for the many issues with which queer poetics concerns itself are also at the forefront of poetic expression and expansion more generally, and not confined to the needs, interests, or prerogatives of queer poets and poetics only. Ian Brinton points to the importance within queer poetics of the dismissal of and resistance to binaries such as black/white, gay/straight, man/woman, and Nerys Williams similarly notes the influence of "identity politics—the categorisation of different groups according to race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation—[which has] found a fertile and often recuperative role in contemporary poetry."[10] All of this highlights the importance of considering contemporary queer poetics as a means of drawing attention to the broader work of identity politics, a subject more often associated with the politics of race or with feminism than with queer writing.[11] Moreover, conceiving of queer poetics in this way allows us to pay close attention to the particular modes of interrogation and disavowal in this work while also acknowledging the common practices of resistance that queer poetry shares with other "non-queer" writings and poetics.

Given the broader aims of queer politics outlined above, a queer poetics does and must also be a trans poetics. Trans poets employ a number of poetic strategies and tools to enter the discourse: they commonly destabilise inherently violent and erasive language, employ coded language that operates through artefacts and lived experience, and borrow from trauma theory, recognising that, as Roger Luckhurst notes, "extremity and survival are privileged markers of identity."[12] All queer poetries, and especially trans poetries, are predicated on the history of trauma and violence that has preceded them, even if this is not explicit in the poems themselves. For transfeminine Asian–American poet Alok Vaid-Menon, for instance, central to the task of constructing a trans poetics is remembering violence: both that which has gone before, and that which is ongoing. As I will show below, Vaid-Menon's work is temporally fixed and situated, in that it is frequently published online and in immediate response to events which directly impact the queer community. And the trans woman poet Joshua Jennifer Espinoza works in a similar way, publishing her poetry both on her blog in immediate response to current events—notably in response to the murders of trans women—and in print.

For other trans poets, such as Trace Peterson and Steph Burt, the way forward is through the more traditional methods of publishing their poetry in books and maintaining ongoing academic relationships with trans poetry groups. In her essay "Becoming A Trans Poet" of 2014, Peterson draws attention to the neglect of trans poets in literary criticism:

> At the time of writing this article, I am not aware of previous work in scholarly journals about "trans poets" as a specific category. So I believe this is the first article on trans poets authored by a trans academic and published in a peer-reviewed journal.[13]

Peterson goes on to differentiate between reviews of individual poets or poems and critical or scholarly attempts to read across writers and construct something approximating a canon of trans poetics. This work has garnered critical attention in recent years,

with the 2013 publication of the first anthology of trans poetry, *Troubling the Line: Trans and Genderqueer Poetics*, and an infamous *New York Times* profile of Burt, an established literary scholar and Harvard professor of English, provocatively titled "Poetry's Cross-Dressing Kingmaker" by author Mark Oppenheimer.[14] After the article appeared in 2012, Burt's public profile rose, increasing the visibility of their queerness. As trans people like Burt gain greater visibility in society, mainstream attitudes change and transform; indeed, trans poets have been instrumental in catalysing this process.[15]

Scholars and poets alike have posited some of the common themes in trans poetry. In her short creative essay of 2009, "In Lieu of a Trans Poetics," Trish Salah notes that trans poetry often focuses on the body and that, like trans bodies, its poetic features are always in the process of becoming, specifically through "unfixing" and "unmaking." She compares the development of trans poetry to the development of the body and mind into adulthood: "Like adolescence, it's so gay, actually."[16] But Salah also conceives of trans poetry as essentially liberalising: not only is it resistant to hegemonic binaries, she writes, but fundamentally concerned with combating the structures that oppress trans people. And yet, Salah also suggests that trans poetry has the potential, like "writing history," to be "hysterical," and to construct texts that move "between subject and abject."[17] In many ways, Salah's abstracted distinction between "subject" and "abject" captures both the complexity and the mission of contemporary trans politics and poetics; it is a fight to be viewed no longer as abject and to move into the realm of the subject—that is, to be conferred agency as individuals, to be recognised and validated.[18] As with the political aims of trans people, trans poets and trans poetics are manifestly concerned with the immediate improvement of trans rights.

In the introduction to *Troubling the Line*, editors Tolbert and Peterson write of trans poetry as a mode that is diverse and irreducible, continually "challenging the idea of a single trans narrative, interrogating binaries of all sorts, and playing with, delighting in, explorations (explosions) of form."[19] Peterson, writing

elsewhere, finds formal exploration to be a common preoccupation among trans poets. Trans poetry, he writes,

> exhibits an ego-dystonic sense of undertow. The poems destabilize or sabotage an idealized sense of self in the articulation of that self. They explore experimental linguistic strategies, reaching beyond biography toward extreme fictional elements [to] push the borders of genre.[20]

In the argot of psychoanalysis, to be egodystonic is to have thoughts that are dissonant or in conflict with one's needs and goals, and to behave in ways that contradict both one's ego and ideal self-image.[21] The concept of egodystonia encapsulates the complex mental territory that the experience of gender dysphoria—and the process of writing about it—maps. The literary scholar Michael Dowdy has highlighted the disconnect between ego and enactment, noting the importance of agent-centred "I" poetry, which can create a political space that has agency and an actor behind it. As he writes, seeing "identity as activated in and through action," allows us to notice how "Action does not express a preexisting identity," but, "rather, action creates and forms identity."[22]

While the notion that taking action helps to propel a subject into being is both persuasive and familiar, actually taking action can be particularly difficult for subjects whose bodies do not straightforwardly align with their gender identity, such as those who identify as trans. In many ways, those who experience conflicting drives are among the most at risk of falling prey to the dangers of language. In a later book section on migratory agency in Latina/o poetry, Dowdy writes of "subjects [who are] split not only between languages, but also between their bodies and the actions their bodies perform," capturing the difficult circumstances in which migrants face the "exclusion or erasure of one language via the 'mastery' or primacy of another."[23] But Dowdy's description of the split subject—of the egodystonic subject with conflicting drives—is also an apt description of the trans poet's position.[24] Of course, for the trans poet, by contrast, it is the "exclusion or erasure" of one *body* via the primacy of another that

is difficult to navigate; and the sense of being "split" arises in the course of confronting the actions and needs of a body that differs from the subject's primary "ipseity," or sense of self.[25]

Whereas I have suggested a trans poetics might focus on the body, and on the conflict that arises in the course of the trans poet's engagement with their body, Peterson suggests that trans poetry often "avoids directly presenting a narrative about being trans," and that, although "it appears" in some poems, it is usually "not the focus of the work."[26] While Peterson's point will prove to be at least partly true for the selection of poets I examine below, I will also show that the work that these poets do—to politicise their personal narratives and to detail their experiences with the ego—also serves to make their trans identities more visible. In other words, through various linguistic clues or implicative references, which a reader fluent in the coded language of the queer community would recognise, trans poets often *do* make narratives about being trans central to their work, even if it is not in an explicit way. My argument is thus in line with Boone's assertion that gay language is coded, and must be so, due to the predominant, hegemonic language of the "dominating group." As he writes,

> it has become historically evident that a new linguistic–cultural problematic is shaped when oppressed groups find themselves under the necessity of speaking not only (or only partly) their own language but the language of another, dominating group. The language of an oppressed group in such circumstances tends to become a coded language—whose opposition is expressed only in "deformed" or distorted fashion.[27]

Moreover, while this argument accords with queer speech acts more broadly, it is especially cogent in the case of trans poetry. As a segment of the queer community who, according to various studies, are more likely to face discrimination and violence than their queer peers, trans subjects are also arguably more likely to employ a coded language, and one that is even more encoded and abstracted than those used by the queer community in general.[28]

Turning now to the work of Alok Vaid-Menon, I want to examine the role that political speech acts play in their poetry. But first, it is notable that, in the State of the Union address on January 20, 2015, then President Barack Obama, highlighting the importance of "human dignity," said,

> That's why we defend free speech, and advocate for political prisoners, and condemn the persecution of women, or religious minorities, or people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. We do these things not only because they're right, but because they make us safer.[29]

Not just an important message, the statement also marked the first time that the word transgender had been said in a State of the Union address.[30] However, in their poetic response to the address, Vaid-Menon draws attention to the fact that merely mentioning the discrimination and prejudice faced by trans people is ineffective, and suggests that taking active steps—such as strengthening anti-discrimination law—would be more important, particularly in the case of hate crimes against trans people. In "girls wear blue; boys wear pinkwashing," published on Vaid-Menon's personal website, they employ repeated strains to draw on the traumas of the trans community:

> not the trans people raped and killed by the military
> not the trans people raped and killed by the police
> not the trans people raped and discarded by the state[31]

The work of trauma theorists Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman has suggested that enunciative acts of repetition in the context of trauma—and especially when that trauma is ongoing and compounding—might enable a traumatised person to survive through their grief and distress, particularly by allowing them to find ways to bear witness to and integrate their trauma into their personal identity.[32] Accordingly, Vaid-Menon's repeated phrasing may be interpreted as an attempt to integrate these traumatic events, at the same time as it serves to highlight the abiding recurrence of these tragedies. As Felman suggests, by opening ourselves up

to the voices from the past—to the voices that often "live" in the present, and sometimes literally so in an age of immersive digital media—we may find ways to redress both trauma and violence.[33] Vaid-Menon's poem additionally makes clear who they view as the perpetrators of violence against the trans community, explicitly naming the military but notably modifying the word "killed" in the final line so as to stop short of asserting that trans people have been murdered by "the state" itself. By substituting "killed" with "discarded," Vaid-Menon not only implies the state's negligence (rather than its criminality), but alludes to an older, less common definition of the word, namely "Of a person: dismissed from employment, deprived of office, discharged."[34] In this sense, the word discarded implies the more systemic and structural prejudices that trans people face in American society.

Later in the same poem, Vaid-Menon employs repetition, sometimes called *conduplicatio* in studies of poetic rhetoric, to affirm their allegiance to their "sisters." Just how that allegiance might be expressed remains unsaid. However, it is worth noting that, if Vaid-Menon had been unfortunate enough to bear witness to violence against a trans person, their witness testimony—and therefore their allegiance—may well be fruitless or ineffective. This is because criminal charges are rarely laid in these matters, with only six percent of the total number anti-LGBT crimes reported to the police in 2013 resulting in the laying of charges on accuseds.[35] Inverting America's exceptionalism narrative, Vaid-Menon draws on the rhetoric of nationalism, contrasting it with an encoded or codified signifier:

> so i will not pledge allegiance to the trans tipping point...
> i will not pledge allegiance to the trans tipping point...
> i will not pledge allegiance to the trans tipping point...
> i pledge allegiance to my sisters!
> i pledge allegiance to my sisters!
> i pledge allegiance to my sisters!

The "trans tipping point" is a reference to Katy Steinmetz's article of May, 2014, published in *TIME* magazine, titled "The Transgender Tipping Point."[36] In that article, Steinmetz highlighted the

progress that had been made in the trans community in terms of attaining more visibility; however, the article was received poorly within the queer and trans communities, with many seeing it not only as an attempt to sweep ongoing trans-related issues aside, but as an essay that fetishised the former identities of trans people, including those of the subjects Steinmetz interviewed. In Vaid-Menon's poem, the word "sisters" refers to trans women exclusively; a highly codified term, "sisters" is frequently used in the queer community as a way for people, many of them trans women, to collectively identify, recognise, and confront the experience of being excluded from womanhood, both in history and in the present.

By subverting nationalist rhetoric but employing the repeated, sloganistic exclamations characteristic of the protest chant, Vaid-Menon foregrounds the importance of developing a trans community. The poem draws distinct lines between "us," by which they mean the trans community, and "them," by which the poet presumably means those who are neither trans identifying nor political allied with trans people. Later, Vaid-Menon goes so far as to outline a vision of a trans-friendly world, employing the word "trans" itself as a kind of metonym or synonym for "utopia" or "dream":

> our trans means the end of imperialism
> our trans means the end of militarism
> our trans means the end of police
> our trans means the end of borders
> our trans means the end of the white man's house

In these lines, Vaid-Menon renames the military as a source of violence against the trans community, but now associates militarism with the perils of imperial rule and the paternalistic history of white occupation. The expression white man's house—a pun on the White House—calls attention to what was, when the poem was written, the fact that an African American president occupied the White House, subtly alluding to one way in which the "end of the white man's house" might have already occurred. These lines, which appear at the close of the poem, follow an earlier

line that subtly alludes to the illegitimacy of the White House by referring to "the red earth this house is settled on." Of course, the word "red" has been associated with Native Americans in both pejorative ways, as in "redskin," and in empowering forms, as in "red land" and "red power."[37] Here the word "red earth" alludes to both these forms while remaining so codified, so encoded, as to signify neither explicitly.

In different ways, both Salah and Peterson point to the role that trans poetry plays in both naming and disrupting binaries. Vaid-Menon's lines are a case in point, not only because they directly interrogate gender binaries but because they construct new dialectics too—syntactic dyads that reframe the orthodox oppositions between male and female, black and white:

> when visibility for some means
> vilification for most
> when lip service for some means
> life sentence for most
> when acknowledgment for some means
> annihilation for most

Here, binaries emerge in the form of visibility/vilification, lip service/life sentence, and acknowledgement/annihilation. The apparent arbitrariness of these oppositions is resolved by the phonetic and visual similarities between the words—not to mention that they are alliterative—and this highlights not only the arbitrariness of all dichotomous categorisations but indicates the primacy that the poet imputes to sonic and graphemic effects. In addition, that Vaid-Menon uses violent-sounding terms to construct these binaries reminds us of the potential for violence that is inherent in all such dualisms: the poet's binaries thus mimic the violence central to all binary gender designation. By using a coded language, Vaid-Menon not only interrogates gender binaries and destabilises the American imperialist narrative, but creates a space in which identity can be built from within the transgender community; not from the words and tools of its oppressors.

Writing again in response to an event—in this case, the anniversary of 9/11—Vaid-Menon expands on their conception of the American national consciousness and its interactions with race, gender, and the changing nature of warfare—topics that Brinton identifies as axiomatic for contemporary poetry.[38] Williams has similarly noted poetry's seemingly inexorable relationship with war, noting that "poetry of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has had to learn how to ethically address and represent brutality and war, from inter-ethnic conflict to global warfare."[39] In a poem titled "when a birth certificate hijacks a body and tells it to speak or forever hold its peace," Vaid-Menon draws a direct line between the violence of warfare (of all kinds) and the violence of gender binary:

> would you accept me if i told you
> my gender came from violence?
> because sometimes i wonder
> if there would be gender if there
> was no violence[40]

As well as addressing the violence (both metaphorical and literal) inherent in the process by which a specific gender designation is forced on a subject, these lines explore the way gender stereotypes contribute to violence. For the poet, violence and gender are inseparable. In a striking chiasmus, the poet suggests that, just as an act of violence must be done in order for gender to exist—whether that act is one of language, of physical modification (as in the surgeries performed on intersex babies[41]), or of social control—so must gender be ascribed in order for later acts of violence to arise.

Vaid-Menon's "when a birth certificate" is further concerned with the impact that the global threat of terrorism has had on identity formation, both in terms of gender and otherwise. As a member of Generation Y, or what Sunaina Marr Maira has called the "9/11 Generation," Vaid-Menon is familiar with violence and warfare.[42] Indeed, "when a birth certificate" sees the poet muse on the intersections between race and gender in a climate of post-9/11 violence:

flying away from man because
he brown
he !

Here, the movement from full sentences to truncated, incomplete phrases is perhaps partly an allusion to African American vernacular English (AAVE), and partly a significative strategy that serves to illustrate the fragmentation of identity at the heart of most gender- nonconforming people's lived experience.[43] Earlier in the poem, the speaker muses on the assignment of race at birth: "what would it mean to say / that i was assigned brown at birth?" Clearly, the lines reference the expression "assigned male at birth" or "assigned female at birth," which are commonly used in medical settings and trans communities as a means of "objectively" identifying a subject's gender genealogy. However, in this line, the poet brings race into play, and so identifies it as just another categorisation that is developed by the assigner rather than the assignee, rhetorically challenging the notions of assignment and assignation more broadly. Echoing the earlier lines in which the poet wondered "if there would be gender if there / was no violence," now the poet expresses a similar pondering:

sometimes i
wonder if there would be brown
if there were no plane

Here, the image of the "plane," which presumably refers to the events of 9/11, is a striking metonym, not least because we know that not just one but four aircraft were involved in the attacks, which took place over three locations. Here, then, the conflation or reduction of these events and objects to a singular vehicle is representative of the way in which the attack has been reified and turned into a unitary event, one with its own origin story and effects. To invoke 9/11, these lines suggest, is to invoke the image of a singular plane crashing into a singular tower.

The critic Kara Keeling has addressed the intersection between gender, violence, and a forward-looking perspective as it appears in some queer political poetry. Writing of Marx's notion

of a "poetry from the future," Keeling describes the "formal" and "temporal" way in which this kind of poetry disrupts language. It "functions," she writes, "primarily at the level of affect" so as to "resist narration and qualitative description," as well as to interrupt "the habitual formation of bodies."[44] The description is appropriate for Vaid-Menon's poetry too, which, as a poetry from the future—an ideal or utopian poetry where there is "no violence" and "no plane"—uses affective language to reconcile all manner of conflicts, including the "egodystonic" conflict between one's identity and one's assigned-at-birth body.

The list of writers who work both as poets and scholars is long; however, among them, only very few identify as trans. One such trans poet–scholar is Steph Burt, an author whose complex gender identity was, as I have already intimated above, shot into the public spotlight when Mark Oppenheimer's *New York Times* article named them "Poetry's Cross-Dressing Kingmaker."[45] In response to the controversy surrounding the article, Burt responded with striking magnanimity:

> The NYT piece—for which I remain very grateful to Mark Oppenheimer!—ended up being sort of performative: a newspaper of record had said that I sometimes showed up to public events as Stephanie, which meant that of course now I did, or at least I could. I wore dresses and skirts to parties and public events in the 1990s, so anyone who knew me then knew that about me, but I wasn't able to talk about myself as trans in the 2000s in the way that I can do now.[46]

The change in culture that Burt describes—a change that enabled them to identify as trans more openly—speaks to the shifting position of trans people in society, as well as to the slow incorporation of specific terms into our common language, terms that may have once been articulated only in a coded, substitutive language. Burt first addressed their gender identity in poetic form in their third book, *Belmont*, which was published in 2013. "So Let Not Am I" might be described as Burt's poetic "coming out," and it is at once an exploration of what it means to straddle the gender divide

and a reflection on the impossibility of doing so in a culture that erases trans people's existence.[47] The poem begins with signifiers that denote Burt's "lost girlhood," naming the "subjunctive lost bangles and butterfly clips, plastic / sapphires, sparkly barrettes" (52) that they do not, and did not ever, possess. The term "subjunctive" here betrays the secret depths of the speaker's experience: they long for the ordinary markers of girlhood, and may perhaps even wish to experience the loss of those items, and yet they are unable to possess them, and so they are also destined to have "lost" them to begin with.

Furthermore, Burt frequently uses half rhyme, exacerbating the affective sense of inchoateness, incompleteness, and queerness that pervades the poem. At the centre of the poem, in the middle stanza, the following lines appear:

> a coin: one side is rusty, incomplete
> a profile of some guy who united his states,
> and to that history I say "sweet,
> but I can see myself nowhere."
> And yet it is a feeling I prefer
> to the other side, the faceless and the
> valueless, the absolutely free. (53-54)

This speaks to the heart of Burt's identity quest. The poet uses the word "states" as a clever pun, referring at once to the "united" states of America, and the different gender "states" experienced by the trans subject. But this wordplay is also coupled with masculine identifiers—"some guy"—and this highlights Burt's own difficulty in "uniting" their states; after all, they can see themselves only "nowhere." Of course, as is typical of Burt's poetry, the line is also ironic, tongue in cheek, and may remind us that humour is one of the primary linguistic strategies or codes employed by oppressed groups as a distancing mediator.

This is in line with Henri Bergson's theory of laughter. Bergson conceives of laughter as essential for political change as, once one is removed from the immediacy of one's self, and instead moved through the alternative, less ego-driven space created by laughter, new meanings are formed.[48] In this context, the poet's

description of the "faceless and the / valueless" refers to those people who cross the divide between genders (represented earlier in the poem by the two sides of a coin), and their invisibility within wider society. And the poet expresses this concern with seeing and being seen elsewhere in the poem, in a line where, breaking the fourth wall, the speaker will address the reader directly: "This poem makes eyes at you, / eyes back at me" (54). Here the poem-as-object, and persona-as-speaker, are separated by the act of seeing and the more passive experience of being seen. Scopophobia, or the fear of being seen, is a common theme of poetry about gender identity. Tied to concerns about "passing"—the ability of an individual to hide their transgender status from others—the notion of scopophobia tends to be invoked in trans poetry as a disruptive force, such as it is here, where it literally ruptures the poem, breaking it in two.[49] It is important to note that in this poetic moment, where the reader is supplied with the image of the coin, we become one step further removed from the imagined world of the persona, the added layers of distance here providing a "cover" for the expression their desire. This creates a space for addressing unvoiced desires, such as the poet's desire to align themselves with the "profile of some guy" despite "seeing [themselves] nowhere"; and yet, for fear of the response, as well as being seen, the poet must remain faceless. In expressing and experimenting with these variously repressed, sublimated, and reconfigured desires, Burt's work addresses the need for a representational system with which trans and gender-nonconforming youth can align themselves and identify—a complex political agenda in and of itself. Additionally, Burt's poetry's engagement with the complex politics of passing illustrates the way that both lived and imagined trans experience may allow for the building of a community that is based on shared experience.

After a career of writing predominantly internet-based poetry, Joshua Jennifer Espinoza published her first poetry collection in 2014, titled *I'm Alive / It Hurts / I Love It*.[50] Afterwards, Espinoza joined with a team of five trans poets to embark on the *Trans Planet* tour, a poetry reading expedition that journeyed along the East Coast of the United States during the summer

of 2015. Espinoza's poem "The Moon is Trans" draws on archetypes of the trans experience, the transphobic attitudes that deny existence of trans people, as well as the codification of trans culture. Written in second person, the poem ensures the reader becomes an active participant in the narrative. "You don't get to write about the moon again unless you use her correct pronouns" (28), writes the poet, indirectly (if not ironically) referring to the failure of news publications and of those in society more generally to address the trans subject in a way that is appropriate. Notably, Espinoza uses the term "correct" rather than "preferred," at once identifying these acts of misnaming as errors of fact rather than of etiquette. Using the "moon" as a synecdoche for the trans subject, the poem emphasises the importance of identitarian politics and policy, making the point that facts, rather than social orthodoxies, are crucial to addressing issues related to the LGBTQIA+ community, and even more so for trans people. Then invoking the alleged facticity of science as an allegory for the trans experience, the poet associates modern scientific thinking with the Old Testament:

> Scientists theorise the moon was once part of the earth
> that broke off when another planet struck it.
> Eve came from Adam's rib.
> Etc. (28)

Trans experiences have long been pathologised, their complexities relegated to the realm of science. In 2013, with the introduction of the fifth edition of the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM-5*), the diagnostic category of "gender dysphoria" was replaced with "gender identity disorder," purportedly to destigmatise trans people but at the same time preserve a diagnosis acceptable to medical insurance companies.[51] Despite the good intentions of those promoting the semantic change, which was, as Zowie Davy writes, intended to "better indicate distress they experience when their gender identity feels incongruent," the continued classification of trans people as "disordered" has served only to reinforce their pathologisation.[52]

In the lines from which I quoted in the preceding paragraph, Espinoza draws on a Biblical verse from Genesis: "The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man."[53] The quotation, of course, is laced with irony, as in the Biblical narrative the woman was literally created from, or at least through, a man. In the lines that follow, the poet succinctly adumbrates the confusion and tautology that pervades many of the discourses devoted to trans issues: "This is all upside down" (29). In addition, the speaker highlights the fear of retribution and the perpetual state of danger in which the trans community, but especially trans women, live: "She turns her face from you because of what you might do. / She will outlive everything you know" (29). In these lines, the words "What you might do" implies an act of violence, committed by the reader, the "you," in the poem; however, the vulnerability of the "she"—that is, the trans woman who is the subject of the poem—is reversed in the last line, which stresses the resilience and endurance of the trans community, which will "outlive everything," surviving all such attempts at intimidation or violence against it.

As I proposed at the beginning of the paper, a trans poetics must be one that speaks both to and of the trans experience so as to build a community that is capable of enacting change. No trans community, however, has been able to escape from the transphobia and violence that has beset it historically. As Trish Salah observes, even if a trans subject has not experienced violence directly, then they have witnessed it in other ways: "our violence is witnessing violence."[54] Indeed, some of the acts of violence committed against trans people are physical, and their effects are perceptible through brutal injuries and murders.[55] But others are less obvious or less material, and result in less clearly discernible reconfigurations in popular moods, general attitudes, and beliefs, and can lead to such changes as the encoding of languages, as I have posited above. Echoing the title of Audre Lorde's essay "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," a group of lines near the end of Vaid-Menon's "when a birth certificate" capture the difficulty of speaking explicitly about these acts of violence:

how we no longer attempt
to translate violence into
language

These lines capture one of the central objectives of trans poetry: the attempt to translate violence into language, hatred into poetry, senselessness into meaning. Trans poetics expresses frustration in response to the indifference and apathy expressed toward violence against and amidst trans people; when, for instance, deaths are not honoured by commemorations in speech and writing, trans poetry seeks to repair and to remedy these exclusions. Judith Butler has illuminated the way in which bodily violence generates a collective loss, a shared form of suffering:

> Despite our differences in location and history . . . we have all lost in recent decades to AIDS, but there are other losses that afflict us, from illness and from global conflict; and there is the fact as well that women and minorities, including sexual minorities, are, as a community, subjected to violence, exposed to its possibility, if not its realisation. This means that each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies—as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of publicity at once assertive and exposed.[56]

Butler's assertion that the body is the site du jour for political and social violence is not new; however, when one considers the additional vulnerabilities associated with the bodies of trans and gender-nonconforming subjects, the point is newly forceful. Trans poetics attempts to achieve what Butler associates with the aims of obituaries and mourning rituals: to provide a record, and acknowledging the importance, of trans lives and experiences. As with the mourning ritual, trans poetry often records the fact that there "has been a life, a life worth noting, a life worth valuing and preserving, a life that qualifies for recognition."[57] This is not just because trans poetry often serves to mourn the death of trans people, but because these poetries speak to the realities of trans

experience, drawing attention to trans lives and the issues the trans community faces.

Too little research has been devoted to trans poetry. Indeed, apart from Tolbert and Peterson's book, which contains many varied, excellent, and formative essays, there is next to no scholarly work that takes up trans poetry as its explicit and singular subject.[58] Of course, Keenaghan has written on queer poetics generally (as have many others); but then, even this category of work is scarce.[59] This paper has sought not only to ignite scholarly discourse on trans poetics but to begin a process of describing the genre's formal features. When it comes to a queer poetics, Keenaghan writes that the genre or form must serve as a resource for reimagining the world, one that might originate in LGBT subjects' specific experiences of oppression and marginalisation but that ultimately works toward inspiring new coalitions and universal inclusivity.[60]

On political poetry more generally still, Dowdy writes that it must always be "a reflection of and response to contemporary culture."[61] Joan Retallack and Juliana Spahr assert that what is most important for contemporary poetry is that it functions as an "interlocutor in the large conversation about what we as human beings are becoming, what matters."[62] Given the seemingly overwhelming need for a poetry that speaks to and about the gaps in equality—and that expresses a range of experiences that challenges those structures that perpetuate violence and hatred—it seems only too clear that queer poetry should act as a powerful force in the trans community. Just as trans poetry must be political, then, so must a trans politics embrace the poetic; it must attend to, celebrate, and scrutinise this mode of expression, for not only is it oriented toward change and growth but reflective of trans experience.

Notes

1. Eric Keenaghan, "Queer Poetry: Between 'As Is' and 'As If,'" in *The Cambridge Companion to American Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. Scott Herring (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 51.

2. Ibid.

3. Nerys Williams, *Contemporary Poetry* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh: 2011), 92.

4. Ibid., 34.

5. Bruce Boone and Frank O'Hara, "Gay Language as Political Praxis: The Poetry of Frank O'Hara," *Social Text* 1 (1979): 64.

6. Michael Dowdy, *American Political Poetry in the 21st Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 123.

7. Trish Salah, "In Lieu of a Transgender Poetics," *Open Letter* 9 (2009): 36; Gayle Salamon, *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 82.

8. Boone and O'Hara, "Gay Language as Political Praxis," 90.

9. Keenaghan, "Queer Poetry," 55.

10. Ian Brinton, *Contemporary Poetry: Poets and Poetry since 1990* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 2009), 41; Williams, *Contemporary Poetry*, 33.

11. See, for instance, Mary Bernstein's analysis of identity politics and the emergence of queer politics in the 1980s: Bernstein, "Identity Politics," *Annual Review of Sociology* 31 (2005): 56.

12. Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 2.

13. Trace Peterson, "Becoming A Trans Poet: Samuel Ace, Max Wolf Valerio, and kari edwards" *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (2014): 531.

14. See TC Tolbert and Trace Peterson (eds.), *Troubling the Line: Trans and Genderqueer Poetry and Poetics* (Portland: Nightboat Books, 2013); Mark Oppenheimer, "Poetry's Cross-Dressing Kingmaker," *New York Times*, September 14, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/16/magazine/stephen-burt-poetrys-cross-dressing-kingmaker.html

15. While I note that Burt uses both the she/her/hers as well as the he/him/his sets of pronouns, I will use they in this essay.

16. Salah, "In Lieu," 35.

17. Ibid., 36.

18. Trans women have long been associated with the abject, especially in cinema and television, where being revealed to be a trans woman typically invokes vomit and disgust. See, for instance, David E. Kelley, *Harry's Law* (2012); Todd Phillips (dir.), *The Hangover Part II* (2011); Neil Jordan (dir.), *The Crying Game* (1992); Brian De Palma (dir.), *Dressed to Kill* (1980); and Tom Shadyac (dir.), *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* (1994).

19. Tolbert and Peterson (eds.), *Troubling the Line*, 10.

20. Peterson, "Becoming a Trans Poet," 524.

21. Freud coined the term "ego-syntonic" and introduced the concept of egosyntonia in his essay "On Narcissism: An Introduction" (1910), repr. in James Strachey, ed. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1959), XIV: 99.

22. Dowdy, *American Political Poetry*, 23.

23. Ibid., 127.

24. Ibid.

25. On "ipseity," see Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, tr. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 2–3.

26. Peterson, "Becoming a Trans Poet," 523–24.

27. Boone and O'Hara, "Gay Language as Political Praxis," 64.

28. According to a report of the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, in 2016, 68 percent of hate violence-related homicides in the United States were against transgender and gender-nonconforming people: see NCAVP, *Lesbian Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and HIV-Affected Hate Violence in 2016* (New York: Emily Waters, 2016), 9, http://avp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/NCAVP_2016HateViolence_REPORT.pdf; also see Rebecca L. Stotzer, "Violence Against Transgender People: A Review of the Data," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 14, no. 3 (2009): 170–79.

29. Barack Obama, "President Obama's State of the Union Address—Remarks As Prepared for Delivery," *The White House*, January 15, 2016, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/01/12/remarks-president-barack-obama-%E2%80%93-prepared-delivery-state-union-address/.

30. Katy Steinmetz, "Why It's a Big Deal that Obama said 'Transgender,'" *Time*, January 222, 2015, http://time.com/3676881/state-of-the-union-2015-barack-obama-transgender/.

31. Alok Vaid-Menon, "girls wear blue; boys wear pinkwashing," *Alok Vaid-Menon*, February 2, 2015, https://www.alokvmenon.com/blog/2015/2/2/girls-wear-blue-boys-wear-pinkwashing/.

32. See Cathy Caruth, "Trauma and Experience: Introduction," in Cathy Caruth, ed. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MA: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 5, and Soshana Felman, "Education and Crisis, or, the Vicissitudes of Teaching" in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 31.

33. Soshana Felman, "Education and Crisis, or, the Vicissitudes of Teaching" in Caruth, ed. *Trauma*, 31.

34. *OED Online*, s.v. "discarded," http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/53664?redirectedFrom=discarded#eid/.

35. See National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP), *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and HIV-Affected Hate Violence in 2014* (New York: Emily Waters, 2015), 46, http://avp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2014_HV_Report-Final.pdf/.

36. Katy Steinmetz, "The Transgender Tipping Point" *TIME Magazine*. http://time.com/135480/transgender-tipping-point/

37. See, for instance, Sean Kicummah Teuton's study of the literature of "Red Power," a period of Native American organizing beginning in the late 1960s: *Red Land, Red Power: Grounding Knowledge in the American Indian Novel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

38. Brinton, *Contemporary Poetry*, 10.

39. Williams, *Contemporary Poetry*, 62.

40. Alok Vaid-Menon, "when a birth certificate hijacks a body and tells it to speak or forever hold its peace" *return the gayze: trans south asian poetry and politics*, available via *The Wayback Machine*, https://web.archive.org/web/20150406020400/http://returnthegayze.com/2015/02/05/girls-wear-blue-boys-wear-pinkwashing/.

41. On intersex surgery, see Georgiann Davis and Erin L. Murphy, "Intersex Bodies as States of Exception: An Empirical Explanation for Unnecessary Surgical Modification," *Feminist Formations* 25, no. 2 (2013): 129–52.

42. See Sunaina Marr Maira, *The 9/11 Generation: Youth, Rights, and Solidarity in the War on Terror* (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

43. While African American vernacular English is a term used in various contexts, this language is also routinely referred to as "Black English, African American English, or Ebonics": see, for instance, Joseph McLaren, "African Diaspora Vernacular Traditions and the Dilemma of Identity," *Research in African Literatures* 40, no. 1 (2009): 97–111.

44. Kara Keeling, "Looking for M-: Queer Temporality, Black Political Possibility, and Poetry from the Future" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15, no. 4 (2009): 567.

45. Mark Oppenheimer, "Poetry's Cross-Dressing Kingmaker" *The New York Times*.

46. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/16/magazine/stephen-burt-poetrys-cross-dressing-kingmaker.html?_r=0/.

47. Stephen Burt, interviewed by Kaveh Akbar, "'I'm happy to spend my time persuading you to read non-me poets," *Divedapper*, January 5, 2015, http://www.divedapper.com/interview/stephen-burt/.

48. Stephen Burt, *Belmont* (Minneapolis, MA: Greywolf Press, 2013), 52–55.

49. Henri Bergson, "Laughter ["Le Rire"], 1900; repr. in David Krasner, ed., *Theatre in Theory, 1900–2000* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 52–54.

50. On "passing" and its relationship with spirituality, trans identity, and literature, see Rachel Mann, "'Queering' Spiritual Direction: Towards a Trans*-Literary Praxis," *Theology & Sexuality* 20, no. 3 (2014): 214–24.

51. Joshua Jennifer Espinoza, *I'm Alive / It Hurts / I Love It* (Tucson: Boost House, 2014), 28–29.

52. See Zowie Davy, "The DSM-5 and the Politics of Diagnosing Trans people," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 44, no. 5 (2015): 1165–76; also see American Psychiatric Association, "Gender Dysphoria" in *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatry Association, 2014); and cf. American Psychiatric Association, "Gender Identity Disorder" in *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-IV* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatry Association, 2000), 576.

53. Davy, "The DSM-5," 1165; also see World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH), *Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender Nonconforming People*, 7th version (2012): 23.

54. Gen. 2: 22.

55. Salah, "In Lieu," 36.

56. See, for instance, "Effects of Violence on Transgender People," *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 43, no. 5 (2012): 452–59.

57. Judith Butler, *Precarious Lives* (London: Verso, 2004), 20.

58. Ibid., 34.

59. Although see Rebekah Edwards, "Trans-poetics," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, nos. 1–2 (2014): 252; Trish Salah, "Notes towards Thinking Transsexual Institutional Poetics," in Eva C. Karpinski, Jennifer Henderson, Ian Sowton, and Ray Ellenwood, eds. *Trans/acting Culture, Writing, and Memory: Essays in Honour of Barbara Godard* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013), 167–192; Joy Ladin, "'Trans Poetics Manifesto," in Tolbert and Peterson, *Troubling the Line*, 299–307; Petra Kuppers, "Trans-ing Disability Poetry at the Confluence," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (2014): 605–613; Joy Ladin, "'Spit it Open and Count the Seeds': Trans Identity, Trans Poetics, and Oliver Bendorf's The Spectral Wilderness" (Book Review), *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3, nos. 3–4 (2016): 637–648; and Susan Stryker, "Dungeon Intimacies: The Poetics of Transsexual Sadomasochism," *Parallax* 14, no. 1 (2008): 36–47.

60. But see, for example, Jose Escabi, "Unfathomable Poetics: Queer Interpersonality in the New York School," *Atenea* 33 nos. 1–2 (2013): 91–100; and Karen Lambert, "'Capturing' Queer Lives and the Poetics of Social Change," *Continuum* 30, no. 5 (2016): 576–586.

61. Keenaghan, "Queer Poetry," 56.

62. Dowdy, *American Political Poetry*, 198.

63. Joan Retallack and Juliana Spahr, eds., *Poetry and Pedagogy: The Challenge of the Contemporary* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 7.

Peer-Reviewed Article

Sabina Rahman

Breaking Spirits for a Happily Ever After: A Grimm Representation of Young Femininity

> Every real story . . . contains, openly or covertly, something useful. The usefulness may, in one case, consist in a moral; in another, in some practical advice; in a third, in a proverb or maxim. In every case the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his readers.
>
> — Walter Benjamin[1]

ONCE UPON A time (in the early nineteenth century), in a land far, far away (Germany), there lived two brothers—well, five brothers and a sister. Now, although each of these siblings had remained hardworking throughout their lives, and while each of them was admirable, it is only two of the brothers—Jacob and Wilhelm—who will be of concern here, for these two brothers were gentlemen with grand intentions. At this time, both the lands and language belonging to these brothers was being ravaged. Threatened by the menace of globalisation,

their cultural heritage was being slowly crushed; and, all of a sudden, the fantastical "far, far away" of their imaginations had begun to look decidedly like France.[2] Seeing such an ogre looming before them, the brothers packed themselves a hearty lunch, armed themselves with their sharpest quills, and set forth, travelling around the land and talking to peasants. Collecting these common peoples' stories, the brothers set about concocting a remedy for their nation's affliction. Together they faithfully recorded every tale that the peasants conveyed to them, collecting them and printing them in the hope that they could, once again, envisage a Germany that was "far, far away" from France. It was a noble cause, for the brothers were preserving the *Germanness* of Germany against the budding *Frenchness* of the rest of the world. And in this way, they imagined, they would defeat this great threat: they would became heroes, prosper, and live happily ever after.

To this day, the Grimm legend is believed to be thus. However, just as the stories contained in the brothers' *Kinder und Hausmärchen* collections are imaginary, so is this history a fanciful fiction. Although the Grimm brothers are commonly believed to have collected their tales from peasants and commoners, scholars have repeatedly proved, mostly during the latter half of the last century, that this was not in fact the case. Critics and historians such as Jack Zipes, Maria Tatar, Valerie Paradiz, and John Ellis have all noted that contributions to this collection of fairy tales came predominantly from a group of educated ladies of the Grimms' acquaintance, including the Grimms' sister Lotte Grimm, and their friends, the women of the Wild, Hassenpflug, von Haxthausen, von Drote-Hulshoff, and Viehmann families.[3] Among these critics, Paradiz for one argues that it was the fervent manner and protective way in which the Grimms guarded the identities of their contributors that permitted the historical myth to arise—that is, they myth in which the brothers are thought to have travelled around the country and collected their stories from common people.[4]

The homogeneous nature of the Grimm tales and their stylistic coherence supports the proposition that the Grimms

were not just the collectors of the stories (as was claimed) but also, at least, their "editors, retellers and adaptors," for the changes that the Grimms made were more than just stylistic modifications.[5] Their editorial procedure, taken together with the evidence of the tales' sources, is sufficient to undermine any notion that the Grimms' fairy tales are of folk, peasant, or even necessarily of German origin.[6] Through the processes of editing, codifying and translating, the Grimm brothers produced a set of texts that were distinctly characteristic of the nineteenth century, tales that incorporated both "the gender assumptions of the Grimms' informants and of Wilhelm Grimm himself."[7] While it is commonly observed that the Grimms were searching for a particularly German *geist*—tales that could serve patriotically as the symbol or spirit of the richness of Germany and its people—the brothers' editing process created a text that was infused with their own ideological orientations, a worldview defined by the middle-class, bourgeois, patriotic, and patriarchal society in which they lived.

As the tales may be traced to their non-German origins (with multiple versions of each fairy tale easily locatable across multiple continents), it is on the "Grimm-ness" of the tales in *Kinder und Hausmärchen* that this study will focus.[8] Jack Zipes notes that the Grimms made major changes while editing the tales, such as removing certain sexual elements that they felt may have offended the sensibilities of their middle-class audience. In the first edition of "Rapunzel," for instance, Rapunzel asks the sorceress to tell her "why it is that my clothes are all too tight" and "no longer fit me."[9] In the first edition, this question serves to reveal Rapunzel's trysts with the prince and her resulting pregnancy, directly confirming the eponymous protagonist's sexual activity outside of marriage. By the 1857 edition, however, the brothers had changed the text to remove all traces of this seeming obscenity, with Rapunzel instead enquiring, "Why it is that you are so much heavier to draw up than the young king's son, who only takes a moment to reach me?"[10]

The Grimm tales emphasised distinctly gendered roles for male and female protagonists—roles that accorded with the patriarchal codes of the brothers' contemporaneous milieu. The tales

emphasised the traits of passivity, industry, and self-sacrifice in girls, while promoting activity, competition, and the accumulation of wealth to boys. As the archetypal world of the fairy tale invites the reader (or indeed the listener) to embed themselves within its fictive context, so do the archetypical roles that these tales introduce to boys and girls—roles that are highly resistant to change—serve as instructions to the child audience. As Jack Zipes suggests, psychologists and educators alike have amply demonstrated that stories and fairy tales influence the manner in which children understand the world and their place within it. Referring to the influential work of Arthur Applebee, Zipes notes that "story characters become part of a child's 'real world' and form part of their cultural heritage."[11] Accordingly, it follows that fairy tales play an important role in early socialisation and in forming the basis of their ideas about gender and gender relations; and, as various critics have suggested, this is particularly so in the case of the Grimm brothers' fairy tales, which have been so pervasive.[12]

Children are conditioned to accept and conform to arbitrary gender roles, and face consequences if they do not do so, such as gender prejudice.[13] Socially reinforced in various ways, gender role expectations prepare girls to be passive, subservient, and self-sacrificial while they prepare boys to be competitive, authoritarian, and ambitious.[14] The added air of domesticity that the Grimm brothers' tales achieve by using what Zipes describes as "diminutives, quaint expressions and cute descriptions" allowed the tales to enter the familial confines of the home and to seem more personal, intimate, and innocent.[15] However, by manipulating and subverting the expectations that readers had already formed with regard to the genre of fairy tales—one that had hitherto been used primarily by women to entertain and educate their children—the brothers were able to deliver subtle moral instructions and behavioural guidelines to children, perhaps without offering the explicit moral instruction typically expressed at the dénouement of, say, Perrault's French tales.[16]

The simplicity of the Grimms' tales, and the exclusion of any features that may clutter the narrative unnecessarily,

indicates how the tales were carefully and efficiently designed to deliver clear moral instruction to their readers. Lutz Rörich notes that the instructional aspect of fairy tales has been well known for centuries; after all, fairy and folk tales have long served the purposes of the Church, often forming an integral part of priest's sermons or supplementing its teachings as a secular means of instruction.[17] In his book-length study of fairy tales, Bruno Bettelheim has argued that the simplicity of many fairy tales—especially in relation to their simple characterisation of heroes and villains—promotes sympathetic identifications among readers. "The more simple and straightforward a good character," he writes, "the easier it is for a child to identify with it and to reject the bad other."[18] In more general terms, Bettelheim's study also shows how "fairy tales have great psychological meaning for children of all ages," and are often centrally important to the way in which children learn about the world and their place within it.[19]

Writing some five or six years before Bettelheim, J. R. R. Tolkien foreshadowed Bettelheim's claim when he argued that the function of fantasy is to lure and hold a reader in a secondary world with its own inner logic and integrity. This process of absorption, Tolkien asserted, gives that secondary world a kind of primacy over the reader, placing them in a position in which they do more than simply will themselves into a suspension of disbelief.[20] Indeed, what Tolkien called the "arresting strangeness" of these worlds is a beguiling aspect of fantasy, since they both remove the reader from their own life and yet allow them to confront matters in their own life too. For instance, the quests that these fantasy narratives involve, that their characters embark on, are, while fantastical, almost always fundamentally for normal human needs, such as love, riches, food, as well as for a "happily-ever-after," and to avoid death.[21]

Like Bettelheim, the psychologists Steven Fromm implies that fairy tales reflect universal psychic operations among men and women. However, various items of historical evidence demonstrate just how imperfect these tales are as universal representations of the psyche, from the homogeneous nature of the

tales, through to the editing and reediting that is apparent in the many changes visible between drafts, to the addition and removal of various aspects of the tales, variously undertaken by the Grimms at different points in time. Indeed, the tales' histories of emendation indicate that they must be seen rather as the product of a pair of male writers who, as Zipes notes, "projected their values onto the actions of fictitious characters."[22] Following Zipes, the tales may be read less as works of literary expression and imagination and more as tools of the educational system—as instruments within an institutional structure that "indoctrinates children to learn fixed roles and functions within bourgeois society."[23]

This paper takes the position that the Grimms' texts advocate a repressive model of feminine behaviour grounded in the patriarchal bourgeois culture within which the brothers wrote their tales. I make this argument by highlighting the brothers' prescriptive representation of female characters in their stories, the intended readers of which were largely women and children. Of course, other scholars have advanced similar theses. The literary scholar Elizabeth Harries, for instance, has noted that such Grimm brothers' figures as Snow White and Ashypet provide patterns for feminine passivity and martyrdom, while the wicked stepmothers, witches, and fairies represent the dangers that powerful women pose to the patriarchal establishment.[24]

Indeed, each of these representations of woman, both "good" and "bad," represses and subordinates women equally. That is, the tales provide listeners and readers in their early and formative years with a roadmap of behavioural norms and patterns, gendered expectations, and the punishments they can expect to face in the event that they transgress these prescriptions. Focusing on the operations of these tales, I want to analyse the formal means by which, as Andrea Dworkin suggests, the fantastical worlds of fairy tales have been pivotal in the formation of identities—how their "values and consciousness [are] imprinted on our minds as cultural absolutes long before we were in fact men and women."[25] Writing of the "ancient world" of myth and fantasy that has "formed us," Dworkin writes that

> We ingested it as children whole . . . We have taken the fairy tales of childhood with us into maturity, chewed but still lying in the stomach, as a real identity . . . At some point, the Great Divide took place: they (the boys) dreamed of mounting the Great Steed and buying Snow White from the dwarves: we (the girls) aspired to become that object of every necrophilliac's lust—the innocent, *victimised* Sleeping Beauty, beauteous lump of ultimate, sleeping good. Despite ourselves, sometimes knowing unwilling, unable to do otherwise, we act out the roles we were taught.[26]

Examining the roles and rules that these fairy tales "teach" to us remains important today, especially in light of the contemporary resurgence of fairy tales in various film and television productions. Recently, Disney has released live action big-screen adaptations of previously animated tales alongside their popular *Once Upon a Time* television series. Recognising such instances of the ongoing reproduction of prescriptive models of gender, this paper aims to examine the primary sources of these narratives—the Grimm fairy tale collections—and argues that these tales aspire to internalise or normalise the codes of bourgeois gender roles endorsed by patriarchal society.

Furthermore, I argue that these tales contrive to pressure women into predefined and predetermined moulds. In particular, I want to show how the most vulnerable and pliable group in the Grimms' tales—the "maiden figures," represented by the likes of Ashypet, Little Red Cap, Rapunzel, Briar Rose, and Snow White—are forced into a state of naïvety that requires them to become and remain dependent on men. By representing women in this group as variously subordinate to men, the tales disempower young sympathetic female figures. The tales advocate and normalise: (1) the forced infantilisation of women in general; (2) the deliberate humiliation of women who demonstrate agency outside of the patriarchal order; and (3) the violence enacted on a woman should she fail to conform to the role allocated to her, advocating a right to force such a woman into submission. The article will conclude by asserting that the Brothers Grimm set out to discover, create, and immortalise a particularly German

geist that, due to the norms of German society at the time, was also a particularly patriarchal *geist*: that is, a spirit in the socio-cultural milieu that allowed women to be systemically stripped of power and agency.

Historical Social Structures and Female Disempowerment

In the introduction to his *Don't Bet on the Prince*, a collection of feminist fairy tales and feminist essays of fairy tales first published in 1986, Zipes explains how various modern creative writers have highlighted the socialising functions played by the Grimms' fairy tales, often reutilising them in the present day.[27] Among the tales Zipes describes, his introduction draws special attention to the feminist fairy tale, which, he observes, typically uses subversive counterexamples to critique the sexist and the racist aspects of the original. So, as Zipes suggests, where many modern writers use parody, the feminist fairy tale critiques the sexist and the racist; and where the former may show innovation, the latter will usually represent a change from archaic attitudes.

Of course, when one considers the functions of fairy tales in this way, it becomes possible to see the Grimm's own motivations in the same manner. That is, it becomes possible to consider how the changes that the Grimms made to their stories served their own agendas too. As I have already indicated, Zipes' study refers to the pathbreaking work of Applebee to show how psychologists have demonstrated that stories influence the way in which children interact with the world and conceive of their place within it.[28] In *The Child's Concept of Story: Ages Two to Seventeen*, Applebee draws on the work of the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget to explain how, as children grow into adolescents, their psychological development means that they are likely to read and interpret these stories differently, now not only to categorising and recognising the various stories' characters, but identifying with them, analysing both "the structure of the work or the motives of [those] characters."[29]

While the first edition of *Kinder und Hausmärchen* was intended by the Grimms to be a collection of historical literature steeped in German tradition, the later editions took on a different agenda. By the 1819 edition, the tales were published as an *Erzehungsbuch*—that is, as an educational book—and, through their editing processes, the Grimms began to place an explicit emphasis on the passivity, industry, and self-sacrifice of adolescent girls, traits that are not simply cultivated in these characters but venerated. For example, compare the two passages below, which I take from extracts in Zipes' book *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World*.[30] The first is extracted from the edition of "Snow White" in the *Olenberg Manuscript*, compiled in 1810, whereas the second is extracted from a printed edition of "Snow White."

Olenberg Manuscript

When Snow White awoke the next morning, they asked her how she happened to get there. And she told them everything, how her mother, the queen, had left her alone in the woods and gone away. The dwarfs took pity on her and persuaded her to remain with them and do the cooking for them when they went to the mines. However, she was to beware of the queen and not let anyone into the house.

1812 Edition

When Snow White woke up, they asked her who she was and how she happened to get into the house. Then she told them how her mother had wanted her put to death, but the hunter had spared her life, and how she had run the entire day and finally arrived at their house. So the dwarfs took pity on her and said, "If you keep house for us and cook, sew, make the beds, wash and knit, and keep everything tidy and clean, you may stay with us, and you will have everything you want. In the evening, when we come home, dinner must be ready. During the day we are in the mines and dig for gold, so you will be alone. Beware the queen and let no one into the house.

Whereas the earlier manuscript includes just one duty for Snow White to perform, only one job that allows her to "earn her keep" (and, even then, the distressed woman seems still to retain some authority, as she has to be *persuaded* to remain to perform that job by the dwarves), the later manuscript outlines a woman's role with an entire itinerary of expectations. The implication of the second version is that, should she leave her jobs unattended, Snow White (and woman more generally) will also see her own needs going unfulfilled. Thus, it is quite clear that, by the time the later edition of the fairy tales is published, the figure of Snow White has descended into mortal peril, having been groomed into passivity, subservience, and unquestioning obedience.

Snow White's labour exchange value brings into focus the related observation that folkloric heroines are often required to toil for their salvation while their male equivalents are allowed access to magic and helpers (devices that the structural narratologist Vladimir Propp called "adjuvants") to attain their glorious ends.[31] For instance, as Maria Tatar suggests, in the Grimms' tales, women's docility is often associated their attractiveness. As Tatar writes, "The Grimms seized nearly every available opportunity to emphasise the virtue of hard work and made a point of correlating diligence with beauty and desirability wherever possible."[32] Perhaps the most obvious example of this correlation is in the case of Ashypet, the character who would later be renamed Cinderella. Despite being covered in soot and denied the prospect of going to the ball, Ashypet manages to marry the prince, largely, as we learn, because she does as her dead mother has asked and remains both "godly and good."[33]

Such a correlation of obedience and subordination (to both one's society and parents) with desirability and self-realisation (inasmuch as self-realisation may have then entailed a woman's marrying a prince) is not to be taken lightly in the early-nineteenth-century patriarchal society in which the tales were first published. In this society, women were inexorably dependants: they were excluded from public-sphere work and had very few options if they sought to earn a wage and to survive by themselves, ever expected to "marry and leave the permanent workforce."[34]

Moreover, bourgeois women could only market their educational achievements as governesses and, failing that, would remain dependent on the good will of their male relations or begin a swift slide into poverty, thus encouraged by all circumstances to adopt the role of the "bourgeois housewife."[35] Then as now, such dependence as this necessarily produces docile bodies, where rigid control by one party and reliance by another trains women into a state of deference and permanent infancy.[36] At the same time, these roles made clear what women could not be: women were not to possess an inquiring mind, nor to question the authority of their husbands or of any other authority that served to reinforce these established gender norms.

It may be unsurprising, then, that the sins that are committed both by women and children in these fairy tales concern, as Tartar argues, behaviours directly associated with curiosity and disobedience.[37] In "The Rose," the curiosity of a young girl invites death into her home. Curiosity leads the heroine to use a spinning wheel—a metonym for women's labour—whereupon Briar Rose (later known as Sleeping Beauty) pricks her finger and falls into her deep sleep, a fatal slumber already prophesied by an evil fairy. But curiosity also causes Snow White to succumb to each of her stepmother's traps, and it causes the wives of Bluebeard to open forbidden doors and thus be placed in mortal peril.[38] As well as curiosity, disobedience also attracts the condemnation of the tales. In the tale of "The Wilful Child," a child who falls sick promptly dies, seemingly for no reason other than that he refuses to obey orders. Disobedience also sees Little Red Cap become a meal for a wolf, along with her grandmother; and similarly, it causes the second sister in "Mother Holle of the Snow" to find herself permanently tarred. Moreover, disobedience leads to the fall and subsequent punishment of the girl for "Our Lady's Child." By thus aligning the actions of females with those of children, many of the Grimms' tales infantilise these adult women. Furthermore, the tales teach us that women who indulge their curiosity or who exhibit disobedience will be led unerringly into peril; they suggest, that is, that adult women require patriarchal supervision.

By contrast, the tales actively encourage curiosity and entrepreneurship in male figures. Briar Rose's prince, for example, is rewarded with a beautiful bride for his daring industriousness. Likewise, the young king in "Faithful John" is driven by his curiosity to look into the forbidden room; however, his circumstances, unlike those of his female counterparts, are improved by his unorthodox inquisitiveness. Thus, the tales present the traits of curiosity and disobedience as negative only when they inhere in women and children. In this way, the tales allocate women to the same rung in the patriarchal hierarchy as that occupied by dependent children, to one that is distinctly below their male counterparts. The subordination of women in these tales not only highlights the disparity between the sexes in terms of acceptable behaviour, however, but also serves to relegate women to the domestic sphere, transforming them not only into property but prizes that propel the curious male upon his quest.

Outside of the narratives themselves, it is also possible to imagine how the Grimms' tales subordinated women—and supplanted their voices—in another way. As I suggested earlier, in the early nineteenth century, the primary tellers of the Grimms' fairy tales would have been women—women who were often engaged in repetitive labour, and who told the tales to their children, grandchildren, wards and students as they carried out their daily tasks. By publishing their collection of tales, the Grimms effectively silenced these women storytellers, supplanting and subordinating their voices. For while these women may still have been the speakers who relayed the stories, the inventiveness, the quirks, and the foibles that these women brought to the tales would have been lost as they began to read them out to their children from the Grimms' books directly, now less with their own voices than with those of the Grimm brothers.[39]

An example of the supplantation of the woman's voice by the text appears in the historical circumstances surrounding the dissemination of tale "Little Red Cap." The oral versions of the tale, named "The Story of Grandmother" and "The False Grandmother," were not recorded until 1885 and 1883 respectively; however, folklorists and historians have determined that the oral

versions predate the version by Perrault published in 1697 by at least a century.[40] According to historical sources, these oral tales, often featured a girl who performed a striptease for the monster (sometimes a wolf, sometimes a bear, and sometimes an ogress); and this girl was usually found lying in her grandmother's bed. From this precis alone, it is easy to imagine a ribald telling of the tale—and, indeed, the early tales are rife with sexual overtones. Such tales also acted as manifestoes or cautionary stories that instructed young women on how to avoid being raped. The girl protagonists, with their ingenuity and without any outside help, would manage to escape their predators. The stories were thus parables that, albeit with an excess of violence, purported to incorporate practical advice to women about how they might trick a predator or escape from a dangerous situation.[41] The nuances of this advice, which was originally doled out to young girls by experienced women, could not be sustained within the writings of the Grimms, for these writings were not only strictly edited but invested with additional ideological and doctrinal meanings related to women's conduct. For instance, in their version of the tale, the Grimms add an episode in which the wolf once again tries to lure Little Red Cap from the path, except that now the wolf's demise is planned and executed by women. But for all ingenuity, the women's diligent enterprise is undercut by the fact that the women of the tale have already been dependent on men: that is, they were required to be rescued by the patriarchal infrastructure, represented as it is by the woodsman. What is more, the tale reinforces women's obedience: because Little Red Cap has adhered to her socially defined limitations, and has not strayed from the path, she may escape the wolf and its violent attack.

Disempowerment through Voicelessness

While the dissemination and popularity of the Grimms' tales deprived women storytellers of their unique voices, the tales also often *represent* women within these tales as voiceless, their speeches and utterances curbed by the story itself, drowned out by the narratorial voice, or problematised in various other

ways. In "The Twelve Brothers," the heroine of the tale is forced into silence, her muteness in fact being required to break a spell that has caused her brothers to assume the forms of ravens anthropomorphically. Though the heroine's silence leaves her open to accusations of immorality and stupidity, and invites general slander from her mother-in-law, all of which results in her being condemned to death, her silence, curiously, does not prevent her from marrying the king. Throughout the story, the heroine's silence forms a marked contrast with the mother-in-law's clamorous exclamations:

> "That's a common beggar girl you've brought home. Who knows what godless tricks she is up to in secret! Even if she is dumb and can't speak, she could laugh once in a while. But those that do not laugh have a bad conscience."
>
> At first the king didn't want to believe her, but the old woman carried on for so long and accused her of so many wicked things, that at last the king allowed himself to be persuaded and condemned her to death.[42]

Later, as the young queen's motivations for silence are revealed, it is not she who is punished but the speaking woman—the king's own mother. In fact, the mother-in-law character will be put into a barrel full of boiling oil and poisonous snakes. And yet, as the above quotation indicates, the king's mother had not said anything that would be reasonably thought to require such a dire punishment, if any punishment at all. And apart from being labelled a "wicked woman," there is nothing in the narrative to suggest that she is especially cruel or hostile. Rather, the punishment that is prescribed to the king's mother may be understood as more generally attributable to her speech acts. In presuming to influence the opinion of the king, the very epitome of patriarchal governance, the mother-in-law commits an incommutable offence, destabilising the foundation of the patriarch's masculine power.

In light of the ominous ramifications of speech in "The Twelve Brothers," the utterances and silences of the female protagonists in other Grimm brothers' tales deserves our critical attention. Another illustrative example occurs in "Our Lady's

Child," sometimes known as "The Virgin Mary's Child."[43] As with the young queen of "The Twelve Brothers," the female protagonist in "Our Lady's Child" is forced to live in an oppressive silence. Born into relative poverty, the maiden is saved from near-certain death by the Virgin Mary, who volunteers to take the maiden from her poor parents, who cannot feed her. Now living in heaven, the maiden is temporarily made a kind of caretaker of the chambers, and is entrusted with keys to the thirteen doors that exist within heaven while the Virgin Mary travels abroad. Before the Virgin Mary leaves, she instructs the maiden that she may open any one of twelve doors and marvel at what she discovers on the other side; however, she is forbidden from opening a thirteenth door. Succumbing to temptation, and defying the Virgin Mary's instructions, the maiden opens the forbidden door, finding the Holy Trinity inside, "sitting in fire and splendour."[44] On her return, the Virgin Mary, suspecting that the maiden has opened the forbidden door, challenges the maiden about her transgression. The girl compounds her offence by lying, and is banished by the Virgin Mary to the forest back on Earth, where she finds that her voice has been taken from her, and she is incapable of speech. Ironically, the now-silent girl is discovered by a king, who—despite that she cannot speak—finds her beautiful, and takes her to his home to marry her. Here, as in "The Twelve Brothers," the heroine's silence serves to secure a desirable marriage, thereby reinforcing the notion that women are favoured by fate, and by men, when they remain silent.

However, this is not the end of the story. When the Virgin Mary visits the now earth-bound maiden in about a year's time, she asks the maiden once more whether she will confess her wrongdoing. Defiant still, even without speech, the girl denies once again that she had ever opened the door. The same turn of events repeats, with the Virgin Mary increasingly vexed by the girl's abiding denials and silences. And finally, in retribution for her continued lies, the Virgin Mary takes from the girl her newborn children. Then, following the Virgin Mary's punishments, the king is compelled by his impatient councillors to condemn his own wife to death, arranging to have her burnt at a

Figure 1. Speech of women in a selection of female-centered tales.

Tale	Female Characters and Incidences of Direct Speech					
Ashypet	ASHYPET: 6 1 (Request to father) 5 (Requests to nature)	MOTHER: 1 1 (Instructional)	STEPMOTHER: 8 6 (Misc.) 2 (Instructing daughters to self-mutilate)	STEPSISTER 1: 1 1 (Material demand)	STEPSISTER 2: 1 1 (Material demand)	STEPSISTERS TOGETHER: 3 2 (Mocking) 1 (Demand)
Snow White	SNOW WHITE: 7 1 (Pleading) 1 (Answering dwarves) 4 (Talking to queen) 1 (At being woken)	MOTHER: 1 1 (Wish for child)	STEP MOTHER: 22 10 (Vanity) 3 (Demanding death of Snow White) 9 (Temptation)			
Rapunzel	RAPUNZEL: 2 1 (Plot to escape) 1 (To give her away)	MOTHER: 1 1 (Desire of lettuce)	WITCH: 6 1 (Threat) 1 (Barter) 2 (Calls for hair) 1 (Anger at child) 1 (Vengeance)			
Hansel and Gretel	GRETEL: 9 3 (Weeping) 2 (Misc.) 1 (Delivering good news) 2 (Identifying solution) 1 (Talking to nature)	MOTHER: 7 2 (Plotting to rid children) 1 (Admonishing husband) 4 (Harsh words to children)	WITCH: 10 1 (Asking who was eating her house) 1 (Welcoming children) 4 (Plotting the children's' demise) 2 (Admonishing children) 2 (Ordering)			
Mother Holle of the Snow	GOOD GIRL: 1 1 (Requesting to leave)	MOTHER: 1 1 (Unkindness)	MOTHER HOLLE: 5 4 (Kindnesses) 1 (Unkindness)	IDLE GIRL: 2 2 (Refusal to help)		
Briar Rose	BRIAR ROSE: 2 1 (Greeting) 1 (Curiosity)	MOTHER: 1 1 (Wish)	BAD WISE WOMAN: 2 1 (Curse) 1 (Temptation)	GOOD WISE WOMAN: 1 1 (Lessening curse)		

pyre. It is at this time, when she is finally to face death, that the silent queen finds herself wishing that she could finally confess her wrongdoing: "Oh, before I die, I'd like to confess to the Virgin Mary that I opened the forbidden door in heaven. I've been so wicked by denying it all this time!"[45] With this thought having passed through the maiden's mind, the Virgin Mary appears, restores her speech, revives her children, and grants her a free and happy life thereafter. Interestingly, the episode illustrates not only the importance of telling the truth, but of having truthful thoughts; for, after all, it is not the queen's utterances that save her children and her life—for she remains silent all the while—but her desire to speak the truth: "Since you want to speak the truth," the Virgin Mary says, "your guilt is forgiven."[46]

Throughout many other of the Grimms' tales, the incidences direct speech of the female protagonists is negatively correlated with their desirability. As demonstrated in the table marked as Figure 1, the tales' "good women" seldom speak whereas the "wicked women" speak often. Ashypet (Cinderella), for example, speaks only six times within "Cinderella," and of those six times, she speaks only once to another person—to her father, when he asks her what she would like upon his return home. Cinderella's stepmother, by contrast, speaks almost twice as many times in many versions—eleven times in total.[47] Similarly, in "Rapunzel," the eponymous protagonist seldom speaks aloud (only twice in the tale), whereas her wicked godmother speaks six times.[48] Time and time again, personified evil speaks more frequently than the embodiment of good, which remains quiet. The tales thus subtly demonstrate to the readers that "good women" are silent women, serving to erase women's presence, diminish their importance, and deny them their agency.

In "King Thrushbeard" a choosy, finicky princess is punished for seeking to choose her own husband.[49] The story rises, and then conveys a sense of triumph when the wilful princess, in her attempt to exercise her freewill and agency, is forced to submit to a husband who appears to occupy a lower social station than she:

> The minstrel, in his dirty, ragged clothes, came in and sang before the king and his daughter, and when he was finished he asked for a small gift. The king said, "I liked your song so much that I will give you my daughter for a wife." The king's daughter took fright, but the king said, "I have taken an oath to give you to the very first beggar, and I will keep it." Her protests did not help. The priest was called in, and she had to marry the minstrel at once.[50]

After witnessing the way in which the princess has mocked previous suitors, the reader is encouraged to view her engagement to the "beggar" as a fitting punishment for her fussy haughtiness. Furthermore, as the princess becomes slowly stripped of her dignity and graces, her status diminishes, now wholly defined by and entirely derived from her husband's social standing. All the pride and desire for agency that had been the princess' character is now shown up only as hubristic arrogance, with her personal identity left decimated and her royal power having been passively abdicated under the aegis of her father-king.

The systematic humiliation of women is common throughout the Grimms' tales. Female protagonists such as Ashypet or Snow White, for instance, are modest and meek by nature. However, the fairy tales often highlight and amplify these psychological characteristics, translating them into elements of the plot. In fact, many of the women in the Grimms' tales are predisposed to humility, but are made even more humble still as the narrative advances. Though they are as varied as the "daughters of millers and daughters of kings," these fairy tale women, as Tatar notes, "are not merely designated as humble" but "actually humbled in the course of their stories."[51] Of course, the many indignities and severe embarrassments these women suffer means that they are not merely humbled in the tales but degraded and endangered too. As Tatar suggests, to merely describe these women as having been "humbled" by the narratives' ends is not quite descriptive enough: this word, she writes, is "perhaps too mild a term to use for the many humiliations to which female protagonists must submit" throughout the tales.[52] To be sure, those women in the Grimms' tales who are haughty or arrogant will only very rarely

be so fortunate as the bride of King Thrushbeard, whose ending is a relatively happy one: she is, after all, given wealth and status, notwithstanding that she is stripped of her own personality. Rather, most such women are punished.

At the conclusion of "Cinderella," for instance, when Ashypet's two proud stepsisters attend the protagonist's wedding, they are permanently disabled and disfigured:

> When the couple went to church, the elder sister was on the right, the younger on the left side: the doves pecked one eye from each one. Later, when they left the church, the elder was on the left, the younger on the right. The doves pecked the other eye from each one. And so they were punished for their wickedness and malice with blindness for the rest of their lives.[53]

This gruesome moment not only functions as the narrative's way of exacting vengeance on the sisters, on behalf of Ashypet, for their "wickedness and malice," but it leaves the sisters both dependent on others in their daily lives and undesirable. In such scenes as these, the tales tend to dwell on the hard and gruelling labours of these women, highlighting the cruel and wounding ways in which they are stripped of their fineries and divested of their social position and status. Each of these women begins the tale in a life of luxury but soon descends into privation, living the impoverished life of a scullery maid. Consider, for instance, the trial that Ashypet faces when she meets her stepsisters, the daughters of her father's new wife:

> "Why should this silly goose be allowed to sit in the parlor with us?" the girls said. "If you want to eat bread, you'll have to earn it. Out with the kitchen maid!"
>
> They took away her beautiful clothes, dressed her in an old grey smock, and gave her some wooden shoes. "Just look at the proud princess in her finery!" they shouted and laughed, taking her out to the kitchen. From morning until night she had to work hard. Every day, she got up before daybreak to carry water, start the fire, cook, and wash. On top of that the two sisters did everything imag-

> inable to make her miserable. They ridiculed her and threw peas and lentils into the ashes so that she would have to sit down in the ashes and pick them out. In the evening, when she was completely exhausted from work, she didn't have a bed but had to lie down next to the hearth in ashes. She always looked so dusty and dirty that people started to call her Cinderella [Ashypet].[54]

This "humiliation scene," while typical of scenes in the Grimms' tales, is especially fast-paced. The tearing, demands, jeers, and taunts all succeed one another quickly, projecting a sense of movement onto the psychological assault that Ashypet experiences, and building such momentum that, by the time we are faced with the image of the sooty little girl, asleep at the hearth, we are struck by the sense of stillness of it all. In this way, the language itself reflects the anxiety and stress of Ashypet, and the fact that her only respite from these assaults—from the chores and the jeers—is sleep. Moreover, the location of the child during this moment makes the maiden glow as though framed by the warm radiance of the dying embers, imbuing her persona with an ethereal quality. And the humiliations, which Ashypet suffers silently and without resistance, amplify this sense of warmth, thus rendering her more attractive and appealing.

In many ways, Cinderella is not just a maligned woman who is condemned to silence but a beautiful sufferer whose misery ultimately places her in a privileged position, one wherein she finds herself admired by a prince. Indeed, as Marcia Lieberman suggests, "the child who dreams of being a Cinderella dreams perforce not only of being chosen and elevated by a prince, but also of being a glamorous sufferer or victim."[55] Cinderella's story thus illustrates the way in which a humiliated woman, a woman in distress, is at once interesting and desirable to the privileged male. Similarly, the Grimms' "The Goose Girl" demonstrates that a powerful and successful woman is less attractive than a silent female sufferer. In this tale, the reader not only witnesses the humiliation of the young princess, who discovers that the prince has married her servant, but later discovers that the king will instantly dispose of the prince's false wife by way of a

gruesome death. The sentencing of the princess' servant to death is a punishment for her deception: the servant had posed as the princess herself, and by that means had won the prince's favour. Additionally, the princess' servant had manipulated the princess, convincing her to remain silent about her identity theft. When the king orchestrates a means by which to extract the truth from the real princess, and thereby discovers the servant's treachery, the king orders that the servant is killed so that the prince may marry his rightful bride: the frail and meek woman who has been silent all along. Consequently, the strength and power of the princess' servant is associated with wickedness, treachery, and repugnance, while the travails and suffering of the real princess is venerated, depicted as not only attractive but morally virtuous—and, at least in effect, more powerful again.[56]

Restricting Power by Repressing Female Sexuality

With the issue of power in mind, we may now turn to the way in which women's sexuality is repressed in the tales, and note that, in these stories, women are effectively denied the power that emanates from the functions and qualities of their bodies. It is no coincidence that whenever a maiden becomes curious, for instance, they are a child who is on the cusp adolescence, and more or less possessed by the reverie of sexual awakening that comes with puberty. As I have already noted, the Grimms fastidiously edited the tales that they collected; however, it should now be added that many of these changes sought to excise from the stories any references or allusions to women's sex and sexuality. While it can be argued that these changes were made so as to better suit a young readership unprepared for these sexual notions, it is also true that the first edition of the *Kinder und Hausmächen* was intended as a work of literary history rather than of literary fairy tales. As Zipes notes, the brothers' aim was

> to write a history of old German *Poesie* and to demonstrate how *Kunstpoesie* ("cultivated literature") evolved out of

> traditional folk material and myths and how *Kunstpoesie* had gradually forced *Naturpoesie* (tales, legends, fables, anecdotes, and so on) to recede during the Renaissance and take refuge among the folk in oral traditions.[57]

Furthermore, Charles Perrault's *Histoires ou Counte du temps passé, Avec des Moralities*, which was expressly intended for children, retained some of the more oblique sexual references—many more, at least, than the Grimms retained in their version. In Perrault's version of *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*, for instance, the narrative largely adheres to the traditional oral tale of "The Story of Grandmother," a tale in which the wolf instructs the girl to get undressed and hop into bed with him.[58] By contrast, the Grimms' version omits both the maiden's undressing scene and the wolf's request to get into bed with her. Consequently, where the maiden had once triumphed against the wolf-figure by utilising her sexual allure—that is, by delivering a performance of seduction—and so distracting the wolf, the Grimm version supresses female sexuality together with any allusion to it, and instead depicts a female victim who requires a male rescuer.[59]

In the unprinted 1810 manuscript of "The Frog Prince," the princess is forced to let the frog into her bedchambers. However, once the frog is in the chambers, we learn that

> she seized him and threw him with all her strength against the wall in her bed. But as he hit the wall, he fell down into the bed and lay there as a handsome prince, and the king's daughter lay down with him.[60]

The first printed version, by contrast, depicts the frog as falling to the bed, whereupon the princess accepts him as her "dear companion," realising that "she cherished him as she had promised," and after which "they went to sleep contentedly together."[61] By the second edition, the frog no longer lands on the bed when after bring dashed against the wall; and neither do the pair sleep together, at least not until he "became rightfully and with her father's approval, her dear companion and husband," after which they again fall asleep contentedly.[62] Having compared

only these extracts, it should be clear that the Grimms undertook something of a sanitising process while editing the manuscripts, removing any trace of sexual relations between these two unwed people. Nevertheless, in so doing, the brothers also relegated the princess to the status of a mere chattel, reinforcing the patriarchal norm by which a woman's petitioner—a prospective husband—requires that woman's father's permission to marry; and, further, the Grimms' amendments worked to deny the frog princess the agency and power that had been conferred on her in the earlier versions, in which she is depicted in the midst of a sexual awakening.

In "Briar Rose," the eponymous protagonist pricks her finger on a spindle on her fifteenth birthday; but the blood that wells on the maiden's finger is not just a pinprick but an allusion to her first menstrual period. Any textual intimation of the maiden's awakening into puberty is swiftly interrupted and then erased, however, as the maiden is made to fall asleep for a century—an event that ensures she shall remain pure and virginal. Of course, while Briar Rose's long slumber will do well to maintain her purity in a metaphorical sense, it will also mean that she is forever infantilised. "Briar Rose" thus depicts a society that forces a fifteen-year-old girl into a state of utter naivety, not only by keeping from her the fact that an angry fairy had cursed her, and had willed her to death at the age of fifteen, but by keeping from her the larger metaphorical secret of her own psychosexual development. Instead of educating the protagonist and its readers, "Briar Rose" venerates sleep and ignorance, romanticising the maiden's artificially maintained purity, which is depicted not just as the stuff of legends but as an ideal to which others should aspire.

While the Grimms' version of the tales set out to deliberately repress any liberating expression of women's sexuality, they also sought to curb or disguise sexual themes even in their cautionary forms. "Little Red Cap," for instance, demonstrates the lurking threat of rape to every young woman who strays from the "good path." The "swallowing whole" of Little Red Cap and her grandmother has been interpreted as a "symbolic

double rape"—a motif that was also adopted by the 1996 film adaptation of the fairy tale titled *Freeway*, wherein the sexual predator does indeed rape the grandmother and attempts to rape the Little Red Cap of the adaptation.[63] In this way, "Little Red Cap" adheres to the transgression/punishment model that I have already described. Moreover, the psychoanalytic critics Bruno Bettelheim and Steven Fromm have suggested that the colour red, which is traditionally associated with sin, lust, passion, and blood, alludes in the case of Little Red Cap, to a "certain complicity in her seduction."[64] First introduced in Perrault's version of the tale in 1697, the red cap was a man's creation, perhaps reflecting something of the anxiety that men of seventeenth-century France may have had on the subject of women's sexuality.[65] Moreover, the males of the tale—the woodsman and the wolf—are Little Red Cap's tempter and punisher, desired and desiring, loathed and loathing. Of course, the red hood is retained in the Grimms's version of the tales, suggesting the brothers' affinity with Perrault's symbolic language; although it is notable that the Grimms erase the playful eroticism of the oral tales while retaining this symbol of sexual anxiety. All in all, "Little Red Cap" is a cautionary tale about the threat of rape. It teaches young women, as Susan Brownmiller suggests, that there are "frightening male figures abroad in the woods," and that women, who are weak and vulnerable, "are helpless before them."[66] Not just vulnerable to sexual assault, however, the women of the tales are also governed by males in all directions: they are reliant on the woodsman to protect them from the male threat represented by the wolf.

But in the Grimms' tales, the threat of violence not only controls and oppresses women while they are young, but continues to threaten them even into their marriages. In other words, where there is a marriage, so is there an implicit narrative of sexual relations—as well as more besides. In "Bluebeard," "The Robber Bridegroom," and "The Fitcher's Bird," for instance, the characters' marriages, as well their sexual encounters, are always imbued with the underlying threat of murder. In Bettelheim's analysis of "Bluebird," the critic posits that Bluebeard's murdered wives must have been killed because they were unfaithful; after

all, as Bettelheim notes, the primary reason that a woman was sentenced to capital punishment was, at the time of "Bluebeard," marital infidelity.[67] Thus, even where the tales are concerned with the kidnapping, rape, and murder of women, guilt—in the form of both blame and punishment—is imputed to the woman. Thus, the moral system that underlies the tales—a system that exacts violence on women—operates implicitly to blame women for their misfortunes, enacting an archetypal form of victim blaming.[68] Time and again, the tales suggest that disobedience, as an act of free will, puts girls at risk; and, by that fact alone, the tales typically exculpate these women's rapists and abusers. As I have argued throughout this article, by characterising disobedience in this way, the tales routinely repress women's sexuality, strip them of power and agency, and render them dependent for their safety on the very men who threaten them.

By creating a homogeneous female protagonist who is characterised by her waiting, suffering, helplessness, and obedience, the Grimms offer their readers a clear model of maidenhood, and caution women readers against departing from the model so provided. At the same time, the tales strip every heroine of her individuality, divest her of her power and agency, and thereby ensure her complicity in the patriarchal structure. In this way, each of the tales I have analysed deliver a succinct lesson to their women readers: If you are industrious, pure of heart, and remain obedient, you will be rewarded. *He* will find you and carry you off to the good kingdom—a place not threatened by the wiles and guiles of female duplicity.[69]

Notes

1. Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *The Narrative Reader,* ed. Martin McQuillan (London: Routledge, 2005), 47.

2. As Jack Zipes and Maria Tatar note, a major driving force for the collecting of these tales was the encroachment on German culture of French traditions, particularly by way of the fairy tales that were prevalent at the time. Charles Perrault's *Histoires ou Counte du temps passé, Avec des Moralities*, published in 1697, for instance, was a distinctly French text and a popular collection of fairy tales within German bourgeois society: *Histoires ou contes*

du temps passé, avec des moralités: Contes de ma mère l'Oye (Paris, 1697); also see Jack Zipes, "Once There Were Two Brothers Named Grimm," in *Folklore: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies* (*Volume II*), ed. Alan Dundes (New York: Routledge, 2005); and Maria M. Tatar, "Born Yesterday: Heroes in the Grimms' Fairy Tales," *Fairy Tales and Society: Illusion, Allusion and Paradigm* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986).

3. See Valerie Paradiz, *Clever Maids* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 1; Maria Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1987, 15; Jack Zipes, "Once There Were Two Brothers Named Grimm", in *Folklore: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Alan Dundes (New York: Routledge), 2005, 34 and John M. Ellis, *One Fairy Story too Many* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1983, 6.

4. Valerie Paradiz, *Clever Maids*, 1.

5. James McGlathery, ed., *The Brothers Grimm and Folktale* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), ix.

6. John M. Ellis, *One Fairy Story Too Many* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 6.

7. Ruth B. Bottigheimer, "Silenced Women in the Grimms' Tales: The 'Fit' Between Fairy Tales and Society in their Historical Context," in *Fairy Tales and Society: Illusion, Allusion and Paradigm*, ed. Ruth B. Bottigheimer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 117.

8. As Angela Carter notes, they are not unique one offs: see Angel Carter *and Corinna Sargood, The Virago Book of Fairy Tales* (London: Virago, 1990), x.

9. See D. L. Ashliman, "Rapunzel by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm: A Comparison of the version of 1812 and 1857," *Professor D. L. Ashliman at the University of Pittsburg*, February 3, 2015, http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/grimm012a.html.

10. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "Rapunzel" in *Selected Tales*, tr. Joyce Crick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 53.

11. See Jack Zipes, *Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England* (1986; repr. New York: Routledge, 2012), xii; also see Arthur N. Applebee, *The Child's Concept of Story: Ages Two to Seventeen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). Curiously, the same words as those quoted here appear in Celia M. Wallhead, *A. S. Byatt: Essays on the Short Fiction* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 128.

12. A 2014 special issue of *Gender Forum: An Internet Journal for Gender Studies* titled "Gender in Fairy Tales" included two notable essays on the fairy tales of the Grimm brothers, namely Nancy Taber, "Detectives and bail bonds 'Persons' as Fairy Tale Hero/ines: A Feminist Antimilitarist Analysis of Grimm and Once Upon a Time," *Gender Forum* 44 (2013): 13–27; and Annette Schimmelpfennig, "Chaos Reigns: Women as Witches in Contemporary Film and the Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm," *Gender Forum* 44 (2013): 28–44, http://genderforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/442013_FairyTales_Complete.pdf.

13. See, for instance, Britney G Brinkman, Kelly L. Rabenstein, Lee A. Rosén, and Toni S. Zimmerman, "Children's Gender Identity Development: The Dynamic Negotiation Process Between Conformity and Authenticity," *Youth & Society* 46, no. 6 (2014): 835–852.

14. Jack Zipes, *Don't Bet on the Prince*, 3.

15. Jack Zipes, "Once There Were Two Brothers Named Grimm," 34.

16. On gender in Perrault's tales and their situation within the "tradition of moralists," see Anne E. Duggan, "Women Subdued: The Abjectification and Purification of Female Characters in Perrault's Tales," *The Romantic Review* 99, nos. 3–4 (2008): 211 –226.

17. Lutz Rörich, "Introduction," in *Fairy Tales and Society*, 6.

18. See *Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (*New York: Vintage, 1989*), *10.*

19. Ibid., 17.

20. J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," *The Monsters and the Critics*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983), 109–161.

21. Ibid., 139.

22. Jack Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forest to the Modern World* (New York: MacMillan, 2002).

23. Jack Zipes, "Who's Afraid of the Brothers Grimm? Socialisation and Politicisation through Fairy Tales," in *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 45–70.

24. Elizabeth Wanning Harries, *Twice upon a Time: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 13.

25. Andrea Dworkin, *Woman Hating* (New York: Dutton, 1974), 32–33.

26. Ibid., 32–33.

27. Zipes, *Don't Bet on the Prince.*

28. Ibid., xii.

29. Applebee, *The Child's Concept of Story*, 123–25.

30. See Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forest to the Modern World*, 30.

31. See Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, tr. Laurence Scott (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), 43–48.

32. Maria Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 30.

33. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "Ashypet," in *The Classic Fairy Tales*, trans. Maria Tatar (New York: Norton, 1999), 117.

34. See Marion W. Gray, *Productive Men, Reproductive Women: The Agrarian Household and the Emergence of Separate Spheres during the German Enlightenment* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 4, 105.

35. Ibid., 1.

36. Michel Foucault, "Docile Bodies," in Paul Rabinow, ed. *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 179–187.

37. Maria Tartar, *Off with their Heads: Fairy Tales and the Culture of Childhood* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), xxvii.

38. This element of the narrative was recorded in the first edition of the tales in 1810 but removed in 1819 by which time the Grimms had written tales "teaching" similar lessons, such as "The Fitcher's Bird" and "Our Lady's Child."

39. See Tartar, *Off with their Heads*, 117.

40. Italo Calvino, "The False Grandmother," in *The Classic Fairy Tales*, 117; Charles Perrault, who published *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralités: Contes de ma mère l'Oye* (Paris, 1697), is an acknowledged source in the Grimms' notes on their works.

41. See also Frances Gray, *Women, Crime and Language* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 83–4.

42. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "The Twelve Brothers," in *Selected Tales*, tr. Joyce Crick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 43.

43. See Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, "The Virgin Mary's Child," in *The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, tr. Jack Zipes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 17–20.

44. Ibid., 18.

45. Ibid., 20.

46. Ibid.

47. See the comparisons of different versions of "Little Snow White" collected in *The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, 493n53, 493–495.

48. See "Rapunzel," in *The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, xxxix–xli, 37–39.

49. Included in the first and second editions of the text.

50. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "King Thrushbeard," tr. D. L. Ashliman, *Professor D. L. Ashliman at the University of Pittsburg*, June 13, 2008, http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/grimm052.html.

51. Maria M. Tatar, "Born Yesterday: Heroes in the Grimms' Fairy Tales," *Fairy Tales and Society*, 101.

52. Ibid., 101, 122.

53. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "Ashypet", *The Classic Fairy Tales* (1999), 119 and 122.

54. Ibid., 117.

55. Marcia K. Lieberman, "'Some Day My Prince Will Come': Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale," in *Don't Bet on the Prince*, 194.

56. See Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "The Goose Girl," in *The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, 283–89.

57. Jack Zipes, "Introduction: Rediscovering the Original Tales of the Brothers Grimm," in *The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, xxv.

58. See Andrew Lang, *The Blue Fairy Book* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1889), 51–53; cf. Charles Perrault, *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralités: Contes de ma mère l'Oye* (Paris, 1697).

59. See Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "Little Red Cap" in *The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, 85–87.

60. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "The Frog King," from the Olenberg Manuscript, 1810, repr. in John Ellis, *One Fairy Story Too Many* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 126.

61. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "The Frog King" from *Kinder und Hausemachen* , first ed. (1812), repr. in John Ellis, *One Fairy Story Too Many*, 128.

62. Ibid., 128.

63. See Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "Cinderella," in Maria Tatar, *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales* (New York and London: Norton, 2002), 117–122; also see *Freeway*, directed by Matthew Bright (California: Multicom Entertainment Group, 1996).

64. Maria Tatar, *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales*, 17.

65. On obscenity and the use of the neo-Latin terms *obscenitas* and *obscenus* in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France in relation to "taboo areas of female sexuality," see Hugh Roberts, "Obscenity in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century France," *French Studies: A Quarterly Review* 67, no. 4 (2013): 537.

66. Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 309–10.

67. Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, 300.

68. On victim blaming, see Kent D. Harber, Peter Podolski, and Christian H. Williams, "Emotional Disclosure and Victim Blaming," *Emotion* 15, no. 5 (2015): 6013–14.

69. See Jack Zipes, "Once There Were Two Brothers Named Grimm," 44.

Excursion

Cecily Niumeitolu

buddy system

THE JACARANDA TREE is moated by a knee-high brick wall just outside the kindergarten classroom. Every November the jacaranda flowers fall, casting a purple shade that moves and pulses with bees embalming in the sick sweet. This will be the last November the kindy teacher is bound to hazard the kids to steer clear of the courtyard surrounding the old tree, and thinks her command rather pointless. There's a noticeable decline in the population of bees looming in the rot, while nut bars are on the frontline of an anaphylactic epidemic. Two girls still play their serious games during the purple shadow, jumping behind the off-limit brick moat that guards the jacaranda. They wish to dwell with rock, with wood.

The two girls hid diamonds in the tree, *real diamonds* they would claim. One of the two girls discovered the booty in an old trunk, deep in the backyard of a pirate who just happened to live next door. Hook was the pirate, and the other girl gave credence to this claim. She knew Hook. Hook had red hair and was ginormous and owned a rainbow lorikeet called Hoozle who was blind in both eyes, so would be fed crackers all day long by the dirty seadog. The terrible two would barter their story with

other kids who sported packed lunches. And as the girls grew their jewels in the bark, they would bear their crystals to the sun to bud their clientele's eyes into rainbow. Red and green and shiny bangles would clink and clunk as good as gold and ruby and emerald. They would come, the boys and girls, proffering their noodles, apples, monte carlos, caramello koalas.

One afternoon, a parent confronted one of the mothers belonging to the two serious girls. Her son had come home wearing clip-on diamanté earrings and, after she twisted his ear, and made threats amounting to a ban on Internet access, he claimed it was the girl, her daughter, who had black marketed them (among other contraband) for his Doritos and jam donuts. The boy's mother took out her angst, which stemmed from an identity crisis not rooted in her son but an idea fixed to the role of mother. Now, nightly, she would find her son, his arms folded across his chest, a sheet tight over his head, and her shiny stilettos on his feet, surrounded by a ring of high heels with their toe ends facing in, a profound clock face foreshadowing the future. It was easier to blame the clock on the serious girl. The father of the boy found no shame in his son's behavior, and reminded his partner that the kid was healthy, that he was merely mimicking those in the world closest to him, that she was his role model, and that she should be happy. Their kid had sass.

That night was scalding. The girl ran into the bathroom as if she could hide from a hiding. She grabbed onto the shower curtain, twirling it around her, wrapping herself in the garish plastic to ward off the wind turbine that had usurped the mother. The shower curtain couldn't handle the mother's propelling and broke off the piping. Her breath was knocked out, if only for a moment, when the mother saw the opportunity to use the shower pole to blow her rapscallion of a daughter down. How could this child, born of her lie, steal and swindle her mother's and her mother's mother's jewelry under the tall tale of a pirate called

Hook who owned a blind parrot? The girl became a bell rung with each sure scold, her tongue donging as she curled upon herself, trying not to sob an inch or to give that redheaded hook of a mother any sign of remorse.

The terrible two waited an eternity. The morning was so infinity, the day so sadly infinity and frightful never, so boring and endless, the jolt of minutes so slow. And then there would be Christmas holidays and so many weeks, and perhaps trips somewhere, to the beach, with real castles of sand, and real crabs and sea anemones in rock pools, which they would finger, relishing slime. How long must they wait till the recess bell, till they till and upturn the bruise of buzzing, till they are bees buzzing, till they run in figure eights, twirl on the spot, their loose heads drugged with dizziness. They no longer have diamonds to trade, but they have rocks, pet rocks, and pet slaters and stingrays made of jacaranda pods, ready under the arbor.

One of the terrible two used to eat slaters. Was a moist old grot of rock and wood, her mother's place, so different from her father's? The slaters would climb up the walls and drop off the ceiling onto her dinner plate, where she would peck them up before she could be stopped, her brothers and sisters cringing, making ew. She was such a grub—a yucky grub. The girl would crumple her nose, a certain pride. Some wanted to be lawyers or bankers, but when she was a grown up, she'd be a grub, a slater. They were silver and blue, delicious blue and silver and blue, and had slats for backs. They were houses that were alive, carried houses on their backs. She quivers the crunch. She misses the crunch. She has an urge to pop these slaters on her tongue, under the rocks of the jacaranda, but is fearful of judgment from her best. She may not approve of eating their pets, and she is fearful to try, just in case. She wouldn't mind kissing her. She wouldn't mind trying. Her friend has such petal lips, such purple wet petal; she wouldn't mind if she was kissed by her in the bud, or if the

girl put her hand between her legs and went tremble there a while between her lips, trembled their hands to vegemite smell, and she would eat her friend's hands.

They are good friends, after all. Best of friends. A terrible two. They could bathe together, be swim together. They could try dangling, and they could bathe together in the holidays. Dangling their legs off the brick wall, they name the rocks in their own language. Ti is small, Haramboo is the heaviest, Luloom long, Rigadig rough, sandy; Impling is round and the favourite. Impling the Impling, and their children—the children of their very own, the slaters, they lift up the rocks, and check that they are all still there. A happy.

They nudge the slaters, to see which ones curl faster than others (a sign of health), to see which are fatter, too greedy, lecturing them with their pinkies, lifting them with their pinkies, so that they share the mulch, the rocks. The baby ones are smaller; they are fast but easily hurt if fingered, so they better not. Better only to play with the mother slaters, prawns of earth, who make castles of the rocks. At times they pouch the slaters: a slater curls and unfurls, rafting their fingers and hands that rudder, turning tremble till they grin their secret under the classroom table, the classroom dumb to their fun. They like to see them curl into houses, and when the terrible two are sad they disrupt the dirt if only to relish the slaters in their fear, to relish fear curling; and terrible mouths curl smiles, and then they spend the minutes waiting, waiting for their children, talking to their young, curlylike with curly tongues that lull and loom, coaxing them, telling their young they are not to hurt them, that they were just testing, that it is safe to uncurl and go about their business, and the slaters do, unclenching themselves and beginning their march, as if nothing. And the two serious girls feel a sense of right in this, holding the rocks up and marvelling. When the bell sings, they gently place the rocks back over the ground near the roots

of the jacaranda tree and, in their given positions, where the dirt is loose, give shelter under Ti and Haramboo and Luloom and Rigadig and Impling.

The buzzing is all about them. The earth is wet still beneath the jacaranda, and the rocks wet above the roots. The girls don't care they don't have their clients any longer. They could eat the slaters, one suggests, but the other scrunches her nose and is not for it—eating their young, that would be bad.

The girl pops a slater in her mouth and crunches down.

The other casts her mouth in horror, but she pretends her horror. She wants to try too but then presses a slater, watching it curl, and this curls her. She loves her friend's wet petal lips. She's just a little funny, just a little odd, and she has habits no one can see, that not even her best friend could see, for no one can see what she does in the night when she pretends to sleep, away with herself and terrible. If her best eats slaters it's not so bad; she makes the best games and they have their own bells. The bells are bees and no one can touch them; they are the fastest runners, none of the boys come close; and they can kiss and catch each other instead, and they can curl into slaters, just like the slaters, and roll and play marbles with the slaters, who are such wonderful marbles, who let themselves be rolled across the court stained brown by the rotting flowers. They have six legs or ten or a gazillion and they queen the castle; it is their castle, a castle of purple, and the day is too long and it never will end, and it is sweat and stink of boy, and they will always be the best of friends, always the best the very best.

in its sex

THERE SHE WAS, sitting at the window, below the fabric, below the steel, with the roll of wheels, the tug of pistons. Big wheels—black, big black wheels, round and round—and her sex turning on the shift at the intersection that sent the bus left, thrumming just right. It pleases her the watching that takes over the restlessness, the watching that opens in a somnolence bereft of a goal.

How her arms rile at the joints after the repetitive movement and all-day stoop, those acts that figure her joints tender come the end of day. In moments like this she gets winsome and visualises her work scissors delving, wrist to elbow, gathering warmth in that quarter, and this proffers a bright sight. She looks out the window, is lost in looking out the window.

Her eyes are inordinate devices for a consumption that roams slantwise as her body is palliated into dumb cargo. The bus vies for the curb; some alight, some board, and the homeless men in the tents near Central park's bus stop blow each other in the bushes. Go their blowing: the bush could be repurposed as a humble divider for a quick suck. She had never thought to use a bush in such a way. Her ears discount words as she lets the scrum of the passengers take over.

It was that her man got off on furniture and tapestry. Perhaps that was sex requiring a metamorphosis of sorts. Sure, there was intimacy—but so-called sex was less between them, not that it

really existed to an extent that could be termed "romantic." Still, they do dote on one another. Was a material love: romance was the appendix of an otherwise healthy body built between them, and they were joined by a similar worldview. They patterned the world with similar patterns; there was respect and small kindness. She did not want for a life without him. When he mounts her, which is rarely, her face would be muffed by the pillow, and he'd rabbit from behind with his hands on her shoulder wings for a few arduous minutes, before patting her behind postcoitally, as if he'd just given her a treat.

There was more carnality between his hands and wood. She can't remember the last time he touched her the way he handled an antique freshly purchased from an auction down Alexandria way. When she left him to do his dark bidding in the back room of their semi, she would fall asleep watching late-night infomercials on the newest abgadget or on pyjamas that doubled as a sleeping bag, knowing he would not return for hours. No doubt he was surfing eBay for a table so streamline it might float, or a Tasmanian oak frame with seamless joints. He would creep into bed and puck her as a child on her left cheek. She sometimes felt a voodoo anger towards chair legs, the way he would almost touch them, the way his fingers would dance up and down as if he was about to perform a magic trick, widening his eyes. She would leave the room when he got out the beeswax on a Sunday arvo, on his hands and knees, with a white cloth, rubbing their arms and legs. Instead of children, they had a Parker table and Ole Wanscher chair. She dreamt of a bonfire, a bonfire that would smell of cedar and varnish and impeccable taste.

The human contact on the bus was as necessary as cauterising a wart. The girl beside her wore an apricot jumper, cashmere. Only cashmere materialised a nimbus so haptic it could tickle her corneas. All day long she'd work with nylon, cotton, rulers and needles, measuring, cutting fabric to size, seaming. Clothes were

not all they were cut out to be. In fact, as a woman in her mid-fifties, she was lucky she even had a job in garment construction. That morning, she sat through an excruciatingly long-winded monologue with the new general manager, whose voice was so vacant as to seem a tad deranged. She was so obviously skirting around the actual issue. The manager's eyes gadded ceaselessly over her person, as if they were flies unable to find a shit to land on—a coke habit perhaps. It was only when she herself had said it, for the exasperated girl was well out of her depth, that she politely worded the prospect of her own redundancy.

She let out a grunt, and the girl in the apricot jumper repaired to a seat at the back of the bus that had freed up. Still, how could she not grunt. Maybe it would be for the best: no more intern pattern makers wearing the latest fad of socks with sandals during Autumn, or pants up to their nipples, speaking to her in broken English, bowing low, as if she was from Japan or something, before telling her in monosyllables how to interface a bloody collar.

She looked over the heads to her left, then at the front, the partition at the front, sequestering the view of the driver, apart from the interior rearview mirror. She held his reflection, he couldn't see her, he was a little overweight, balding. She saw him ogling at the next stop an exotic young thing with jeans so tight they were as good as skin, an apple-shaped, taut face so edible. The driver smiled a little smile, as though he would smile at all the passengers with such a smile.

She didn't feel so different, no, she didn't feel so different—or perhaps it was that she just couldn't remember exactly how she felt.

The pistons feel her, the pistons and fuel turning. The throttle feels her, and hands that are wheeling, and the effect below her, above her, across her, going round and round. She could feel the left rear wheel turning her. Round and round she

could feel her whole body moved by the grooves and bumps in the road, the jolt of the break at the light, and the inevitable cross-stitch of cars down Parramatta Road, an ambulance siren always bounding past.

She was back in Blayney, and she remembered her legs would splay beneath the tap in the bath, get right up close to the flow of warm water beneath the tap, get her rear right under it, and the pleasure devoid of idea, hitting a warmth working from the inside out, from the outside in, all at once. All at once the pleasure of the bus, being above the left rear wheel, her tiredness opening up. She gave herself over to the throb of the steel frame above, to the side, below her, the window that she lay her head upon, tingling into her inner ear, shivering hairs along her joints, along her arms. She gave herself to the sore, to the cold, to the town hall with its broken clock tower, the shopfronts turned squat, and others with a glow that made her heart break, always just a little.

She would go home and be kissed on the forehead by her man. She would run her hands along his back, along the woolen sweater that she made him last winter, fix his fringe, and they would play out their day to one another over tea. She would eat a huge sandwich of avocado and swiss cheese and rye, would run a bath, quit her job, would make herself a new dress, and dye her grey pussy a Chinese black, all these desires weaving as she alighted Norton Street, stepping over the amorphous mound, asleep in its blanket, outside the local convenience store, her eyes consumed in a warm glow, tingling.

every dog and her girl

THE DOG WAS a dance. Yes, and the girl? The girl was a dance. Yes, the dog and her girl were a dance. How did that song go, how did it go—O body swayed by music—it was just that something that sways inextricable. The girl could be called beautiful, they called her beautiful. That she was something that could be called beautiful posed questions at times, this beauty, this raging. And how the rage leapt through her bones, how the brow that creased too early loosened in her shaking fists and cicada legs.

The girl had a sister—if this little girl was called beautiful, the elder sister, the elder sister, how to put it. Skin of magnolia, hair of cobalt, lips of wing. But her eyes: ah, a beat of her lashes could lacerate the heart. Those lashes were slippery dips from which her hazel would disarm. Yet these parts, in themselves cause for remark, were dealt so much grace by an inner warmth that it was as if her mind was a benign head of state, a head that dulled these heady fiefdoms towards fine equipoise.

But we are getting carried away here. We are once again letting the beauty get in the way of . . .

The elder had a child, the child had her mother's laughing eyes, they set up house in the suburbs just nearby. It was all soft, soft mother and soft child; think pastel colours in a milky room,soft kisses and soft words. But there are many stories that could be told, and least of all a mother and child's. Many Helens and many wars fought under the farce of these faces, a fair foil for a prick by any other name. What is beauty but a collective

yearning, to be born a Helen—ah, what nightmare would smell as sweet.

Perhaps, in the end the elder is a minor. She minors the scene of the dance, perhaps. The elder sister's lips may feature here—perhaps these lips and only those lips; they touch our girl's cheek, and then from the deep space a whisper, a whisper that is demand and also instruction, and the girl, only the girl, can hear, and upon her face a smile appears.

Do you hear one magpie begin a song, do you hear how this calls for congregation? If you do not, then listen, the black grips, the branches, and the whole tree teams to music box, volleying a fugue that opines far travels. A spirited epic delimits the bower of the blue gum, and such song of dark and light could not be but birds, and the birds could not be but a song of piercing dispersion, rising many-voiced but one, which forthwith ends as it began, instantly and without ceremony, harboring no future. We meet the dog and her girl under the bower of the blue gum, in the local park under the bower of the blue gum.

The dog is out walking her girl, and the dog is black, as black as the magpies to be exact—which is to say, the dog is black with white highlights. The white highlights how time diffuses her limbs, how an end diffuses from the inside out, from the outside in. Our canine does not need to reconcile with death: she will be right to harry a space to deal with her body's malaise, for she is moved by life as she is moved by death, matter-of-factly.

The dog will make room for death when time is due, as indeed will the girl, through attrition—pain—that great inquisitor. Pain will charge space with contemplation, to reconcile with death per se by clutching the cosmic in a little mortal death of her very own, and this little death will clutch the girl to plot a space in the space that opens her to infinity. Perhaps carrying a thought on the wind, a trespass born into living: yes, the dog

and her girl among the fissures that fire your own little head into death. Surrender will be sudden.

The dog's muzzle is a diffuse light, and her coat's recourse to a different melanin expresses itself in the white that sprouts her jowls and brow, forefeet and hindfeet. How the dog's skin sags across her abdomen and neck, across her increasingly cleaving chest, so much that it seems as though she were performing a sleight of hand, for now she sports a tuxedo coat to court death, a white emblem hearting her black saturate. Yes, there is something Dietrich about this dog, something Dietrich in *Morocco*. Behind the dog's eyes there conspires a reticence that holds the world nonchalantly, a kind of nonchalance that takes life as if it were a dream, as if at times she were asleep with her eyes open.

Perhaps we are reading into the eyes of the dog something that is not there, in an Olympia sort of way. To reference the world around us is a human talent, that of fabling the inexplicable towards resolution. Gods, Yetis, and apocalypses roam the human horizons. It is a colourful way to be, with a cast of invisible friends and nemeses. The dog was not an automaton, but nor was she human. Her eyes were that of a dog, those eyes that perceived clearly, with no talent for fabulation. The future functions differently for the dog, who may dig a hole to stash a carcass, a treat to dig up at a later date, when the flesh has rotted appropriately, and who may then collect talismans of twigs and socks to set up shack. Yet she is not held to ransom by these creative endeavours, and surrenders herself to the momentum of the present, for what is pressing is a tummy rub, performed by her girl at this very moment beneath the bower.

The tummy rub is winning. Very winning. The dog is winning.

Often, the dog regards her girl in such a way that the girl feels guilt. This guilt does not reside in the dog; but in the dog's girl who has abstracted failing her duty of walking her companion.

The dog throws upon the girl what the girl sees as a Dietrich distance; the dog is unimpressed with the waiting game she must play until she is taken out once again to be as she is, a dog. The dog plays her tune. She slinks across the living room after eyeing her girl, and she rubs across the chair, winding a half circle upon her hessian bed, to coil that head into her legs, all a conch.

The girl is under the bower of the blue gum, living in the shadow of her elder sister, unaware of what could be called, by some, a certain charm. She has eyebrows that caterpillar and lips and eyes that looney tune a bug parade. The candour of such insect features, so delicate yet robust, and as muscled as centrifuges, is as transfixing as watching someone with a plate of green jelly about to trip over a bench. The girl has no talent for duplicity and, in lacking this talent, makes good this lack, to be appalled and show no appall, to be impressed and show no impression: it is a bag of tricks she presumes wanting.

At times this frankness is charming. Conversely, it often causes offence. Some such persons in their own duplicity intuit in the girl a purity akin to idiocy. This lack of duplicity feeds into her kithship with animals. The girl is more comfortable with their languages, with her fluency in animal movement, primed as it is by her training as a dancer, with muscles and their locomotive cadences more easily legible for her than for the majority of her kind. She has a talent for bodies. Thus to her, the certain ways a dog may pivot, and certain prehensions in the trapezius, signal a dog's intent. The gestures of the neck, a paw that stretches out, a supplicating snout, a gaze: these acts are never directionless but are vessels of habitation, existing as concrescence and conflict, as question and response, folding further. And now the wind plays on the girl's brow under the bower, in the park, and in response her mouth curls.

A brindle staffie waltzes upon the scene just as the girl's face is curling, the staffie's balls hanging low and loose in their

skin. This is in contrast to the head, with its skin stretched tight over the knotskull, lowered on approach. His ears droop slightly back, his tail limp. He is scouting the availability and backstory of our dog by scavenging her rump. The dog who walks her girl, although desexed, is not averse to a full-blown male, brindle or otherwise. While she is on the whole standoffish in relation to her own species' taking of privileges, she is more willing when the nose belongs to a virile type. After this sniff, the dog—as is custom among dogs—takes her turn, her eagerness translating in her tail, which crescents sky high, and with her black nose, with its now-white whiskers, flaring mildly as the neck delves inward, towards its puckered target. After this short meet and greet, the brindle bounces off, a little prouder, balls dangling left and right, rising its hind leg over a nearby shrub. He disappears, never to be seen again.

Enter a female kelpie, who jetties face forward but moves to the dog's quarters, her tail wagging. The girl notices the hairs stiffening around the neck, alpha that the kelpie is. The growl erupts, the dogs frozen in a close-quarter Mexican stand-off in rapid time. The girl grunts from above, and calls to her dog, "Dog." The girl summons her feet and legs to stiffen into syncopation, so that she may tower over them both. The kelpie ignores the girl and her demand, its face taut and foxy, not looking directly at her target, but by a side glance as she begins to bare her teeth. The dog responds with neck hairs rising beneath tensed muscles, and the girl slides her hand quickly below the collar, pulling the dog to her shin. There is no call from the distance, but there is something else the kelpie wants, and she moves on, moves on farther.

When the girl was young, she thought as most bourgie white kiddies think—that she was free—and felt her freedom encroached on recklessly by her parents. She was led blindfolded across a tightrope between two cliffs of violence with a gulf of cruelty in between. No, she could not see how precarious freedom

was, nor its dirty cost—not until dissonance could enter the scene. So it happened in the guise of a series of run-of-the-mill maths tutorials when she was cusping. Yes, the maths tutorials happened to her on the cusp.

When the maths tutor happened, she was horrified to find hair sprouting within valleys and dips previously barren, her caterpillar brows arching thusly in appall. She was punching her chest to make the little sore hills disappear, wanted to be the way she used to be. This harvest left her in mourning. Why her body was changing when she didn't want it to, didn't want it to at all—and this was cause for more than discomfort—it was shameful.

She wished she was somewhere other than in maths; anywhere else would do. Perhaps she could be at soccer practice, or following her sister and her sister's friends, somewhere beyond the window. She would wait, all ashiver at the window, at the door. The maths tutor was a bloke the burb used. He'd worked up a solid reputation, and the girl was thenceforward sent to him. "Send her there," her mother would say. "Maybe then her grades will improve."

But the girl would sit on the tutor's lap, and he'd tell her to open her mouth, and it felt funny and a little strange, and that tongue of his so powdery and darty. Of course, she never told anybody. It was her boyish beauty that won him over so. Skin of magnolia, hair of cobalt, lips of wing. And how slippery dip the lashes upon which the hazel reposed, pretty as a picture, pretty as a child blooming. She wondered what happened to the tutor. She did hate him, wondered why she did hate him, knew she should hate him, for life happens instantly and without ceremony. Time had passed, as time did, much time, and there were so many other wonders that crept her out. There were moments when her mouth opened and he crept back, he and the hate, and she felt sore, for however many others, for however many could be counted.

She kept despite a propensity to love. It was her life to love, self-care folded into animals, into people, and in small ways into the landscape that constituted her life. Hurt was part and parcel of forming and maintaining and severing relations, part and parcel of the deal of her life. To love was that love was contingent.

The girl recognised that the preciousness of love came not from its being unconditional but from bonds hard won, that perpetual balancing act between one's own desires and those of others. It was certain that her father never could quite master affection, and her mother was draconian. Yes, these factors may have led her to know how conditional love was. She could sense an economy to affection.

Perhaps this is why she turned to dogs, to these fine examples of the conditions that constitute something akin to her notion of a special sort of trust. Food, exercise, shelter, and boundaries formed a loyalty that could become in a dog unerring, steadfast, and forgiving of occasional slip ups. Respect was something a dog didn't give willingly, but had to be earned. Intimacy was not a celebration of the dog's assimilation of human qualities but of an aberrant animality. Family could be created across species and not merely within her own. To be given this respect opened up a relationship incomparable to those she had shared with her fellow humans: it was a human–dog pact, millennia in the breeding. Here was the dog, scratching a flea on its back, a dog whose heightened awareness of movements, scents, and sounds invisible to the human senses, forwarded to her what could be called the beauty of life outside the stiflingly human.

The dog chose her. She chose to have the dog choose her. Yes, that would be best. There she sat—at the RSPCA with a mongrel litter, and the dog, the black runt, the pup barely able to stand under the weight of its milk-plump belly, foundered upon her foot, where it proceeded to fall asleep. The girl lifted the dog, for the dog had lifted the girl, lifted the dog in between her legs, where

she could see the pup's belly rising and falling in the soundest of sleeps. That is how the dog had her girl, and the girl her dog.

In the park the girl stood under the bower, the dog running across the park in strides that masked its sore stifles. The dog had a propensity to retrieve, it having been written somewhere into its co-evolution with humans, and with a coming of age, the girl noticed that the dog had become increasingly fixated on balls, balls and food, and food very much so. If there was a ball in the vicinity, no matter how hidden, the dog had the power to sniff it out, and back she would come with the ball in her mouth, squeezing the ball, a writhing question. And there the girl would stand, a warm response. The ball was the dance. One must throw; one must catch. The ball was their dance, for it sped across the park, dancing the park, in the dog and her girl's gathering, and the dog would go to no other, for it was for the girl alone that the dog.

The dog could then stop to sniff at a pole, and her pink beak would loosen, and she would crouch above the grass fronds, casting a glance for her girl as she made flag in her evergreen territory. This brought to the girl's face a glow: how once, how once upon the joy. The dog would be trotting off, serpentine, and the girl would call after the dog to wait.

The girl says now, "Dog, Dog, wait for!" And the dog—even before the wait—and merely in the way the name coils the air, knows what her girl requires, and the dog does not turn head, her ears pincer back, ready, for they existed to listen to her girl. And there the dog stands, frozen from snout to tail, their nostrils expanding to distinguish a new set of coordinates, staring forward, gathering in that body the somehow swaying.

Excursion

Emma Rayward

The Consumption o*f*(You)

WHEN YOU OPEN up wide and relax your sphincter, a passage for the outside to pass through you appears. All of you, somehow, is a passage for the outside to pass through you. You are full of entrances and exits.

You are topologically flexible; flexibility being a function [$f(x)$] of topology, consumption being the shifting of points of sets in fields [field(set(point))], fields overlapping and intersecting, fields becoming functions of themselves. This glass of water you drink is, at some time, I imagine, welcomed by your mouth. This section of water, these discrete points in space, with a meniscus formed in co-operation with the wall of the glass, its points solvent and hard, hums with excitement over its impending absorption with your section of body, with your discrete points in space, with the edge formed by the wall of your skin, porous and layered. You hum with excitement, too.

With the gulping of water you experience a commingling of point-sets, as your bodyfield readjusts, accommodating these new molecules. You shift yourself in a one-to-one translation, your punctured, tubular self not producing new tears or holes but

stretching into an equivalency of you, a function of you. You and the water are a (Venn()diagram), and we can label the intersection *f*(You).

(So, the whole thing begins as a fucking of You)((fucking as inter-mingling).)

The water, ~bent~ in nature, and you, ~bent~ in posture, "~" as approximate range, as a mark of suspension, as diacritic nasalisation, as a perturbation/variation, or, say, as Tilda Swinton, settles into a dynamic equilibrium from one state to another. We settle in.

* * *

TO BEGIN AGAIN, again, is the indefinite article, the "a." Add to it the plural. Indefinitely, a you, a body. Plural, you again, bodies. The plural indefinite as approximation, range, perturbation/variation.

Bodies as a terrifying reminder of human vulnerability (bleeding, shitting, decaying, mutating and penetrating) as they pour out of themselves, or turn in on themselves, crossing boundaries and limits—uncontrollable, exploding, exploding, exploding, collapsing. As if in fear of the heavy rain that might flood our drains and expose all of our food wrappers and cigarette butts and coffee cups from the sewer's depths, things move about inside us, alive, near to bursting. Just under the surface of the ground is a networked tide of rubbish, like the veins that cross just under the skin.

But picking your nose and eating it is recycling—a recycling of the products of your body back into it, because you do not have a tissue. When the mucus is pulled from your nostril hairs, you feel open; and then, there it is, on your finger. You don't remember the first time you thought to reintroduce the stuff into your body,

but you were not thinking. It tastes like you and this is the most at home you could feel.

Pulling inside yourself, smiling as the mucus moves to the back of your throat, caught on your uvula, you smile because no one knows. You want to ask them to try it, to remind themselves of what they taste like, to swim in themselves, to be both inside and out, to be like the recycling symbol, a möbius cut with arrows that point: "I am here," and also "Here" and "Here." You recycle yourself to empty and fill yourself, like coughing up fur balls, like a fly sucking back its vomit, like a guinea pig nibbling on its own shit for the nutrients it couldn't digest the first time. We want to taste ourselves so we know what others taste when they look at us, emptying us with their eyes.

The snot is only now starting to slip down my throat. My stomach has already begun to mumble, anticipating its queasiness. My stomach sometimes makes me lose my thoughts. The sound of it moving is not contained by the membrane, by the flesh, the skin. It sings to me in a language I do not understand. I try to Google, "Why is my stomach so loud?" but it cannot tell me. I try to Google, "Why can I taste metal in my mouth when I squeeze a pimple and watch the pus pop out?" but there is only one other person on the other side of my question, and they don't know either.

My body shakes from the sound of itself, from its unintentional clenching. I am simultaneously "I" and "it," the subject and the object of myself. I think of myself and then my body. I contain and am contained. I think of my fingernails working through my intestines. I want to shit in the dirt so something will eat my fingernails as I have done. I don't want to shit in a container, in a pipe, my wrapped-up fingernails suffocating and drowning. I want it to rub on the belly of a worm, to grow inside apples, to be printed on the books I touch with my fingers.

I contemplate the moment my lips become the inside of my mouth with my tongue. Like the night falling, I cannot see the line that defines them as separate, the line that distinguishes between light and dark, lip and mouth. Both are contained within the other. The two disperse until they are so wide apart that they do not sit where they belong. How discrete are the lips and the mouth, the throat and the stomach, the intestines and the rectum? How much of my asshole is in my mouth? I can taste it.

The skin is the locus of a body's topology because bodies are made bodies by skin. This skin feels and acts on both sides of itself at some indeterminate depth; like multiple plateaus nesting one atop another, the skin touches itself, touched by itself, with itself. An itch/scratch is a double sensation that spontaneously produces itself, there, on the surface, but from somewhere deeper. The only solution is to apply a greater force on it from outside, with nails, more bits of hardened skin, flaying layers, some floating like dust. But the itch lingers still, moving again, out of reach.

This skin–body constantly generates itself isomorphically [$f(x)$ & $f\text{-}1(x)$], shifting and twisting, taking on a different shape, this same skin, until, perhaps, it ruptures. Like the policemen and their bicycles become an intermingling, a reciprocation, an image of the image between mirrors reflecting, the policeman-becoming-bicycle and bicycle-becoming-policeman as they ride and carry each other, so the skin holds and withholds itself.

This skin is a manifold, contorting and stretching and twisting in space. All of a body's iterations are homeomorphs, the clean and proper body, the shitting, pissing, bleeding body. A continuous, connected path exists between every point in these functions, so that, with some distortion, they can be made equivalent. They can be shifted and twisted and stretched along the surface and take each other's place. They are always near one another, perhaps touching each other, because they may be folded in together, on top of one another. This is a möbius figuration of

a body, where two sides, or differences, invert and inflect one another, one becoming the other becoming the one-other. The form doesn't produce a distinct two-relation, nor a singular one.

To me, you are a T-shirt, as I am a T-shirt, as our mothers are T-shirts. When I peel you off, you are turned inside out and I hold you between two fingers, as far away from me as possible, because you make me sweat, I've worn you through. I am myself a T-shirt that I cannot take off, still sweating, even naked. Our mothers unwrapped us from plastic, crisp and new, and when the plastic is broken, we forget all the work, and we deny all the work, and then we spill food on ourselves. I have a drawer full of T-shirts, and I am all of them, crinkled, worn, stained. I am a jumble of threads, mostly dense, but if you catch one and pull it, I will shrink. I wear my me-T-shirt and you wear your you-T-shirt to bed, and yours snags on my sharp corners and between it and my own we generate so much heat. Pull one of the arms through, tuck it in, patch it, wear it inside out. I'm all it. Pull into it, let it flap loose around you, knot the sleeves together, scrunch up into a ball, elbows inside nostrils, toes in urethras, squeeze it all in your hand, this flimsy T-shirt you have worn through.

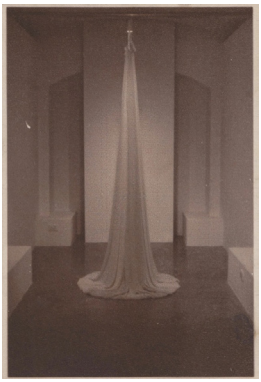
These T-shirt object/subjects, embedded in space, and then embedded in more space, go on ad infinitum. A lemniscate fibre, embedded in the möbius thread, embedded in the Kleinian fabric, each n-dimensional object structured by $(n-1)$-dimensions. We are polyblend Klein bottles, all inside-out ourselves.

Excursion

Josephine Mead

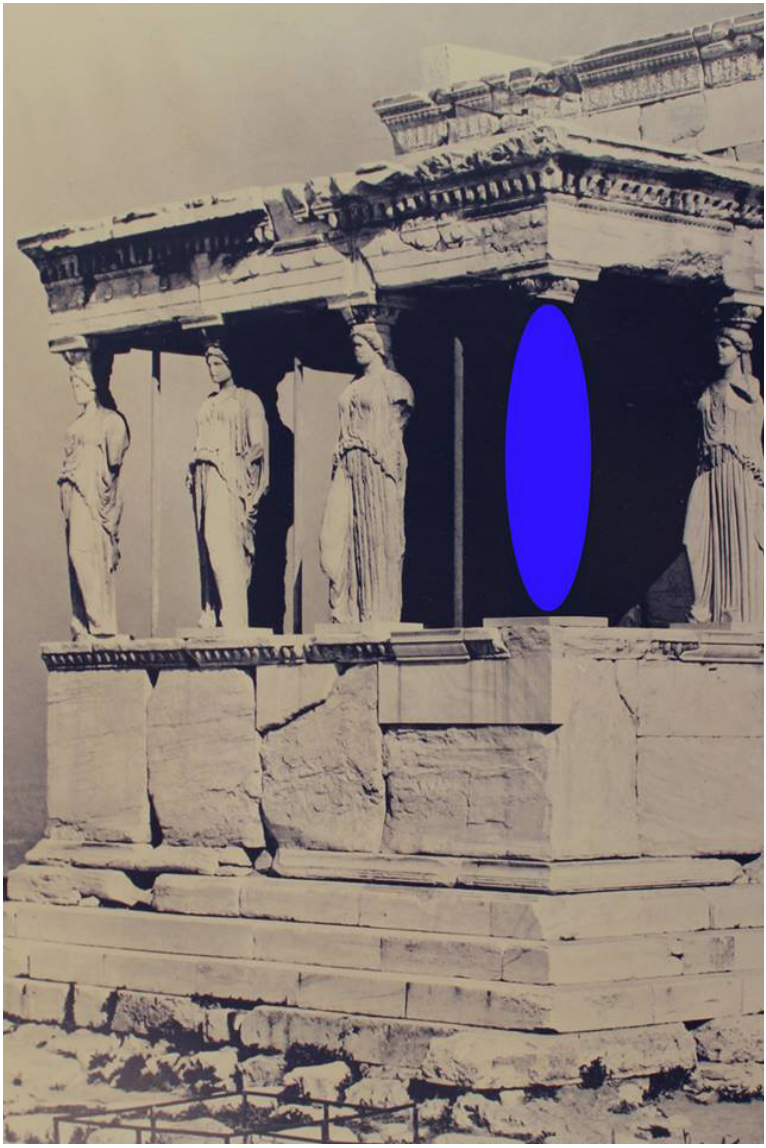
Untitled

Sit. Support. Repeat. (Inkjet Print, 2016).



Warp, Weft, and Flesh (Van Dyke print, 2014).

Self Holding (Van Dyke print, 2014).



Women as Columns or Pillars AKA Holding Up AKA Societal Scaffolding (Digital collage, 2016).

Review

Olivia Oliver-Hopkins

Sophia Coppola (dir.), *The Beguiled* (2017)

THOUGH AN EXCEEDINGLY successful director, Sofia Coppola has something of a reputation for making aesthetically beautiful films strangely devoid of substance.[1] Coppola's most recent offering, *The Beguiled*, is in much the same vein, which is disappointing, as the plot promised to contribute to current discourses relating to intersectional feminism. Despite Coppola's efforts to distance her film from the 1971 Donald Siegel film of the same name—a film that was adapted from the same source material as Coppola's film, namely Thomas P. Cullinan's 1966 novel also titled *The Beguiled*—the similarities are such that it is difficult to avoid comparisons, much to the detriment of Coppola's version.[2]

The Beguiled takes place in a remote part of Virginia toward the end of the Civil War, where the five remaining students at a girls' school are attempting to continue their education under stern headmistress Miss Martha (somewhat overplayed by Nicole Kidman) and gentle French teacher Edwina (Kirsten Dunst), while their world collapses around them. One afternoon, one of the younger and more adventurous students, Amy (Oona Lawrence), discovers an injured Union deserter, John McBurney (played by a moody Colin Farrell), in a nearby forest. The women (with varying enthusiasm) decide to nurse the man back to health before reporting his presence to the local Confederate guard.

However, the wily McBurney attempts to seduce his way out of his predicament, focusing his attentions upon Edwina and the sexually precocious Alicia (Elle Fanning), while Martha battles with her own feelings for the soldier. But McBurney's plan ends in campy disaster, with the film seeming to attempt to suggest the complex nature of human relationships but succeeding only in producing a darkly comic revenge tale reminiscent of urban legends.

One of the most disappointing and obvious differences from Siegel's film is the omission of the sole character of colour, a slave named Hallie (Mae Mercer), an important reminder of both the central cause of the war and the human cost of the Confederates' genteel lifestyles. While Coppola has argued that she excluded Hallie because she did not wish to treat a subject so serious as slavery lightly, in so doing she has cut a much-needed complex role from an actor of colour, and has ignored an opportunity to explore the way that race affected—and continues to affect—constructions of gender, especially in the American South.[3] The omission recalls the words of Southern studies scholar Tara McPherson, who writes, "the South cannot be understood apart from the history of cross-racial intimacy that has so shaped the region, even as that intimacy has been both brutally enforced and resisted."[4] As such, a Southern film—especially a Civil War-set Southern Gothic film, which has at its heart a conflict between Northern and Southern characters—must either engage with slavery's legacy directly, or be haunted by it, as this film is.

Coppola's film could have been a feminist tale of revenge and an ironic subversion of the strict gender expectations of the antebellum South, especially feminine passivity and chastity. The film could have united women across racial lines against a male aggressor who seeks to divide them through sexual jealousy and competition, much like the 1971 version. However, it is instead easily read as an indictment of white Southern women, who are made to seem responsible for the atrocities of slavery and exploitation, anddepicted as only thinly hidden behind their false claims to feminine passivity and Christian virtue. The women's continual insistence on obeying the dictates of Southern hos-

pitality speaks to a deeper unease about the role of upper-class (white) women in the subjugation of lower-class men (of all races) throughout history, both in the United States in general and the South in particular. Particularly disturbing are Martha, Edwina, and Alicia's efforts to disguise their lust behind their insistence that allowing McBurney to continue to convalesce in their music room (despite his hale-and-hearty ability to undertake considerable physical gardening work in their overgrown yard) is the only "Christian thing" to do.

All of this said, the film is beautifully shot. Coppola takes full advantage of the stunning rural Virginian setting to create an atmospheric melange, imposing old oak trees standing silent vigil in the empty forests against spectacular Southern sunsets. The lighting is also impressive, shifting effortlessly between the open grandeur of the forests during the day and the claustrophobic atmosphere inside the school at night, especially during the fevered evening prayers. Among the cast, Kirsten Dunst stands out as the quiet, sad-eyed Edwina, and manages to steal many scenes with her beautifully understated performance and lingering, meaningful looks. However, the film seems hollow or even campy at points (resulting in frequent titters from the audience at the Sydney Film Festival screening I attended). This is in part due to the inexplicable choice of Farrell for the lead role, whose casting seems to have led to the decidedly odd recharacterisation of McBurney as an Irish mercenary—although, admittedly, Clint Eastwood's performance in the 1971 version was particularly excellent and thus difficult to follow.

Overall, the film is lovely but empty, especially when compared to the vitality of Don Siegel's version and, with the sole exception of Edwina, it was difficult to care much about any of the characters or to discern any deeper meaning within the film. *The Beguiled* will likely please Coppola devotees and cinematography enthusiasts, but it is likely to leave others cold. I am delighted that a female director finally won the Cannes Film Festival Best Director award again—but why this film was so awarded seems somewhat inexplicable.[5]

Notes

1. Claire White, "Too Feminine, Too Pretty, and the Gendered Bias in the Critique of Sofia Coppola's Films," *Bitch Flicks,* May 1, 2015, http://www.btchflcks.com/2017/05/sofia-coppola-and-gendered-bias-in-critique-of-her-films.html#.WVCFfeuGPIU/.

2. Rebecca Ford, "*The Beguiled*: Sofia Coppola on Taking on a Genre Movie and Why It's Not a Remake," *The Hollywood Reporter,* May 16, 2017, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/beguiled-sofia-coppola-taking-a-genre-movie-why-not-a-remake-q-a-1004173/; see Thomas P. Cullinan, *The Beguiled* (New York: Horizon Press, 1966).

3. Alanna Bennet, "Sofia Coppola Says *The Beguiled* is About the Gender Dynamics of the Confederacy, not the Racial Ones," *BuzzFeed*, June 17, 2017, https://www.buzzfeed.com/alannabennett/sofia-coppola-beguiled-power-dynamics?utm_term=.sc5rLqbEo#.jeJ2XzG3v/.

4. Tara McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 114.

5. Clarisse Loughrey, "Cannes 2017: Sofia Coppola Becomes Second Woman Ever to Win Best Director Prize," *The Independent,* May 29, 2017, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/cannes-film-festival-2017-sofia-coppola-the-beguiled-best-director-prize-lynne-ramsay-nicole-kidman-a7761081.html/.

Review

Emily Castle

Sarah Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Duke University Press, 2017)

IN EARLY HIGH school, I often wrote a dictionary definition of feminism on the back of my hand with the aim of convincing my friends that, if they believed women should be equal to men, then they too were feminists. Yet *Living a Feminist Life*, Sara Ahmed's most recent book, makes clear that feminism cannot limit itself to a vision of equality defined by a world that remains decidedly non-feminist. That is because, for Ahmed, feminism is no less ambitious a project than the building of new worlds—an affirmative life project that grounds itself in the "active and ongoing commitment to live one's life in a feminist way" (25).

Building on two decades of work in the fields of feminist, queer, and critical race theory, *Living a Feminist Life* foregrounds Ahmed's personal experiences "as a brown woman, lesbian, [and] daughter" (23) to show that feminist theory is generated through the embodied effort to challenge everyday forms of sexism and racism. Importantly, her assertions on this point do not lead her to jettison academic frameworks; instead, Ahmed consistently strives to undermine any kind of dichotomy in which criticality and activism are opposed. Far from an academic tool that may be

deployed and put aside as and when convenient, feminist theory, Ahmed insists, does "more the closer it gets to the skin" (20). Drawing from legacies of feminist-of-colour scholarship, with particular tributes to the work of black feminists Audre Lorde and bell hooks, Ahmed intertwines memories, anecdotes, and individual accounts of feminist struggle with astute yet accessible scholarly insights, opening up new possibilities for feminist theory as precisely "what we do when we live our lives in a feminist way" (22).

In the first of the book's three sections, Ahmed reflects upon the process of becoming a feminist—a process by which one becomes willing to be a "problem" through speaking out about the problem of sexism and racism. Neither a memoir nor a guidebook, Ahmed's monograph offers no originary moment of feminist awakening but instead a sustained reflection on the figure of the feminist killjoy, first developed on her blog of the same name. Understanding oneself as a killjoy, Ahmed suggests, allows feminists to productively reframe the labour of getting in the way of unjust structures and prejudices, which others are invested in not seeing, or ignoring. For Ahmed, reframing antifeminist concepts for feminist purposes is not just a matter of converting them to positive terms; rather, insisting on the negativity of these concepts requires staying close to the everyday scenes of violence that feminism seeks to expose (105). Far from embracing the postfeminist fantasy that "feminism has been so successful it has eliminated its own necessity," Ahmed argues convincingly for the enduring relevance of feminism, defined as the ongoing and everyday labour of insisting that sexism and racism exist (14).

In part two of her monograph, Ahmed explores diversity work as a form of feminist theory in practice. Through her own and others' experiences as diversity practitioners in British universities, Ahmed considers various attempts to transform institutions, as well as the embodied effort of departing from institutional norms, in relation to living a feminist life. More than this, Ahmed argues for the further disruption of the normative citational system, which she suggests guarantees the reproduc-

tion of certain bodies and minds within academic scholarship, by advocating that scholars avoid or reject the citation of white men. This strict citation policy marks a shift in Ahmed's own work: she has frequently traced the history of feminist concepts and figures through a predominantly masculine philosophical canon. Ahmed's call for feminists "to create a crisis around citation, [or] even just a hesitation, a wondering" (179) constitutes her refusal to conflate the history of feminist ideas with white male intellectuals—a strident recentring of the work of feminists of colour in this history.

While *Living a Feminist Life* is certainly a call to arms, it resists becoming an exercise in didacticism in that Ahmed does not limit her prescriptions to any singular form of feminism. Indeed, her writing shows great sensitivity to the costs and consequences of being a feminist, particularly in part three. Ahmed's distinctive methodology of "listening for resonances" (22) allows words such as "fragility," "snap," and "shatter" to be turned this way and that so they catch the light from different angles, illuminating moments of individual and collective resistance or refusal. Ahmed's 2016 resignation from her position as professor and director of the Centre for Feminist Research at Goldsmiths, University of London—a protest against the the University's failure to respond to the problem of sexual harassment on campus—gives particular resonance to her discussion of "feminist snap." Yet, once again, Ahmed insists that such points of rupture are not only negative but may be both positive and productive. In a compelling exploration of the creative possibilities and support systems that give feminists the energy to keep going, Ahmed draws from transfeminism and Lorde's womanism to advocate a revival of lesbian feminism, such that "a feminist politics that centres on women can keep the category of women open to women" (253).

Living a Feminist Life comes at a time when, as Ahmed observes, feminism appears to be gaining increased momentum—in popular culture and academic circles alike (11). Writing with a sense of urgency tempered with wit and lyricism, Ahmed successfully taps into and galvanises this contemporary feminist resurgence and, for the most part, avoids rehearsing tired

aphorisms. The two-part conclusion—the first part titled the "Killjoy Survival Kit," comprising a personal list of resources to sustain feminist labour, followed by a "Killjoy Manifesto"—effectively summarises the ideas contained in the first parts of the book. As addenda, these sections seem unnecessarily repetitive, although they could easily act as standalone texts to prompt discussion or reflection in the classroom. Similarly, the influence of the blog that Ahmed maintains at https://feministkilljoys.com seems to express itself in the book's increasingly loose structures and poetic interjections. While these experimental elements become unnecessarily heavy handed as the book progresses, they nevertheless help make *Living a Feminist Life* an engaging and accessible work for the non-academic reader.

A feminist movement requires the development of feminist tendencies—"a willingness to keep going despite or even because of what we come up against" (15)—such that, like the note on the back of my hand, feminism is always "at hand." And yet, crucially, these tendencies do not provide us with a stable ground for political empowerment. Ahmed's work is thus at its strongest when it argues against conventional narratives that position feminism as an exclusionary site—a space that belongs to some women more than others. Ahmed criticises, for example, the assumption that feminism is "a conversation that starts with white women," whereby instances in which feminists of colour who bring up racism are heard as interruptions (212). For Ahmed, feminism necessarily addresses sexism *and* racism; though she notes that, within a politics of intersectionality, not all tensions can be neatly resolved. In a powerful account of childhood trauma, Ahmed works through the complicated nature of speaking out about sexism while attending to the risks that this speech may serve to co-opt certain forms of violence into a racist narrative (92). Yet what is so refreshing about Ahmed's analysis is that it emphasises the importance of not simply eliminating or dismissing this tension but of staying with the difficulty and contingency of feminist collectivity. It is this ability to withstand tension, Ahmed suggests, that never ceases to fills her "with hope, with energy" (9). So long as feminism itself remains continually open

to question and to critique—so long as the "we" that feminism rallies around is "not a foundation but what we are working towards" (10)—feminism remains, she writes, not only relevant but imperative.

Living a Feminist Life can be read as updating and weaving together all of Ahmed's past work. Although Ahmed's previous books have engaged with the complex interplay of gender, sexuality, and race, here Ahmed explicitly and unambiguously anchors her analysis in intersectionality. A foundation rather than an end point, intersectionality allows us to understand how some bodies, once stopped, are less or more able to start up again due to their proximity to different forms of oppression and privilege (145). Significantly, Ahmed turns this critical optic on herself, reflecting, for example, on her ablebodiedness and those advantages that have allowed her to theorise the intimacy of bodies and worlds without offering any substantive discussion of disability or engagement with crip theory (218). Ahmed's continual reference to and reflection upon her past work is one of the the primary strengths— and potential frustrations—of *Living a Feminist Life*. Although readers familiar with Ahmed's previous seven books may find certain sections of this book repetitive, it is also true that this book has an altogether different aim than her former works. Rather than pursuing any singular concept in great detail, *Living a Feminist Life* works through ideas that Ahmed has elaborated elsewhere in a more succinct and accessible manner, effectively demonstrating the way in which every aspect of her diverse intellectual and political projects to date can be understood as feminist theory in practice.

As such, *Living a Feminist Life* is an excellent introduction to the impressive scope of Ahmed's own work, as well as to feminist theory generally. At once poetic, academic, and personal, the book less prescribes guidelines for a way of life than offers a provocation to readers: always keep open the question of how to live a feminist life.

Review

Samantha Poulos

Roxane Gay, "What's Feminism Got To Do With It?—In Conversation with "Bad Feminist" Roxane Gay (May 4, 2017, at the Sydney Writers Festival), and Anthea Taylor, *Celebrity and the Feminist Blockbuster* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016)

PUBLISHED IN 2016, Anthea Taylor's book *Celebrity and the Feminist Blockbuster* is a timely analysis of and reflection on a selection of notable popular feminist books, their authors, and the popularisation of feminist ideals through iconic publications. Borrowing a term from Shane Rowlands and Margaret Henderson, Taylor calls these iconic books "feminist blockbusters."[1] As Taylor writes, feminists blockbusters are bestselling books that have generally served to "persuade readers of the validity of their critique of gender relations and limiting patriarchal assumptions around femininity, and indeed masculinity."[2] Taylor's book traces the history of these "blockbuster" books and the rising celebrity of their authors, ranging from Betty Friedan's cultural critique *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) through to Lena Dunham's recent memoir *Not That Kind of Girl* (2014). Taylor

describes these authors as "celebrity feminists," a term that she further explains:

> A celebrity feminist is someone whose fame is the product of their public feminist enunciative practices; that is, they are famous because of their feminism. In this definition, the feminist blockbuster author reigns supreme, even in the twenty-first century.[3]

Rather than these authors being established celebrities who promote feminist ideals, their celebrity status is derived directly from their feminist politics. These feminist blockbusters and those who pen them are notable for the way in which they popularise feminist ideas, bringing them both into popular consciousness and the broader discourse. Perhaps more importantly, these books offer a vantage point from which the average reader may begin to engage with feminist theory; and they serve as springboards for further and more nuanced discussions of feminism in popular culture.

Taylor's book makes a point to identify where Roxane Gay and her book *Bad Feminist* (2014) are situated along this continuum of celebrity feminists and their blockbuster books.[4] In her examination of Roxanne Gay's influence, Taylor elaborates that Gay employs her "celebrity feminist persona" in order to "destabilize the dominant discourses of both postfeminism and post-racism" that have been set up by early celebrity feminists and blockbusters.[5] The position of postfeminism and post-racism is one that is common in popularised forms of feminist theory and one that focuses almost solely on middle-class, white, heterosexual women. Taylor notes that "Gay's very public visibility challenges the normative whiteness at the heart of much popular feminism."[6] By this Taylor implies that Gay offers a new feminist narrative for readers that many people are ready and very eager to engage with. This new narrative has perhaps contributed in part to Gay's growing celebrity status and popularity as a feminist figure.

Earlier this year I was able to experience Gay's influence and popularity firsthand when I attended "What's Feminism Got To

Do With It?"—In Conversation with "Bad Feminist" Roxane Gay, at Leighton Hall within the University of New South Wales, as part of the Sydney Writers Festival.[7] While the event was sold out (and packed with an eager audience), the casual nature of the event—an open conversation between Gay and cyber-bullying academic Emma Jane of the University of New South Wales—created a pleasant and intimate atmosphere. Gay's position as a "celebrity feminist" (as Taylor describes her), as well as the fact that she is a prolific, outspoken author, and a voracious Twitter user, offers an accessible gateway to intersectionality and unique feminist ideals that is not often offered by other celebrities. During the conversation, Gay noted that part of the reason she calls herself a "bad feminist" has to do with her desire to "claim feminism," despite the fact that she feels like she "falls short" of the "idealised" feminist politics practised and promoted by those whom Gay calls "good feminists." Gay's scholarly background—she has a PhD in rhetoric and technical communication, as well as master's degree in creative writing—ensured that we the audience were offered a more substantive and considered discussion about the realities of feminism and practising feminist ideals in contemporary life than that we might expect from other "celebrity" feminists. Rather than an overly theoretical discussion of "idealised" feminism, the conversation focused on the actualities of trying to live as a feminist today in a patriarchal society.

A highlight of the evening was when Gay offered her opinion on how one might consume media that is sexist while still upholding one's feminist values. Much of the evening seemed to centre on this point, with an overwhelming number of questions from the audience asked either for validation or advice regarding their individual media consumption habits. In answer, Gay acknowledged that there is an expectation that feminists must "be perfect in our politics and always consistent, and in many ways superhuman"; however, she noted that it is better to acknowledge one's flaws and stay media literate than to aim for an unattainable political ideal. It is more important, she said, to understand the way sexism operates within the media we consume, rather than to avoid consuming or enjoying that media, given that sexism

is prevalent in almost all forms of media, ranging from classic literature, through famous operas, to modern rap music, all of which Gay and her audience alike used as examples.

On this subject, Jane recalled a point that Gay had made in her 2015 TED Talk, "Confessions of a Bad Feminist," about boycotting media deemed unhelpful to the feminist cause.[8] Gay clarified her point by explaining that in order to create change, we must "make better choices about what we consume." "When we affect the bottom line," she elaborated, "the people who make this kind of pop culture are going to pay attention." Gay then agreed with Jane's sentiment that "this is, of course, easier said than done." This is perhaps why so many people feel affiliated with the notion of being a "bad feminist," as remaining consistent and strict in one's personal politics can prove challenging, especially when faced with media saturated with and based on sexist and patriarchal values.

At one point during the evening, Jane mentioned her and Gay's shared enjoyment of hip hop music, despite the fact that the genre often contains misogynistic lyrics. This moment stood out as another notable example of Gay's wisdom regarding how to engage with inherently sexist media. It was also notable in the way that Gay actively took popular, which is to say white, perceptions of feminism to task, and articulated her view that all music, not just rap and hip hop, can be misogynistic:

> Jane: [I find myself] singing along to words that mortify me. A lot of the lyrics are about as misogynist as you can get.
>
> Gay: Yes, but the one thing I want to be clear on is that it's not just hip hop. All music is misogynistic, and hip hop often gets isolated as the problem child. And I'm like: "Have you listened to country music lately?"

In what seemed like a casual comment that aimed to call out all music genres for their misogyny, Gay actually highlighted how easy it has become to focus on the obvious misogyny of hip hop while ignoring the sexism in predominantly "white" music genres

such as country. As Gay furthered commented, this sexism is a result of the choices made by music artists: "They always make the easy choice and that easy choice is to degrade women." By pointing out how popular culture is geared towards misogyny, Gay reminded the audience of her earlier commentary on the importance of media literacy. The message to take from all of this seemed to be that one should be conscious of the media one consumes, be aware of the misogyny present in media, and attempt to make better choices.

While much of what Gay said during the interview was relatable, and not necessarily a cutting-edge or radical approach towards feminism, her perspective was refreshing. For instance, Gay's comments against "choice feminism" were very accessible, particularly as she outlined the limitations inherent in the concept. Choice feminism, a term coined by Linda Hirshman, refers to the notion that choosing is an inherently feminist act.[9] But the choices themselves escape criticism and scrutiny, which allows for the continuation of patriarchal social structures under the illusion of feminist progress. Rather than supporting this form of choice feminism, Gay noted that feminism needs to have a core set of principles and, while "they can be flexible," these principles cannot work if it is assumed that everything an "informed feminist" might choose to do is acceptable, or if each of their acts is held uncritically as "a feminist act." While this is hardly a new idea within contemporary feminist theory and the surrounding academic discourse, it is rare to find it in popular feminist discussions.

When asked if she thought that current feminism was inclusive, Gay responded,

> Feminism has a lot of work to do . . . Part of calling myself a bad feminist was partly tongue in cheek. Part of it was [that] good feminism has typically served the interest of white, heterosexual, middle-class women. And if that is good feminism, then I want no part in it.

Gay's acknowledgement of how much further feminism has to go seemed to be the at the heart of the event. Her ongoing pro-

fessionalism, valuable insights, and readiness to accept all of the questions put to her—regardless of time constraints—demonstrated why so many people had decided to attend this event. As a celebrity feminist who is committed to intersectionality within popular feminism, Gay holds a unique position among other "celebrity" feminists. The sheer amount of people in attendance looking toward Gay, wanting to hear her talk, and wanting to understand her take on feminism is testament to this.

If there was one main thing to be taken away from the event, it was Gay's point that dialogue around feminism and women's issues should continue and change. In particular, Gay noted that the continuation of the conversation about reproductive rights, though it might seem repetitive and redundant, is necessary for changing perceptions of birth control and a women's right to choose. Gay did comment, however, that although these conversations have continued in various forms since the 1970s, the discussion about women's rights, and further to that discussions about abuse survivors and recovery, must continue to improve, evolve, and progress into "*better* conversations." Many audience participants echoed this call to arms to expand and contribute to "the conversation" in order to give it longevity. The questions the participants asked reflected this desire to move feminism and feminist discussions forward. I, for one, could not help but feel affected by Gay's relatability and clarity of argument, and mostly I appreciated being there, being part of the conversation, and the knowledge that I am not and do not have to have these conversations alone.

Notes

1. Shane Rowlands and Margaret Henderson, "Damned Bores and Slick Sisters: The Selling of Blockbuster Feminism in Australia," *Australian Feminist Studies* 11, no. 23 (2010): 9–16.

2. Anthea Taylor, *Celebrity and the Feminist Blockbuster* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 36.

3. Ibid., 3

4. See Roxane Gay, *Bad Feminist: Essays* (New York: Harper, 2014).

5. Taylor, *Celebrity and the Feminist Blockbuster*, 211.

6. Ibid.

7. A sound recording of the event is available via the UNSW Arts & Social Sciences on Soundcloud; see https://soundcloud.com/unsw-arts-social-sciences/whats-feminism-got-to-do-with-it-in-conversation-with-the-bad-feminist-roxane-gay/.

8. See Roxanne Gay, "Confessions of a Bad Feminist," TED Talk, June 22, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fxt_MZKMdes.

9. Linda Hirshman, *Get To Work: A Manifesto For Women of the World* (New York: Viking, 2006), 1.

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