The Garden Statuary

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ABOUT THE JOURNAL

The Garden Statuary is the official Undergraduate Journal of English at The University of British Columbia, operated and peer-reviewed by UBC undergraduate students. We publish twice a year (once at the end of each term) both on our website and in a digital issue.

The journal began as the idea of a group of writers, artists, and musicians from a second year English honours class and has published 19 issues since September 2011. As "English" is a field of remarkable interdisciplinary richness and UBC students work in remarkably diverse mediums, we welcome a wide range of genres and forms: academic essays in the field of English, poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, stage and screenplay, photography, visual art, music, and film. Our mission is to provide a place for UBC undergraduates to showcase, celebrate, and share their work within the university and beyond. In turn, we hope we leave our student audiences feeling inspired and connected to the incredible energy and talent found in the community around them.

If you are a UBC undergraduate and wish to see your work on your print and/or digital pages, please peruse our submissions guidelines on our website www.thegardenstatuary.com. You can also contact us at thegardenstatuary@gmail.com. We're excited to see your work!

POETRY, PROSE, MULTIMEDIA AND ACADEMIC ESSAYS BY

AUDREY CASTILLO • DAX AVERY HAMOUTH • ALLEN HUANG • ELISE JUNCKER • AIMEE KORISTKA • GRACE LIU • DAN MILLER • KATRINA VON SALZEN • SAMHITA SHANKER • VALENTINA SIERRA • KAYLA WILFORD • CICELY WILLIAMS

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VOLUME 11.1 — WINTER 2021

A Note from the Editors-in-Chief

Hello!

Thank you for taking the time to read Issue 11.1 of The Garden Statuary. This year marks our return to in-person operations, and we received an unprecedented number of submissions alongside our return to campus! The continued and growing success of the journal speaks to our unique position in UBC's arts and cultural community, publishing academic essays, prose, poetry, and a variety of multimedia works.

We would like to thank our editors, illustrators, and executive team for their hard work to make this issue a possibility! In particular, we would like to thank Emma for tirelessly promoting the journal, Asya for organizing our many submissions, and Caitlin for creating the lovely digital issue you are reading right now! We would also like to thank last year's Editor-in-Chief Samantha Bowen for her support and guidance during our transition into her previous role. Thank you all - we could not have done it without you!

Whether published or unpublished, we would also like to thank all those who submitted their work for consideration in this issue. Though we cannot publish all the submissions we received, our team is constantly amazed by the quality of writing and incredible creativity on display from UBC students. Within this issue, we have published what we believe to be a diverse and enlightening selection of prose, academic, multimedia, and poetry pieces.

For those who will be continuing as undergraduates next term, please continue to submit your work! And for undergraduates and graduates alike, stay tuned for information on our Issue 11.2 launch party.

Finally, please enjoy this issue of The Garden Statuary!

All the best,

Avani Dhunna and Colby Payne
Editors-in-Chief

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In Variation

Dax Avery Hamouth

in twists and knots
the willow tree
births
a sigh
stretched out into eternity:

biological processes
mimicked over
and
over,
named Miracle,
dressed in

red twine bindings,
and cell tide mindings;

fingers crossing
caught bound
in incorrection to one letter
wrong

skin stretches over
muscle and fat:
canvas
over easel wood–

am I
painted wrong?

details of my geometry
clashing with tastes
of different movements,

who wants cubism in the impressionist
museum?

mirrors and gallery eyes that seem
scattered everywhere,
they always reflect
small images of mutilation
in the rounds of their
irises.
hatred is inevitable and encouraged;
friendly knives
say to skin the deer
in the frame:
there might be something better
underneath.

sinew and gore
sometimes preferable
to the skin which
aches and burns,

and when they come to clean me
my watercolours come
sloshing off
like new missing limbs–
another pain,
one of many

but there isn't much
room to fall apart
between the borders
of the fixture.

the yellow gallery lights;
they frame
my painting,
but they're tilted wrong,
so only the bottom edge
that was painted in later,
is illuminated

the devouring
apathy

–all as the nightwatchmen eyes up
the paintings like a pervert
tracing up with auburn
wood grain walls,
with predator's
gaze.

the way he lingers
on the edges of my portraiture
traces
the up and down
of the twists in my
frame
thinking all the time of the cost
of the paint of the golden
name on my side;
oh how it makes
my heart beat
with fear and revelry
a'twain:
O how fire
both burns
and animates.

He goes to work
beneath the window-ceiling-light
of the full moon
plucking my sisters off the walls–

"Oh, just *try* to steal me."

Collage

Elise Juncker

Artist's Statement

Parts of this piece are strangely menacing to me. The man in the bunny costume invokes an almost forgotten childhood horror. But what we once found strange or menacing, may now just be a part of life. This collage is scrapped together from both the actual content, but also the advertisements found in old issues of the National Geographic Magazine. The source mirrors the tension I feel between learning and earning. I believe that a lot of students feel the strain of academia being more and more commercialized, the pressure of making yourself "marketable", and the notion of the American Dream (= a sense of optimism for the future) slipping away further. This collage is meant to take old and new images, the familiar and the strange, and to blend it in a way that makes everything seem just a little off.

The Angel of Death: Analyzing Departures from the Chronic in Close to the Knives

Audrey Castillo

Close to the Knives by David Wojnarowicz is an example of "AIDS literature" (Bradway 256) that traverses the queer consciousness during the American AIDS epidemic. It contains the disembodied voices of a population neglected by its government and murdered through the "internaliz[ation of] society's hate" (Wojnarowicz 179). These circumstances characterized what Eric Cazdyn calls the "chronic mode" of contemporary queer communities, and this paper is interested in death as a mechanism for a departure from said chronic mode. Two mechanisms of departure will be explored in the thoughts and conversations contained within *Close to the Knives*—a physical one, and a mental and political one. Cazdyn's premise of the "already dead"—one that confounds the rigid temporal expectations regarding life and death—is a state of being where theoretically, a mental and political departure from the chronic mode of existence can occur. Lauren Berlant's theories of "slow death," "environment," and "event" lend nuance to Cazdyn's terms, and Lauren DeLand's notion of the "useful corpse" provides a locus in which the two departures exist simultaneously. The way that Wojnarowicz figures death as a departure from the chronic mode complicates the idea that revolution is "hopelessly utopian" (Cazdyn 6).

Cazdyn's idea of "the chronic mode" describes the consequences of late capitalist society and its tendency to forgo reformation in favor of maintenance in politics and culture (5). Cazdyn explains that societies suffering from the chronic mode not only recoil from terminality, but contort its capacity for positive change into a menacing "dystopian fantasy" (7). The malignant chronic mode functions as a euphemism for stagnation in the way that it encourages its population to accept a process that "effectively colonizes the future by naturalizing and eternalizing the brutal logic of the present" (Cazdyn 6). The power of an end goal is neutralized as it is rendered nothing more than a mechanism to sustain that which already is, and people are deluded into complying with, "settl[ing] for, and even fight[ing] for" (Cazdyn 5) eternal uniformity. Cazdyn bolsters his description of the chronic mode by including its literal manifestation in medicine, thereby equating diseased bodies with institutions infected by the "practical need to manage and stabilize" (6). In order to apply the idea of the chronic mode to

the political realm and introduce a means of "rethinking the relationship between life and death" (Cazdyn 6), he argues the need to dismantle the differences between the two while simultaneously preserving that division (Cazdyn 6). This paper is interested in the latter part of his argument, as the "autonomy of death" (Cazdyn 7) is integral to understanding it as a mechanism to depart from the chronic mode.

Death is important due to the actual act of ending that it brings about, as well as the promise of an end that it inspires. Cazdyn claims there is an inextricable connection between death as "the pure form of radical change" (7) and "our capacity to imagine other radical possibilities" (7). His subsequent descriptions are rousing and they culminate in the concept of the "already dead"—a mode of "revolutionary consciousness" (Cazdyn 7) that involves the recognition of a virgin future undetermined by the present. The already dead is a mindset that resists the chronic mode by opposing "the maintenance of the status quo" (5), remaining open to the terminality of current capitalist structures, and envisioning a future beyond a comfortable extension of the present. Cazdyn's argument reads as though the moment one realizes that imagination, revolution, and transformation exist in the universal, autonomous "right to die" (7), he is immediately liberated from any adversity that may characterize his chronic mode. The departure from the chronic mode is essentially automatic here, as if knowing this information is enlightening enough. However, this call to action is not one that mobilizes activism as easily and as extensively as Cazdyn theorizes. In actuality, the already dead are a rare breed, especially in populations subject to a chronic condition of physical and emotional collective suffering, gross governmental negligence, and pervasive societal persecution. It is exactly this kind of chronic mode—this oppressive and "diseased society" (Wojnarowicz 177) where widespread death in the queer population is not considered a crisis—that characterizes America during the

AIDS epidemic of the late twentieth century.

The gay community's chronic state of being as victims of social and physical sickness exists on the margins of what Wojnarowicz calls the "preinvented world" (181)—referring to the structures, institutions, and accepted rhythm of the world that people are born into. This world is a hostile, unwelcoming, cruel embodiment of "hell [...] on earth," (Wojnarowicz 46) for those it alienates. During the AIDS epidemic, the priests and politicians of the "preinvented world" (181), or according to Wojnarowicz, the "bigoted creeps who at this point in time [were] in the position of power," (180) demonized and neglected the gay population. They withheld money, medicine, and information about safe sexual practices (Wojnarowicz 167) and claimed that homosexuals were personally liable for contracting the disease. The government, with the help of the media, placed their responsibility of public health on the shoulders of its most vulnerable, leaving the gay population to suffer in a suffocating, destructive chronic mode.

When applying Cazdyn's claims about the autonomy of death and its role in the already dead to this kind of chronic mode, he assumes too much of both the persuasive power of his argument and its realistic viability. The argument's power to incite a revolutionary consciousness is feasible, however in a chronic mode saturated with death, pain, and trauma, identifying with the already dead is not an automatic, universal response. His claims take for granted the amount of energy necessary to adopt this mindset, as well as the resilience of a battered population. In actuality, not everybody is able to, or will want to, rise to the challenge of "inspir[ing] political movements" (Cazdyn 7). For some, the glamour of death does not go beyond its function as a physical terminal point; death is appealing solely as a guaranteed and permanent end to suffering. Therefore, a second iteration of death as a mechanism for departure from the chronic mode arises. In simple terms, the first is a mental and political departure from the chronic mode, facilitated through Cazdyn's concept of the already dead, and the second is a literal departure that comes with physical death—both of which are present in *Close to the Knives.* The latter is a response that Cazdyn's theory does not account for, however Wojnarowicz and his experiences reveal that these two are very much alive in the face of his chronic mode.

These two types of divergence from the chronic mode are in dialogue with Lauren Berlant's concept of "slow death" (100), as well as her meditation on the temporal differences between an "environment" and an "event" as belief systems for engaging with crises. Her theories directly characterize Wojnarowicz's circumstances, therefore lending nuance

to Cazdyn's chronic mode, and addresses the logistics of how death can be both part of and a catalyst to exiting the chronic state of existence. Berlant's slow death signifies "the physical wearing out of a population in a way that points to its deterioration as a defining condition of its experience and historical existence" (95). This concept is tied to processes of normalization, and it thrives in "temporally labile environments" (Berlant 100), places where crises are embedded in the ordinary. During the AIDS epidemic, the gay community was decimated by the "institutionalized homophobia" (Bradway 257) of the "preinvented world" (181), and it contributed to what Wojnarowicz calls a "windstorm of murder" (249). Hearing the news of someone dying from AIDS became "familiar" (Wojnarowicz 256) to him, and he alludes to the anesthetization that is implicit in slow death was becoming numb to the idea of death itself" (Wojnarowicz 256). Therefore, slow death is an extremely fitting term for the suffering that defined the queer state of existence at the time, where "survival [...] is such a transient thing" (Wojnarowicz 259); slow death describes their chronic mode of existence. In a population ravaged by social alienation, government abandonment, and a widespread, fatal disease, slow death is undeniably at work. Berlant's theory provides a stronger, more specific theoretical characterization to the queer chronic mode during the AIDS epidemic.

Berlant goes on to distinguish between the temporal elements of an environment and event and how their connotations impact the ways in which people perceive a crisis, thus clarifying how the two mechanisms of death provide divergence from the chronic state. Temporality does contribute to the difference between an environment and event, seeing as the latter is short-lived (Berlant 100). However, Berlant is more interested in the shock factor or noticeability that is generated by an event; her definition focuses on "its intensities and kinds of impact" (Berlant 101). An event calls attention to itself, is likely to adhere to one's memory, but most importantly, stands out from the ordinary. In comparison, her conception of an environment involves the development of "structural conditions [...] through a variety of mediations" (Berlant 101), effectively neutralizing the affective response that comes from an event. Berlant conceives of the environment as a levelling terrain with the capacity to absorb commotion, crises, and events into the abyss of ordinariness (101). When applying this to Wojnarowicz's reality, both versions of departure from the chronic mode correspond to one of Berlant's terms. The idea of the chronic mode, one typified by slow death, can be considered an environment and Cazdyn's notion of the already dead—a mental and political departure from the chronic mode—as adopting a mindset to reform it. In contrast, the physical departure from the chronic mode through death can be categorized as an event.

Death as an event, the ultimate escape from the queer chronic mode characterized by slow death, is tracked in the prevalent craving for physical death throughout *Close to the Knives*. Early in the memoir, Wojnarowicz reflects on the feelings that arise when he finds himself on the fringes of established cities and towns—completely empty landscapes that have managed to lose their "earth[,] muscle[, and] fur" (63). This void, being an alternative to the "industrial void of the cities," (Wojnarowicz 63) should provide a sense of liberation, an opportunity to find "psychic room" (Wojnarowicz 298). Instead, Wojnarowicz experiences the physical pressure of the "preinvented world" (181), pushing him to vanish either "within [this] civilizational landscape or else expelled off the face of the earth" (Wojnarowicz 64). He "does not mind" (Wojnarowicz 64) either form of disappearance, and his submission to the pressure comes from recognizing the ubiquitousness of homophobia in the chronic mode. Additionally, Wojnarowicz actually admits "having wrestled with thoughts of suicide" (335) as he struggles with the "preinvented world's" (181) ultimatum for the marginalized: "remain invisible or die" (335). Explicitly stating this desire for a permanent end speaks to the perverted temporality of the chronic mode. In any kind of chronic mode, where the present hegemonizes the future, all that remains mysterious is death (Wojnarowicz 313). In one characterized by a "**FEAR OF DIVERSITY**" (Wojnarowicz 236) and slow death, suicide seems like a logical, if not expected, desire. Furthermore, his interviews conducted with friends reveal that this feeling of resignation is embedded in a collective queer consciousness during the AIDS epidemic. Wojnarowicz is not the only one who is hyper aware of how "he wake[s] up every morning in this killing machine called america," (247) or that this chronic mode is dictated and perpetuated by "death god[s]" (269) disguised as politicians. Dakota's letter to Johnny, outlining how "he was really tempted to just give away everything he owned and just duke it out with nature," (Wojnarowicz 314) is a point of relation between three characters — Johnny, Dakota, and Wojnarowicz. This "impulse" (Wojnarowicz 315) to "giv[e] up on the world and the imposed structure of everyday life" (Wojnarowicz 315) is a shared one; they all participate in the same dialogue of surrender.

The intense desire to die culminates in his friend Dakota's suicide, and Wojnarowicz includes an interview with his friend Sylvia where she describes what she believes was the motive behind his actions. Her answer relates to the chronic mode that is the "preinvented world" (Wojnarowicz 181), as she explains that there is an appeal of "*wanting to adapt*" to its "structure" (Wojnarowicz 376). To her, Dakota did not kill himself due to the mere existence of the structure, or

because he "didn't believe in anything it stood for" (Wojnarowicz 376), but because of its hostility, its selectivity, and the fact that he was unable "to fit into it no matter what it stood for" (Wojnarowicz 376). Sylvia then goes on to say that attempting to distance oneself from these "bigger structure[s]" completely is impossible because smaller structures will always be measured against them (Wojnarowicz 376). Dakota's suicide is a clear example of death as an event to depart from the queer chronic mode, rather than "try[ing] and struggl[ing to] survive in it" (Wojnarowicz 315) .

On the other hand, the memoir also follows death as a catalyst for mental severance from the queer chronic mode. It tracks Wojnarowicz's shift from suicidal tendencies to something more congruent with Cazdyn's notion of the already dead, and positions art as the physical manifestation of inhabiting Cazdyn's revolutionary consciousness. Wojnarowicz is diagnosed with AIDS himself, and standing on the "edge of mortality," (172) he no longer wants to die. He "[doesn't] want to cease to exist" (Wojnarowicz 355) because he realizes the issue with viewing death as an event: "one can't affect things in one's death, other than momentarily" (Wojnarowicz 355). As such, corporeal death means eternal silence, and this negates any of death's former seduction for him. In living through the slow death of the queer community, Wojnarowicz becomes "the repository of so many voices and memories and gestures of those [...] *who have died from the way this disease was handled*" (354). This responsibility is incompatible with a pale, cold, mouth sewn shut, and this jolts him from the "self-destruction that [his] other friends found themselves spinning into uncontrollably" (Wojnarowicz 356). Upon realizing that he must live in order to depart from and reform the chronic mode, he enters the realm of the already dead—he "inhabits revolution" (Cazdyn 9).

However, Wojnarowicz contends with the transience of life and his ability to "inform political movements" (Cazdyn 9) in his statement that "[he] cannot scream continuously without losing [his] voice" (355). In order to continue the work of the already dead, Wojnarowicz relocates it within something void of mortality: his art. To create art on paper, canvas, film, or any other palpable medium is to "[leave] evidence of life behind [after having] moved on" (Wojnarowicz 238). According to Jacob Mullan Lipman, art is "a means through which the individual can construct for themselves a definable heritage, which will extend beyond their physical death" (377). Wojnarowicz's art, his "historical records [of] existence," (227) is not subject to the warped and "controlled" (Lipman 362) timeline of the chronic mode. It cannot be exhausted by slow death, it is immune to disease, and it "[speaks] even when [the artist is] silent" (Wojnarowicz 227). Therefore,

the immortal nature of art makes it the perfect arena for the already dead and the "disruptive temporality of queer utopianism" (Lipman 378).

Besides Wojnarowicz's own art, he includes his friend Johnny's "xerox magazine called *MURDER*" (260) as an example of art with the power to disrupt the chronic mode. The magazine exists to portray murder in all its forms, and it includes "found clippings from newspapers, photographs of both real and staged murders, [and] drawings of mayhem" (Wojnarowicz 273). Johnny concludes that "people are unable to respond emotionally to reality unless it is translated through media images" (Wojnarowicz 275). Here, photos are situated as the sole authority on triggering affective responses. Their capacity to do this, in conjunction with the fact that art is suspended from the chronic timeline, gives photographs the power to either change or perpetuate the chronic mode. Johnny's stills force people to confront the gory truth of the "packaged world;" its "fake moral backdrops," "illusion[s] of security," and "created system of corruption" (Wojnarowicz 137, 92, 93). His magazine exposes the artificiality of the "preinvented world" (Wojnarowicz 181), and evokes the "new radical temporality or spatiality" (Cazdyn 7) of the already dead.

A mental and political departure from the chronic mode is implicit in physical death, making coexistence between the two seem impossible. However, Lauren DeLand purports her theory of the "useful corpse" which acts as a locus where the two types of departure are reconciled. The useful corpse repurposes the otherwise "expendable" (Wojnarowicz 338) bodies of the marginalized, conveying them as "more useful dead than alive" (DeLand). DeLand claims that these corpses "stage [their] own disappearance in order to command the attention necessary to sustain life." At one point in the memoir, Wojnarowicz explores how "each public discourse of a fragment of private reality serves as a dismantling tool" (Wojnarowicz 179) against the chronic mode. He contemplates the various means of "making the private grief public" (180) and conjures a perverse version of the typical memorial. He imagines a mass grave on the steps of the white house; a mountain of necrotic flesh composed of "lover[s], friend[s], [and] stranger[s]" lost to the AIDS epidemic (Wojnarowicz 181). In this image, DeLand describes how the "[once] vilified corpse [functions as] a political weapon to be detonated at the door of those directly responsible for perpetuating the epidemic," and "indicts" the chronic mode that facilitates it. Like art, the dead body becomes a site for the already dead to inhabit, and the physical departure from the chronic mode no longer inhibits the possibility of a mental or political one as well. Though these are "tragically perverse bod[ies]" (DeLand), Wojnarowicz finds comfort in seeing

them "mark time and place and history in such a public way" (182). When the disintegration of the queer population becomes standard, and homosexuals dying of AIDS becomes commonplace, the useful corpse must be utilized in order for their deaths to have meaning. They are visible to the American public in ways that living bodies were not (DeLand), and the notion of the useful corpse embodies a final resort for the gay community to halt slow death and redefine the chronic mode.

Close to the Knives is deafening in its portrayal of the queer consciousness during the AIDS epidemic, representing the voices of people "expected to quietly and politely make house" (Wojnarowicz 169) in the slaughterhouse that is America. It is located in a chronic mode characterized by "society's hatred and repression of homosexuality," (Wojnarowicz 179) and the memoir follows two major ways in which death functions as a departure from this chronic mode. In the thoughts and conversations traced throughout the book, one hears a chorus yearning for escape, whether it be physically or mentally, from their circumstances of slow death. In DeLand's theory of the useful corpse, there is a space for both departures to complement one another and exist simultaneously. Evidently, Wojnarowicz uses his art to cheat the corporeal limits of the already dead and perpetuate its reformative mandate—all of which continue to disrupt the chronic mode today.

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at the bus stop, a tired boy speaks to death

Kayla Wilford

the boy is barely a man, black clothes veiling frail bones
and a victorian disposition under moonlight and mist.
he sits on a sad corner street under neon light
and butchers meat and wonders where to go.

but the concrete is cold, frozen feet tucked under
the dim gold of bus bench chrome, and he supposes
home was never more than a brief room to roam.
a roof to hide from snow, throw rocks through windows,
crawl in attics too low. well, caesar's palace
collapsed and now this hideaway haven of blacklist crow and night-kissed raven is all that's left.

free of faux-family, fate's theft, he sits
on grey ground, gone is blessed green grass.
road's pavement becomes twilight's tired chateau,
but still he does not know what to do, nor where to go.

and it's much too cold to be sitting still,
pale fingers shaking in shallow pockets, sweet
thoughts soaked in sad brine floating near nighttime.
memories flash by of sunrise eyes and lime sour smiles
but he's walked too many miles for sweet sleep
to reach him now. so he fixes one prayer
in this fear painted affair, and to heaven he avows.

i don't wish to live but i don't wish to die.
a coward's declaration, death replies. you may choose one
or another, but to choose none at all, to leap blind wild,
is simply to suffer immortal, my unfortunate child.
you know this sad end so certain to be true?
yes, death replies, and you would do well to learn so, too.

thus, listening to the soft score of silence and corner store
voices, contemplating his choices under coal-lined clouds and
sombre black sky, the boy of barely age, to assuage
his new-found friend, decided life was worth a try.

Dear Anyone

Katrina von Salzen

Dear Anyone,

I want us to be friends, you and I. Because friends tell each other secrets. I have a secret- but no one to tell. Will you hold my secret? Will you keep it with you, hold it close to your heart, let it flutter inside of you like a butterfly? I don't know if you're a man or a woman, if you're short or tall, if you're handsome or ugly. I don't care very much anyway. All I care about is that you'll listen to my secret. You can decide after that if you'd like to keep it or not.

Now that we're friends, I should tell you about myself because friends are supposed to know things about each other. I wish I could know things about you, too. Maybe if you concentrate really hard, you can send yourself to me through the air between us. I'll try and listen for you, I promise.

There's a list of facts about myself that are true.

1. I'm good playing the violin
2. I'm not often very kind to myself, which is also why
3. #1 is a lie. I'm amazing at the violin (at least according to anyone who has ever heard me)
4. I love avocado toast and Ben and Jerry's ice cream

5. I love the colour purple, but not just any purple, a certain shade of purple, dark. Soft and violent. It reminds me of the plums I used to eat during long hot days at my grandmother's house. The sticky sweet juice would run down my chin. It tasted like summer.
6. I have a best friend named River
7. When I was six years old, I almost drowned in the ocean at my aunt Hope's. I remember the darkness behind my closed eyes and I remember the silence. For a second, it was almost peaceful. For a second, I could believe that I was already a ghost, dancing below the waves

That is the list of facts about myself that are true. Or I should say that it is a list of things that used to be true.

After last summer, my list needed some updating.

1. ~~I'm good playing the violin~~ I haven't even touched my violin since June
2. ~~I'm not often very kind to myself which is also why~~ I am never kind to myself
3. ~~#1 is a lie. I'm amazing at the violin (at least according to anyone who has ever heard me)~~ If I picked up my violin now, I'm not even sure my fingers would remember how to play
4. ~~I love avocado toast and Ben and Jerrys ice cream~~ I can't remember the last time I ate either
5. ~~I love the colour purple, but not just any purple, a certain shade of purple, dark. Soft and violent. It reminds me of the plums I used to eat during long hot days at my grandmother's house. The sticky sweet juice would run down my chin. It tasted like summer~~ the colour purple reminds me of a couch in a dark basement. A mildew scent, cold fabric, rough on my skin. The saggy pillows, worn out from the people who shared short moments of their lives on it before standing up and continuing their days.
6. ~~I have a best friend named River~~ I don't anymore
7. ~~When I was six years old, I almost drowned in the ocean at my aunt's. I remember the darkness behind my closed eyes and I remember the silence. For a second, it was almost peaceful. For a second, I could believe that I was already a ghost, dancing below the waves~~ I went swimming at that same spot. I felt the ocean's tug on me, her waves holding me like a child in a mother's arms. She tugged at me, whispering that I should allow myself to go with her. I almost did.

I think you must know me pretty well now, don't you? Maybe you're wondering about why I stopped playing violin or you're wondering about that purple couch or about my former friend River. I want to tell you about that. I want to tell you all of it. But you have to promise me you'll listen. I don't just mean listen the way that you listen when your mom tells you to clean your room, or the way you do when your teacher is hushing you because you're being disruptive. I mean really listen. Listen softly, listen kindly. Just listen.

My parents had finally had enough when I tried to cut open my stomach. They thought that I was suicidal, that I'd tried to kill myself. I tried to explain to them that that wasn't it. I hadn't tried to cut open my stomach to kill myself (too slow, too painful).
I'd tried to cut open my stomach because I wanted to see what was inside of me. Maybe if I opened my skin, I'd thought, I could crawl out of my human shell. It hadn't felt like my home for awhile now anyway. I wanted to move out.

They didn't buy that though, and as soon as I was back from the hospital, my mother informed me that I would be leaving the actual home I currently lived in.

"You're kicking me out?" My mother likes to garden, do puzzles, and crochet. On the weekends, she volunteers at the soup kitchen. She wouldn't have the heart to abandon me.

"Not kicking out," my father interjected before my mother could respond, "we just think it would be good for you to spend some time with your aunt."

"Aunt Hope? But she lives, like, in the middle of nowhere!"

My parents exchanged looks and I could tell they'd practiced this beforehand.

"You haven't been yourself lately."
"We're worried about you."
"Some time by the ocean will do you good."

My parents spoke in short bursts, their sentences dry but factual.

I left the table and slammed the door. But to be honest with you, I wasn't really upset. It was just what I knew I was supposed to do then. What any teenager would have done then. But I didn't really care. Whether I was laying in bed in my purple bedroom with a view of the road or laying in bed at aunt Hope's house with a view of the ocean, it didn't really make a difference. I just didn't care.

Are you still listening friend? Did I scare you away when I talked about cutting open my stomach? Maybe you're afraid of blood. Maybe you're the type of person who faints when they see it. Don't worry, I'm done talking about the blood now. I promise.

My aunt lived in a tiny town called Beavertown. I'm not even joking right now, that is its actual name. I had to take two flights and a bus to even get close but the nearest I could get was still about an hour away from my aunt's house.

Aunt Hope picked me up in a grey Volvo. It was dented at the side and a long scratch ran along the driver's door. The inside smelled like dead fish, or maybe old seaweed.

"You didn't bring your violin?" was the first thing aunt Hope asked me once I'd managed to pry open the door of the car. Aunt Hope teaches piano. She always loved that I played violin. She called it my "musical gift". Like it was something that had been given to me rather than something I'd earned.

"No" I said simply, too tired to explain that I didn't play anymore. I'd twisted the pegs until the strings snapped off. If I told aunt Hope that, though, I'm pretty sure she'd cry as if someone had cut open her stomach too.

"Hmm well that's okay. Maybe Fredrick can lend you one."
Beavertown is so small that everyone knows everyone. I didn't even bother to ask who Fredrick was. Probably one of my Aunt's crazy friends who makes his own clothing and doesn't believe in cellphones. That whole town is basically stuck in the past.

Aunt Hope tried to talk to me the entire drive. She told me about the tomatoes she was growing in her backyard, her border collie's obsession with swimming, her piano students. I only half listened. I was thinking about

my own misery and about how unfair it all was. I was thinking about how I should have pressed the knife in deeper.

Okay sorry, you're right, I said no more blood. I don't want to talk about that much anymore anyway. It was kind of gross and kind of sad and the more I think about it now the more ashamed of myself I get.

How about I tell you about Aunt Hope's house instead? It's right by the ocean. If you walk five minutes out the back door, your toes are already being kissed by the salty water. The first few weeks I was there, aunt Hope constantly tried to get me to go outside with her. She loved swimming and swam almost every morning.

"It's a beautiful day today!" she would say, ripping open the curtains, allowing the sunlight to hit my closed eyes. "Are you coming for our swim?"

Every morning, I didn't respond. Every morning, she would come in and try again.

She would try all day to find ways to get me out of bed. I probably should have been grateful that someone cared that much about me but I wasn't. I wanted her to leave me alone so that I could bury my face into my pillow and let the stupid stupid world go on without me in it.

Sometimes she would play the piano downstairs. She tried everything, from jazz to ragtime to modern pop. "Come on!" she'd shout from downstairs, "I'm missing a singer!"

One day I tiptoed down the stairs and touched a key with my pointer finger. It felt cold and smooth to my touch. I held it down until the sound faded into the still summer night. For a brief second it made me miss the strings of my violin. When I turned around, Aunt Hope was standing behind me. She looked so proud that I felt that shame rise in me again and I quickly hurried up the stairs, away from her loving eyes.

Do you understand me, friend? Have you ever felt like that? I can't even think of a way to say it poetically. I felt awful. I felt like I'd lost who I was and that I could never get her back. I felt like I was trapped in my body, in my life. Too tired to move, too broken-hearted to sleep. Every night, I wandered the halls of my elementary school in my dreams. He was always there. Always a few steps behind me or beside me. Always, he told me everything he hadn't in our waking hours together. He told me he was sorry. He told me loved me. I awoke from these dreams yearning for a past that didn't exist. Like the ocean's tides, it always escaped back. I couldn't catch it. I couldn't catch him.

Aunt Hope drove me into town one day. "We have a market on Saturdays" she told me. "It'll be fun. I'll buy you ice cream."

She parked the car in a dusty gravel parking lot. As we were walking away, she stopped abruptly "Oh, I think I forgot the bags. Could you be a dear and go grab them for me?"

"No," I said. It was a whisper at first. I cleared my throat. "No I can't go get your stupid bags."

My aunt blinked at me in surprise. She didn't say anything. I looked past her shoulder, at a squirrel in a tree. I didn't want to see her.

"You're so annoying all the time. Can you just leave me alone?" the words came out from somewhere deep inside of me. A space I have no control over. It was me and it wasn't.

"I hate you," I seethed at her. Like a child who's been denied a toy. "I hate you," I said again. I was almost screaming at this point. My aunt still didn't react, just kept staring at me with her deep brown eyes.

I'm only telling you this because we're friends. And friends can show each other the worst parts of themselves. I hope that's okay with you. I want to tell you that I liked it. I liked how it felt to yell at her. I liked how it felt when I knew I was hurting her. I wanted her to hurt, wanted her to feel the sting of my words. Maybe there was a certain power in it, in making her feel the same hurt I had been feeling all these weeks. Maybe I just didn't want to be the only one suffering.

I finally stopped yelling at her when she grabbed my fist. I suddenly realized I'd been punching her chest. Lightly, but enough that it hurt.
"Stop," she said softly.
"No" Tears slid down my cheeks. I felt angry. I felt pathetic. But mostly, I just felt empty.
"Stop," she said again, stronger this time. I did.

That night, I joined her on the beach. She did that sometimes, sat on the back porch and watched the waves until late into the night, a candle her only light.
I sat beside her, wrapped in the purple blanket she had bought for me. Neither of us said anything and I was reminded of what a coward I was. I'd yelled at my aunt and now, when I wanted to apologize, I couldn't even find the words. She spoke first.
"You must be very angry."
"No," I told her, "I don't feel much of anything."
The waves washed up onto the shore and the summer breeze blew through my hair, caressing me like my mother used to when I was very young. I imagined walking into the ocean and disappearing into bubbles on the surface.
"Why did you stop playing violin?"
I shrugged. "I don't know." We were silent again. "It didn't feel right anymore. Making something beautiful".
"Why?" she asked simply.

You've probably been waiting for me to tell you my secret. I've probably kept you at the edge of your seat, waiting for something to happen. Instead all you've gotten is a story about a pathetic girl who was once talented and kind and funny.
My aunt told me that we need stories to

heal. That, like music, we need to create something from all the nothingness that is inside of us.

River was my best friend. Sometimes, my only friend. When he raped me in his basement on that ugly purple couch with the saggy pillows, I thought my life would stop. I thought there couldn't be a tomorrow anymore, only a yesterday in which he loved me and I trusted him. But when tomorrow came, I was reminded of his rough hands on my fragile skin, I felt cheated. My life was supposed to end. That night. But instead it had to go on, dragging me with it. I looked at myself naked in the mirror. I ran my hands up and down the skin of my stomach, the skin of my thighs. I felt the softness of what had once been my home and realized that I was a stranger in it now. I was no longer welcome. That was what he had done to me, he had forced me out of my own skin. But I couldn't hate him. I could never hate River. I could only love him more in his absence and hate myself because of it.

That's my big and terrible secret. Are you disappointed? Did you hope I was a spy or a secret millionaire? I'm sorry that I'm not.

I didn't feel immediately better after I told my aunt. It wasn't an instant fix, as much as I wanted it to be. But, the next morning I went outside with her for our swim. I didn't swim, but I watched her. My aunt says that's enough for now.

Aunt Hope started to teach me how to play piano. I'd loved the violin all my life, had never understood the value of any other instrument. But my aunt showed me how the piano could be soft and angry and sad and happy all in the same song. "You'll feel all of that again too," she told me. I wasn't sure if I should believe her. I'd felt nothing for so long, I wasn't sure I was ready to allow any emotion, even happiness, back into my body. But I nodded, because I loved my aunt and because there was always a chance that she was right. For the first time since that night on the purple couch, I wanted to take that chance.

I should let you get on with your day now, my friend. You probably have dishes to wash or a dog to walk or homework to do. That's okay. You were here and you listened. That's all I can ask of anyone.

I'm writing this on my last night at aunt Hope's place. I'm not sure my story has a happy ending. I think I'm still right in the middle of it. Maybe one day, many years from now, we'll talk again. I will tell you how I've missed you and you will say the same. We'll trade our stories. Maybe I'll be able to tell you how wonderful my life has become since that summer in Beavertown. Maybe you'll tell me you knew I'd be okay all along. We'll hug like old friends do. I'll buy you a coffee.

Do you take cream or sugar?

When her "skin dissolved under that gaze": Reclaiming a Remedial Look in Beloved

Cicely Williams

As bell hooks notes in her scholarship on the Black gaze, "The politics of slavery, of racialized power relations, were such that the slaves were denied their right to gaze" (115). Quite literally, enslaved persons were often "punished ... for looking," and accordingly, she believes that this denial of "black peoples' right to gaze ... produced in us an overwhelming longing to look" (116). hooks explains that the Black "oppositional gaze" is a "site of resistance," wherein the Black subject "look[s] back" and "interrogate[s] the gaze of the Other," the "Other" being the agents of racialized oppression (116). Correspondingly, much of the scholarship on the way Toni Morrsion frames "looking relations" in her novels addresses her exploration

of "the controlling gaze of a dominant, racially oppressive society" and how the Black characters "internalize[]" and/or resist this "gaze of the Master" (Guerrero 762). As the object of this gaze, many of Morrison's characters dare to "look back," thereby usurping the subject position and reclaiming autonomy by way of their look (hooks 116).

Yet, true reclamation of the self after being continually objectified by a dominant gaze (the most relevant to *Beloved* being the gaze of white slave-owners), is perhaps not as simple as continually subverting the subject/object dichotomy so that Black people may inhabit the subject position, and white oppressors, the object position. For, in addition to being denied "their right to gaze" back at the white slave-owners, Morrison's *Beloved* shows that Black people were similarly prevented from gazing at one another (hooks 115). As is the case with Sethe and Halle, the couple "saw each other in full daylight only on Sundays. The rest of the time they spoke or touched or ate in darkness" (31). Looking at each other was a luxury that the barbaric work schedules of slavery did not afford them. Therefore, Beloved is not only about Black people enacting resistance by gazing back at white oppressors, but also by gazing at one another.

Yet, in denying Black people "their right to gaze," white slave owners attached a hierarchy to the concept of looking and being looked at (hooks 115). According to their model of the gaze, the looking 'subject' always has the power and the pleasure, degrading the looked-at 'object' with a violating and objectifying look. Consequently, in order for *Beloved*'s characters to derive mutual empowerment from gazing at one another, they must deconstruct this hierarchy, and thereby eliminate the derogatory connotations of being the object of the gaze. Indeed, by exploring Morrison's incorporation of the gaze into the healing processes of *Beloved*'s Black characters, I identify a strategic distancing of the gaze from its conventional power dynamics. Morrison demonstrates that in addition to usurping the subject position, Denver, Sethe, and Paul D must learn that being the object of an empathetic party's gaze is just as spiritually remedial, and crucial for destabilizing the "Gaze of the Master" (Guerrero 762).

Of all *Beloved*'s characters, except for perhaps Beloved herself, Denver is the most unaccustomed to gazing or being gazed at. As the only central character who was not born into slavery, she has little first-hand experience with the dominating white gaze. Yet, since she was raised by Sethe, who spent her young life enslaved, Denver is hardly more accustomed than her mother to ideas of self-ownership and subjectivity. Additionally, the Black community's rejection of her and Sethe, after Sethe's infanticide, means that Denver has long

been "the object of an exclusionary gaze" from other Black people (Wallace-Sanders 181). However, this gaze is perhaps more felt than literally experienced: Denver's twelve year isolation period with "no visitors ... no friends," means that she does not experience looking or being looked at by hardly anyone but Sethe for most of her life (Morrison 14). As Molly Volanth Hall observes, this "loneliness" means she is "unable" to maintain a sense of "subjectiv[ity]," that is, she does not know how to connect with others as a looking subject (557). Nor is she comfortable being the object of the gaze, as when Sethe and Paul D take her to the carnival, she does not directly engage with others, and is only relieved to find that the "crowd of people ... did not find her the main attraction" (58). Unaccustomed to seeing or being seen, she has not yet realized how much she desires to inaugurate herself into a pleasurable experience of looking.

However, when Beloved arrives, the ghostly manifestation of her dead infant sister, Beloved satiates Denver's long repressed "hunger" to gaze and be gazed at (139). And, Denver privileges the experience of being the object of the gaze over being the subject. She specifies that although "looking [at Beloved] was food enough to last," being "looked at in turn was beyond appetite" (139). Beloved's satiation of Denver's "appetite" to be beheld marks the moment at which Denver begins to realize her own subjectivity. This is because the experience is not of being "stared at, not seen," but rather, of "being pulled into view by the interested, uncritical eyes of the other" (139). This act in turn forces her to recognize her own materiality and conscious agency. And Beloved's eyes, being "interested, uncritical," indicates that her gaze seeks to understand Denver rather than scrutinize her. In perceiving that her appearance appeals to Beloved, Denver experiences a positive validation of her identity. In turn, this opens up the possibility for *Denver* to acknowledge and take pleasure in her own corporal existence, since Beloved has shown her that others are able to.

Moreover, Morrison's figuration of the gaze in terms of "food," "hunger," and "appetite" frames this experience as life-sustaining (139). Having one's existence validated by the "uncritical" gaze of another becomes nourishing, and as necessary to corporal function as food. Inhabiting the object position, in this case, does not mean debasement or immobilization. Instead, it provides the nourishment Denver needs to develop a newfound sense of self-reliance; Beloved's gaze satiates Denver's constant "hunger" because it fills her up with external validation. With this need fulfilled, she achieves self-sustaining *internal* validation, a state of burgeoning self-reliance, which takes form in her sense of, "Needing nothing. Being what there was" (139). With no more external "need[s]," Denver feels that her identity and body

not only deserve a place in the world, but are the whole world for her: she simply is "what there was" (139).

Indeed, the gaze between Beloved and Denver resonates with bell hooks's description of the gaze between two Black women in the film *Passion of Remembrance*, who, dressing and dancing before going to a party together, "appear completely focused on their encounter with black female-ness," and "display their bodies not for a voyeuristic colonizing gaze but for that look of recognition that affirms their subjectivity" (130). Even if Denver is not yet sure that Beloved is her sister, their shared identity as young Black women prompts Denver to infer that she will be able to recognize herself within Beloved. Experiencing this "look of recognition" enables Denver to acknowledge her own "subjectivity" (hooks 130). As hooks articulates about the women in *Passion of Remembrance*, "It is this process of mirrored recognition that enables both black women to define their reality, apart from the reality imposed upon them by structures of domination" (129-30). Because Beloved's gaze "affirms [her] subjectivity," inhabiting the object position becomes associated with self-governance, thereby juxtaposing the immobilizing intentions of the white gaze. Morrison shows a Black girl recognizing herself within another, and this rehabilitates Denver's sense of individuality. As the object of the gaze, she garners the requisite self-assurance to inhabit the subject position in turn.

Of course, this is not to suggest that Beloved has a positive influence upon Denver and Sethe. As the ghostly manifestation of repressed trauma and the "collective suffering" of slavery, Beloved feeds upon Sethe's pain, and her expulsion is necessary for the family to heal (Wallace-Sanders 187). However, it is hard to say that Denver's empowerment under Beloved's gaze is not one of the positive effects of Beloved's presence. And, she is the catalyst to Denver's eventual decision to leave 124 Bluestone Road and rejoin the Black community. For, by the time Beloved begins to make "demands" and consume their resources, with Sethe helpless to deny her, it is Denver who musters the autonomy to "step off the edge of the world" and into the community to seek their help (281-3). The connection between her decision to do so and Beloved's once-empowering gaze parallels the process bell hooks attributes to the "look of recognition" between the two women in *Passion of Remembrance*: "Mutually empowered" by a shared, affirming gaze, "they eagerly leave the privatized domain to confront the public" (130). Morrison seems to suggest that Denver's sense of self-affirmation, which Beloved's gaze helps her achieve, is a necessary condition for her ability to "confront the public." Beloved's gaze helps Denver satiate her "hunger" to be looked at and achieve a state of "Needing nothing. Being what there was" (139). However, this is in contrast to Sethe,

whom Beloved feeds off of until both of them are "rationing their strength to fight each other," for both literal food and spiritual sustenance: "The hungrier they got, the weaker [they got]" (139, 281). Only Denver, who now "need[s] nothing," has already had her "hunger" satiated, and trusts her own internal strength, can venture being "swallowed up in the world beyond the edge of the porch" and return safely with the help she needs (139, 286).

Furthermore, once Denver enters the community, the mutually affirming gazes she partakes in with its members nurture her growing independence. In fact, the first words spoken to her encourage visual self-affirmation. Opening the door to her, Lady Jones says, "'Why Denver, ... Look at you'" (290). No matter how subtle, this greeting heightens Denver's awareness of her own presence and worth. First, the use of her name alerts her to the fact that she is valued enough to be remembered, even after twelve years. Then, the following imperative phrase instructs Denver to "look at" herself, which not only reminds Denver of her corporal identity, but endows it with positive connotations; it implies that her body is valuable and worth looking at. And, the following sentence, "Lady Jones had to take her by the hand and pull her in," recalls the language used to describe the gaze between Denver and Beloved (290). Just as Beloved's "interested, uncritical eyes," "pulled [Denver] into view," Lady Jones "pulls" Denver into her home (139, 290). Perhaps then, Lady Jones's action takes on a symbolic function: in addition to pulling Denver into her home, she pulls Denver into her "view," her gaze indeed being "interested, uncritical" (139). The two instances of being "pulled" have the same effect on Denver: she feels her existence "recogni[zed]" and appreciated by an understanding Black woman (hooks 130).

Moreover, the consequent empowerment allows Denver to not only ask for the help she needs, but to reciprocate Lady Jones's gaze: "'Food. My ma'am, she doesn't feel good.' 'Oh, baby,' said Mrs. Jones. 'Oh, baby.' *Denver looked up at her*" (292, emphasis mine). Being called into this woman's view allows her to become a looking subject in turn. And, in this moment, Denver experiences not only the onset of her personal subjectivity but of her womanhood. Morrison writes, "She did not know it then, but it was the word 'baby,' said softly and with such kindness, that inaugurated her life in the world as a woman" (292). Ironically, the word "baby" initiates her passage into maturity, even though its literal meaning implies the opposite. Yet, in the same way that being the object of Lady Jones's gaze builds rather than diminishes her subjectivity, being called "baby" distances her from a dependent, infant-like state and completes her "inaugurat[ion]" into womanhood. Being an 'object' of the gaze is not degrading, just as being a 'baby' to Mrs. Jones is not infantilizing; instead,

being an 'object' teaches her how to be a subject, and being a 'baby' teaches her how to be a woman. Morrison reverses the usual connotations of these two concepts in order to show how an empathetic exchange of the gaze between two Black women is a remedial experience. It eliminates the power dynamic which a racially oppressive society attaches to conceptions of being the subject or object of the gaze.

Later, Denver encounters Nelson Lord, who similarly alerts her to ideas of self-ownership. With a smile Nelson says, "Take care of yourself, Denver" (297). This imperative idiom, like Lady Jones's "look at you" forces Denver to acknowledge she is responsible for her own selfhood. And, Denver admits this is a first for her: "It was a new thought, having a self to look out for and preserve" (297). Not only does Denver realize her identity, independent from her mother, Beloved, and inherited trauma, but she realizes that this newfound, independent self is deserving of care and preservation. It is the visual and verbal acknowledgement of the self from another Black person that enables her to begin her own process of recovery, and her hand in the banishment of Beloved, or metaphorically the residual trauma of slavery. By inhabiting the object position and being "pulled into view" by the "interested [and] uncritical" gazes of empathetic Black community members, Denver is able to learn her own value and to become a gazing subject in her own right (139).

The gaze plays an equally important role in Sethe's healing process, the most helpful gaze being that of Paul D. Importantly, their relationship dynamic denies any model of the gaze that suggests a gendered hierarchy. Perhaps the most well-known framework of gendered gazes comes from Laura Mulvey in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," which alleges a dichotomy between the "woman as (passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man" (67). Just like the "Gaze of the Master," which attempts to confine Black people to a derogatorily coded object position, Mulvey's "male gaze" characterizes the beheld woman as invaded and immobilized by the conquering gaze of the male subject (Guerrero 762). Many Black feminist scholars, and bell hooks in particular, have excluded themselves from this model, arguing that Black women have created "a critical space where the binary opposition Mulvey posits of 'woman as image, man as bearer of the look' was continually deconstructed" (122-3). Concordantly, Morrison uses Sethe and Paul D's relationship to exemplify a non-hierarchical gaze. Paul D's "male gaze" does not "project[] its phantasy on to the female figure," and Sethe *certainly* does not perform her "traditional exhibitionist role" and passively cater to his supposed voyeurism (Mulvey 62). Instead, they interchangeably occupy the subject and object positions, forming a mutually

empowering, understanding, and ultimately healing gaze. Morrison writes:

Although her eyes were closed, Sethe knew his gaze was on her face, and a paper picture of just how bad she must look raised itself up before her mind's eye. Still, there was no mockery coming from his gaze. Soft. It felt soft in a waiting kind of way. He was not judging her—or rather he was judging but not comparing her. Not since Halle had a man looked at her that way: not loving or passionate, but interested as though he were examining an ear of corn for quality (30).

Although Sethe initially shows concern for her attractiveness, she relaxes when she finds that Paul D's gaze does not demand her to cater to a male ideal of femininity. For, by not "comparing" her to other spectacles or indeed his "phantasy" woman, Paul D exists outside of the realm of the "determining" man (Morrison 30; Mulvey 62). His "soft" and "interested" gaze is able to find Sethe sexually attractive without impeding on her individuality or subjectivity. Notably, the word "interested," recalls the "interested, uncritical" gaze of Beloved towards Denver, and denotes an attempt to understand the other by way of looking at them (30, 139). It is this "interested" quality of Paul D's gaze which separates it from any objectifying or voyeuristic connotations. And because there is no gendered hierarchy, the gaze between them is just as healing for Sethe as if it came from another woman.

In turn, Paul D seems to desire Sethe's gaze, as he identifies her "polished eyes," even when closed, to be her most attractive feature, saying that these are what keep him "both guarded and stirred up" (30). One of Paul D's characteristics is that anything with enough beauty to "stir him ... he tried hard not to love" (316). This is because as a slave he could not love anything without the risk of losing it. Hence, he specifies that without Sethe's eyes, "her face was manageable—a face he could handle," that is, a face that he could refrain from caring about (30). Further, he claims that he might be able to stay away from her if she "would keep them closed like that," implying part of his compulsion to Sethe comes from the pleasure of seeing her eyes open and looking back at him (30). However hesitant Paul D is to become attached to Sethe, he is compelled to her not only because he enjoys looking at her, but because he desires for her to look at him in return, to be the object of her gaze. This is a position that Sethe just as happily fills, as when talking to him later she realizes "how much her eyes enjoyed looking in his face" (56). In a subversion of Mulvey's gendered framework, the male takes pleasure in being the object of the female gaze. Morrison thus proposes a de-hierarchized and mutually pleasurable structure of looking.

A key point in Sethe's healing process is when the community's women come

to expel Beloved, and Sethe decides to "run[] into the faces of the people out there, joining them and leaving Beloved behind" (309). As Wallace-Sanders has observed, "Abandoning Beloved indicates that she is ready to move beyond ... the deadly repression of the past, ... embodied by the grown 'basket-fat' freak Beloved. The point is not that the terrible trauma is resolved at this moment but that her burden cannot be shouldered alone" (187). This moment marks her acceptance of mutual support, but importantly, shows that her trauma is not entirely "resolved." And, rather than feeling better after this incident, she goes to lie in Baby Suggs's bed just as Baby Suggs did after Sethe's infanticide. This is perhaps Sethe's lowest point; since it so closely recalls the slow, bed-ridden death of Baby Suggs, it comes across as a form of suicide, a desire to manually shut down her body. And, given the constant reminders of her trauma physically engraved on her body, like the "revolting clump of scars" on her back from being whipped, it is easy to see how finding relief from her trauma while still inhabiting that scarred body would seem impossible (Morrison 25). It thus makes sense that she refuses when Paul D encourages her to "get up" from Baby Suggs's bed and offers to bathe her (321). Rejecting his help, she "closes her eyes and presses her lips together" (321). In doing so, she voluntarily shuts off two of her senses, speech and sight, becoming conscious of her internal self only. She then denies her corporeality, thinking that a bath would be futile, as according to her there is "nothing left to rub now and no reason to. Nothing left to bathe" (321). This desire to retract into herself, deny the existence of her own body, likely stems from the belief that spiritual healing is impossible when her flesh is indelibly marked.

However, Sethe is able to pull herself out of this and return Paul D's gaze: she "opens her eyes knowing the danger of looking at him. She looks at him" (321). Indeed the "danger" in looking is that it prevents her from resigning her corporeality. For, Sethe becomes aware of her subjectivity under Paul D's gaze, just as Denver does under the remedial gazes of Beloved, Lady Jones and Nelson Lord. Paul D's gaze forces Sethe to acknowledge her mental and physical autonomy, which in her grief she would rather relinquish. Rather than do the tempting thing, which is to repress her trauma and immobilize her body, this act of opening her eyes and looking at Paul D signals that she has chosen the effort of healing. She describes looking at him as a "danger" because she knows that within Paul D's "ready, waiting eyes," she will see "the thing in him, the blessedness, that has made him the kind of man who can ... make the women cry ... cry and tell him the things they only told each other" (321). This cathartic process of healing forces Sethe to vocalize and relive her trauma in order to expel it, a difficult but ultimately more healing option than repression. And, it is specifically the act of looking and being

looked at by Paul D that begins Sethe's process of externalizing and banishing her grief. However reluctantly at first, in being the 'object' of Paul D's gaze, Sethe finds the courage to look at him in turn and open herself up to vulnerability and catharsis.

In the same moment, Paul D similarly realizes the healing power of Sethe's gaze for him. He claims that Sethe "never mentioned or looked at" his three neck scars from being "collared ... with chains," and in this way, Sethe "left him his manhood" (322). Sethe's considerate gaze intuitively bypasses the scars which are associated with his past enslavement and which impede upon his process of self-reclamation. Her gaze then admires the rest of his body, thereby reinforcing his sense of its value and affirming the strength and dignity of his "manhood." By being the object of Sethe's appreciative gaze, Paul D is able to reclaim ownership of his male identity, feeling it is no longer wounded by the "shame" of his body's objectification under the barbaric control tactics of slavery and the objectifying white gaze (322). Paul D then encourages Sethe to enact this self-reclamation in turn. When Sethe mourns the loss of Beloved by saying, "She was my best thing," Paul D corrects her: "You your best thing, Sethe. You are" (321-2). Sethe then responds "Me? Me?" (322). Paul's phrasing implies that Sethe 'belongs' to herself, which is a new concept for her, given that the residual trauma of slavery prevented her from experiencing a true sense of self-ownership even in her freed life. Just like Denver, for whom it was a new concept to "hav[e] a self to look out for and preserve," Sethe's "Me? Me?" indicates that Sethe is awakening to the concept of unmitigated self-ownership and self-love for the first time (297, 322). She does not quite understand it yet, but Paul D and Sethe's mutually restorative and life-affirming gaze upon one another forms a bond which allows them to emerge into a truly liberated and autonomous future. As Paul D says, "me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow" (322).

Beloved is able to have this hopeful conclusion because Denver, Sethe, and Paul D have successfully regained self-ownership, a feat at least partially accomplished by deconstructing the hierarchical construal of the gaze whereby the beholder degrades the beheld with an invasive, dominating look. This hierarchy is indeed a consequence of racialized power constructs; by denying the enslaved person "their right to gaze," the proponents of slavery monopolized a domineering version of the subject position, which in turn figured enslaved people as the powerless objects of their gaze (hooks 115). Wallace-Sanders identifies the project of *Beloved* to be an "attempt to reverse the terms of slavery, shifting attention from the spectacle of the oppressed Black body to a Black viewer whose gaze implicates 'whitefolks' as the architects

of that peculiar institution" (177). Wallace-Sanders's key word being "architects," Morrison reveals that the power dynamics between master/subject and slave/object, are arbitrary constructions: they are not natural or fixed but are designed and built by the architects of oppression. *Beloved* not only inverts those power dynamics, so that its Black characters are able to gaze back at white figures of oppression and "interrogate" racialized hierarchies, but it eliminates the hierarchy associated with the subject and object positions overall (hooks 116). This makes space for a "mutually empowered" gaze *between* Black people, which, just like the act of looking back at the agents of racialized oppression, becomes an act of personal healing as well as public resistance (hooks 130).

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unteachable, relentless, what we may never fathom

Allen Huang

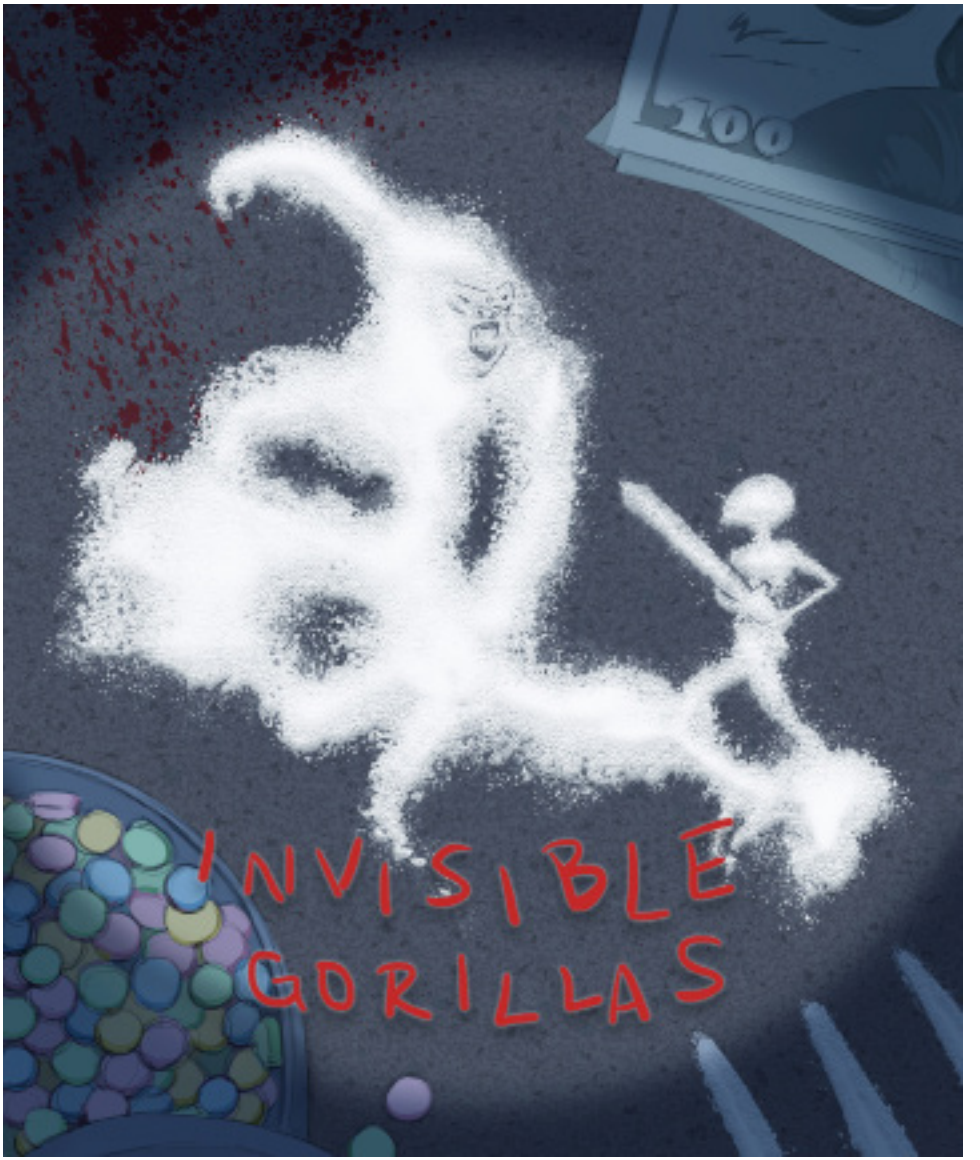
when she teaches you in the slow yawn of
midnight, in the youth of your prime, recipes not
from books but from memory and a yearn of past
tongue— a metaphor for her immigration story
(waters displaced from a mighty weight)—when the
front yard blooms in the dogged boredom of spring and
summer and you know she doesn't know floriography,
much less the very language you speak, when that woman
you've known from birth cups and cradles your baby
cheeks, pinching down an earlobe, crooning the sounds
that you could never translate properly (now words on
a screen)—soothing the relentless knocking and ache
beneath the dead of your sternum— when a high school
assignment demands you rehearse a novel you've never
opened (a pot of family resistance and unspoken history—
sunflower yellow river simmering from voice)
and you listen intently, knowing you'd reproduce
that story into consumable form, when she tells you in the
car that the family you know now is from the cultural
necessitation of ancestry and trees and a river's
relentless path from china to canada, but, still, she stays
and endures, when the low murmur of her fingertip trails
along the family tree, cutting off right before her name
(except, there is no name) and she writes you two down
in with the impermanence of shaky pencil graphite,

when she still has the pictures of your elementary
classes taped on the aging wall— above is her
wedding picture, framed, elegant in the way
motherhood wasn't— when she pays for the
drinks but still slyly slides hers over to you when
she hadn't even started, explaining it all away as
dislike, when that woman you can hate at times
apologises her way through a plate of cut fruit, intending
a peaceful closure to the warzone you two
inadvertently introduced into the house, like the
sole incense candle stuck into the ashtray inviting
back the red and gold fortune you two tossed away resentfully,
like orange lilies, pink larkspurs, and tansies bundled together
and now chest-caged, like whistler wind seeping through a
forgotten open window (and water warps the sill),

you can almost hear a mother's love in the lingering
memory of metaphors and isolation, and you can almost touch the
faint borders of an unteachable word that constantly challenges
and challenges you—the same way nerium feels on the tongue or
the same way water isn't meant to be held forever—igniting you with
the imperial fear of having to love somebody back

Invisible Gorillas

Valentina Sierra



FADE IN:

EXT. GORILLA HOUSE - DAY

A 'Beware of the Invisible Gorillas' sign stands proudly in the yard of untrimmed bushes. A white plastic bag attached to the head of the sign CRINKLES in the wind.

The exterior of the house has seen its better days with the chipping paint, molding wood, and the rusted chain-link fence that has started to fall inward.

A cardboard box acts as a castle in the center of the yard.

The quiet of the morning is broken by the charging CRY of a boy heading into battle.

JACKO (4), barefoot and in need of a bath, rounds the side of the house with a flimsy cardboard sword at hand. He cuts through the air as he tries to defend his cardboard kingdom.

A car RUMBLES towards the house, interrupting his play. Almost instinctively, Jacko scrambles towards his box.

Through a peephole he's cut in the cardboard, Jacko watches the gate. MAN 1 (40s) leaves his car running and approaches the opened gate. He grasps the Teddy Ruxpin that's been hung on it. He messes with the back and appears to take something out of the bear before he shoves something back in.

After the exchange with the Teddy Ruxpin, Man 1 returns to his car, HONKS twice and then drives away.

PAPA (28), emerges from the house.

A new bout of excitement causes Jacko to burst through his box. He clambers around Papa's feet.

JACKO
Papa, there's a gorilla-

Papa shakes Jacko off. He continues to the gate as Jacko tries to keep pace.

JACKO (CONT'D)
- was really big. An' had bloody teeth. Tried to eat you, me, and, mama, but I beat-

Papa takes the Teddy Ruxpin that's been strung up by its neck and turns it over in his hands. It's missing the cassette deck in the back. Papa sorts through the broken back stitch and pulls out a wad of cash.

JACKO (CONT'D)
Did you hear me, Papa? I best. I protect us!

Papa hums to the rhythm of his unintelligible counting.

JACKO (CONT'D)
I count too. Six, seven, eight, ten, nine-

Papa shoves the money into his pocket and glares at Jacko.

PAPA
Shut up, Jacko. Go play.

Papa sets a firm hand on Jacko's head and tries to push him away. Jacko saddles right back up to continue watching him.

Papa looks around the street before he takes a bag of small, brightly-colored tablets out of his other pocket. He shoves it into the empty cavity of the bear.

The Teddy Ruxpin hangs once more as Papa turns on his heel to head back inside. He takes a phone out and dials a number.

Jacko chases after him but gets distracted.

Papa's distant voice is hardly discernible.

PAPA (CONT'D)
Pickups ready-

Not watching for traffic, Jacko runs across the road. His dirty feet patter against the asphalt as he hones in on the single thing he wants. A car is headed in his direction.

Jacko grabs the abandoned ball laying by the storm drain just as the car barely misses him. He gives the ball a tentative bounce and smiles as it returns into his arms.

He runs back across the road and adds the ball into his collection of used toys. He returns to his play.

EXT. GORILLA HOUSE - DUSK

Jacko naps in his cardboard box. His new ball is tucked close to his stomach and a line of drool connects to the handle of his sword.

The distant RUMBLE of an older vehicle breaks the silence. The old breaks SQUEAL, but to Jacko it sounds like a gorilla WAILING. His eyes snap open as he scrambles to look through the peephole of his box. His hands clutch his sword.

He looks in time to see MAN 2 (30s) dropping the Teddy Ruxpin, running to his car, and peeling away without honking.

Jacko instinctively calls out loud enough for Papa to hear.

JACKO
HONK! HONK!

Jacko looks through the peephole. Nothing changes.

He sucks in a deeper breath. Louder this time.

JACKO (CONT'D)
HONK! HONK!

Papa bursts through the front door and makes his approach to the bear. Jacko doesn't interrupt as he watches from his box.

Papa pulls the money out from the Teddy Ruxpin and mumbles his counting. Jacko joins in.

JACKO (CONT'D)
Two, three, four-

PAPA
MOTHERFUCKER!

Jacko flinches as Papa chucks the bear against the gate and takes his phone out of his pocket. Jacko doesn't understand the words, but he can hear the yelling fade into the house.

Jacko looks at the swinging Teddy Ruxpin, his BREATHING the only sound in the box. Observantly, he mimics his father.

JACKO
Motherfucker.

The word makes him grin.

INT. GORILLA HOUSE - ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Dirt-covered feet step inside the house. The state of the home is even worse on the inside than it is on the outside. The laminate flooring is raised along the edges. Wallpaper sags with moisture. Punched in holes go unexplained.

Jacko can hear a ruckus in the kitchen. Multiple voices talk over one another. There's YELLING and THUMPING.

He walks down the hallway and traces a finger over the crayon artwork tapped on the wall. The first few are of his kingdom. The last is of a vicious gorilla with red eyes and blood dripping teeth. He pauses and bares his teeth back at it..

INT. GORILLA HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Jacko stops at the doorway to peer inside. MAN 3 (30s) holds Man 2 down by the sink as Papa pours water over his face. Man 2 kicks out and SCREAMS past the water.

At the table, MAMA (21), WOMAN 1 (30s), and WOMAN 2 (20s) are unfazed as they mix stuff in bowls, shift white powders, and continue production down the line.

PAPA
I say when you can breathe-!

MAN 2
Please-

More water cuts off his pleads. He GURGLES.

PAPA
Get him up!

Man 3 hauls Man 2 upright. Papa grabs the man's jaw and gets in his face.

PAPA (CONT'D)
I'll take your fucking tongue. See if you can come up with excuses without it-

Jacko enters slowly. He approaches Mama and pats her thigh. She doesn't look at him as she presses powder into tablets.

MAN 2
(sobbing)
I have the money-

Papa grabs Man 2's tongue and pulls a knife from his pocket.

JACKO
Mama-

Mama glances at Jacko then. She tips back in her chair, opens the nearby fridge, and withdraws a half-empty bottle of milk. She sets it in his hands and sends him on his way.

Jacko leaves the kitchen. Man 2 SCREAMS.

INT. GORILLA HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jacko lies in bed with an old knit blanket. The chaos in the kitchen VIBRATES the walls of the bedroom.

A small crack in the door sends a line of light towards Jacko's eyes. He watches the light intently as he chews on the nipple of his empty bottle. A habit formed from hunger.

The fighting pauses. A door opens. There's a distant CRASH.

Jacko tenses, he stops chewing and breathes loudly.

A beat before his door opens. Jacko quickly closes his eyes and feigns sleep. A shadow approaches. The bottle is pulled from his mouth before a hand runs through his hair.

MAMA
You aren't sleeping.

Jacko grins at Mama's knowing tone. He cracks an eye open.

There's a THUMP in the hallway that neither of them acknowledges.

MAMA (CONT'D)
You can't leave your room tonight.

Someone YELLS in agony before it's muffled. Jacko nods his understanding.

JACKO
Mama, check for gorillas.

Mama pets Jacko's greasy hair before she obliges and bends down to look under the bed.

MAMA
No gorillas here, Jacko.

JACKO
You sure?

MAMA
Positive. The only gorillas are the invisible ones outside.

JACKO
I best. I tried to stop one today.

Another muffled SCREAM interrupts their conversation. Mama sighs and ruffles Jacko's hair. She starts to leave.

MAMA
No leaving till morning, okay?

Jacko nods. The door is shut.

The muffled SHOUTS and SCREAMS follow Jacko into his sleep.

The sounds of the house morph. Human YELLING, BEATING, and SCREAMING change into the angry ROARS of gorillas. The sounds grow thunderous as the rage boils over.

There's a BANG. A gorilla SCREECHES. Then: silence.

INT. GORILLA HOUSE - BEDROOM - MORNING

Jacko sits up in bed. He yawns as he moves to the door. He peeks out into the hallway and pauses. There's no noise. He takes a tentative step out.

INT. GORILLA HOUSE - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jacko enters the bathroom. The mirror is smashed, the faucet is bent sideways, and the shower curtain has been torn down.

Along with the built-up limescale, the bathtub is marked with streaks of blood. Jacko isn't fazed as he goes about relieving himself.

He looks over all the hand-shaped bloodstains. He fixes his pants before he reaches a curious hand out to rest over one of the marks. It's much larger than his own.

Jacko shrugs, flushes the toilet, and exits the bathroom.

INT. GORILLA HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Jacko tiptoes across the hall and peers into the kitchen. The mess from the previous night has been cleaned up.

Jacko goes to the fridge first. It's empty.

He moves onto a lower cabinet. He opens it to find a bag of bread. Blue mold spots the edges.

At the counter where the toaster sits, Jacko pulls himself up onto the lip of it. His dirty toes slide against the laminated cabinets. He uses one arm to maintain his height while his other works quickly to set two pieces of bread into the old toaster. He presses down the lever before he drops back to his feet.

As he waits for his food, Jacko grabs a knife from the drawer. The toaster POPS. He grins.

Once more, Jacko lifts himself onto the lip of the counter. He blindly stabs into the toaster with the knife and manages to withdraw his two pieces of barely toasted bread.

Jacko leaves the knife on the counter and exits the kitchen.

EXT. GORILLA HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Jacko looks around the yard before he steps into the morning dew-covered grass. He sits in the soggy cardboard box and eats his toast. A curious eye glances through the peephole to look at the Teddy Ruxpin that continues to hang.

EXT. GORILLA HOUSE - DUSK

Jacko slashes his sword through the air.

JACKO
I got you gorillas!

He kicks the ball towards the gate and makes an EXPLOSION noise with his mouth. He cheers his actions on.

JACKO (CONT'D)
Take that motherfuckers!

He starts raining his sword down against the ground. The play turns violent. He GRUNTS in effort as he finishes off the invisible gorilla before him.

The opening of the front door interrupts him. Papa exits the house with a bag slung over his shoulder.

JACKO (CONT'D)
Papa-!

Jacko excitedly runs. He stumbles, hits the grass, but is up in an instant to chase Papa who doesn't pay him any mind.

JACKO (CONT'D)
Got the gorillas, Papa!

PAPA
Not now, Jacko.

Jacko taps Papa's leg with his sword and shakes his head. He notices Papa's busted knuckles as he gets into his old car.

JACKO
No, I did good. I got 'em. I best, Papa. I best-!

Papa slams the car door despite Jacko's reaching hands. The door nearly gets his little fingers. He glares at the offending block between them.

JACKO (CONT'D)
Lemmie go too, Papa.

Jacko tugs at the door handle. Papa pulls back from the driveway and starts down the road. Jacko isn't having it and hurries up the driveway to get on his old big wheel.

He pedals quickly behind the shrinking figure of Papa's car. Jacko's persistence is not deterred until he hits a pothole. One of his back wheels CRACKS and falls off the plastic bike. Jacko is sent sideways - his hands and knees take the brunt of the fall against the asphalt.

Getting back to his feet, he looks down at the scrapes that are slowly starting to drip blood. He doesn't cry yet.

The tears are saved for when he notices his broken big wheel. He cries as he picks up the broken back wheel and grasps the handle of his bike. He starts to drag the toy back home. His cries grow as his desperation gets the better of him.

INT. GORILLA HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Jacko runs into the room. Mama, Woman 1, Woman 2, and Man 3 work together just as they did the night before.

Jacko cries as his bloodied hands pat against Mama's thigh. Blood stains her pants but she doesn't appear to notice.

WOMAN 1
He's always been too impulsive-

WOMAN 2
(annoyed)
He's going to get one of us killed.

MAN 3
Don't say shit you wouldn't say to his face. He's the reason any of us got this-

WOMAN 2
Where is he then, huh? We do the dirty work and he goes and fucks around with the money.

Jacko presses his snotty nose against Mama's ribs - a plea for comfort. She tips back her chair and reaches for his bottle on the counter. She gives it to Jacko and sends him on his way. He doesn't leave, he just cries harder.

MAMA
(to Woman 2)
We get our cut eventually. Don't ever question his methods.
(to Jacko)
Jacko, go to bed.

Jacko shudders through his cries and does as directed.

He pauses at the sound of something CLINKING. He watches as Man 3 pours the colorful candies into a tin, scratches something onto a paper, and seals it.

Man 3 sets the tin in the upper cabinet beside the oven. Jacko leaves the kitchen.

INT. GORILLA HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jacko sits in the back corner of his bed. His empty bottle dangles from his lips as he chews the nipple.

He glances down at his knees. The blood trails have dried against his skin. He scratches some of the blood away and looks at the collection of it under his nail. The bottle falls from his lips as he curiously wipes away more.

An inquisitive sniff of the dried blood on his hands has his nose scrunched in distaste. He wipes it against his shirt and looks at the crack in the door again. Nothing happens.

Jacko sighs and looks over the edge of his bed. He takes a calming breath before he lowers his upper half down to peer under it. From his dangling perch, Jacko surveys the underside of his bed. Aside from a collection of dirt and dust-bunnies, it remains clear of any threats.

JACKO
No gorillas.

Jacko settles himself on the bed and curls up for the night. He shuts his eyes. The sound of the CONVERSING adults in the kitchen morphs into the CHATTERING of gorillas.

INT. GORILLA HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Jacko tiptoes into the kitchen and surveys the space before heading to the fridge. It's the same as yesterday. He tries the lower cabinets. All are empty, save for the cabinet under the sink, which is full of bottles of unknown substances. An aerosol can topples out - Jacko doesn't touch it and instead turns back to the upper cabinets.

He pulls himself all the way up onto the counter and starts to rummage through the shelves.

Jacko shuffles to the right until he stumbles by the oven. He tiptoes along the edge of the range. His toes balance on the grates as his fingers hold onto the range hood. One foot slips. He steadies himself on a knob and keeps on shuffling.

At the last cabinet, Jacko finds the tin from the night before. He giddily hugs it to his chest and jumps off the counter.

Jacko sits on the floor and pries open the tin to find the colorful candies. He inspects the small shape. The residual pink dye rubs off on his grimy fingers.

A gorilla face is stamped onto the pink tablet. Jacko bares his teeth at it and LAUGHS. He takes the small piece of paper next and inspects the numbers. He pretends to read.

JACKO
"Three, four, five, six, seven, eight, ten, nine" - so many gorilla candies.

Jacko giddily shoves a handful into the pocket of his shorts. The RUMBLE of Papa's car stops him short of shoving the whole tin's content into his pockets.

In an instant, he is up and running towards the front of the house. His excited CHEERS and CRIES for his father chase him and slowly disappear.

In the kitchen, we remain on the dangerous details.

MONTAGE:

- The aerosol can with an explosion hazard label.

- The unknown powder that coats the top of the kitchen table.

- The knife that remains by the toaster.

- The frayed toaster cable that is plugged into the wall.

- The spots of dried blood on the vinyl.

- The turned knob on the oven.

- The abandoned ecstasy pills on the floor with their gorilla stamped in details.

FADE OUT.

"How vain, without the merit, is the name": Proper Name Usage Invoking Asian Diaspora in Souvankham Thammavongsa's How to Pronounce Knife

Aimee Koristka

Proper name usage—both in literature and in real life—creates a clear sense of identity for an individual, allowing for distinct separation from one person and another. They are the manner by which an individual is *known*. Hence, "[p]roper names can be considered as an interface between individuals and society … [a]t the same time, however, names can be considered as empty signifiers as they 'wait' to be filled in by a bearer" (Georgelou & Janša 1). Indeed, the importance of a person's name in the formation of their identity cannot be overstated. It is for this reason that proper names are generally considered pre-requisites in character-centric narratives, as they place a character within the given societal framework. However, it is critical that the usage of proper names in literature is no longer considered obligatory, but rather further examined to identify how proper

name utilization contributes to a narrative's formation. In Souvankham Thammavongsa's short story collection, *How To Pronounce Knife*, character names are not used in the common notion that they are a necessity, but rather selectively used in order to enhance the thematic resonance of the effect of Asian diaspora (1)—a central component of the entire collection.

In this paper, I analyze Thammavongsa's usage of proper names in two stories from the collection ("Randy Travis" and "Chick-A-Chee!") which exemplify how proper name usage can be used to reinforce narrative themes. Utilizing theories of naming as established by scholars Mladen Dolar and Barbara Dancygier, I demonstrate how Thammavongsa's technique creates a feeling of displacement, subsequently emulating the experience of Asian diaspora and impelling the reader to not only empathize with the characters in the sense of *understanding* them, but sympathize with the characters in the sense of *experiencing* diaspora along with them. Through this shared identification, the characters in the stories are no longer perceived by the reader as passive recipients of sociopolitical and socioeconomic issues—a perspective compelled by the preconceived notion that the characters' diasporic state prevents them from doing so—but rather active individuals with as much agency as the reader themself. I will begin by outlining theories of naming to frame the paper. Next, I will individually analyze the two stories, highlighting how their distinct name usage contributes to the overall story themes. To conclude, I will compare these methods, illustrating how Thammavongsa synthesizes these approaches to reproduce Asian diaspora.

Proper names are the necessary framework through which individuals communicate, as they signify a person in a single, agreed-upon term (Dolar 26). Generally, proper names are understood to belong to the individual that bears them, however, this belief disregards the purpose of naming in the first place. An individual—as they have the complete conception of themself—has no reason to have a proper name except for communicative purposes, meaning the proper name they bear is not *for* them. The purpose of proper names is to allow for a sense of objective communication (i.e., without relational descriptors dependent on the user) when referring to and communicating with others. The necessary simplicity of naming, therefore means that a name cannot fully encapsulate the nuances of the individual being described (31). "Naming is evoking a phantom, conjuring a ghost," (32) philosopher Mladen Dolar writes, referencing how the intricacies of an individual are lost once they are described in the abstracted sense of their name. Because proper names can only conjure the idea of an individual for the purpose of coherent communication, proper names are 'filled' with meaning by the user rather than

the actual individual in reference. Proper names are thus "a structural illusion" (31), serving to abstract an individual so that the user may distinguish and understand them in relation to the rest of the world. The creation of an individual's identity, therefore, is strongly influenced by the manner in which their proper name's meaning is filled by the user. The subjective experiences that the user brings to fill in an individual's proper name shapes the abstraction of the individual's identity and places them within social, political, and geographical structures. Because one's expression of agency relies on their ability to exert power within their environment (OED), the extent to which their environment (i.e., societal structures) is willing to *recognize* their power (i.e., their identity) affects the degree to which they can assert authority. For this reason, proper names directly influence the manner in which an individual understands their reality; names "designate and enact cultural codes, social status and power regimes" (Georgelou & Janša 2). Consequently, the manner in which one's proper name is (un)used by others informs oneself on their status within these social structures, consequently shaping their *own* subjective evaluation of their worth. As such, "[n]ames can also signal narrative options and play with the idea of character identity" (Dancygier 119), meaning that a name's prevalence, or, lack thereof, in a literary text influences the extent to which the reader—who is an indirect user—is able to fill in the meaning of the character in relation to their understandings of social, political, and geographical structures. Although one's agency could theoretically be asserted through personal usage of their own name, it is rare for one to continually refer to themselves in the third-person, therefore placing the ability to grant societal agency in the power of the user, rather than the holder. Evidently, proper names abstractify individuals in order to fit them within preconceived notions of societal structures, consequently influencing one's own experience of their identity. While proper names create a hollow abstraction of an individual for communicative purposes, they are crucial in order for an individual to be acknowledged within larger society and are, therefore, an aspect of having full agency.

As readers apply their own understandings of the world to fulfill their abstracted idea of a proper name, what these names subsequently represent to the reader are, thus, symbolic of a specifically invoked perspective. Indeed, "[a] name ... refers to a set of descriptions—geographical, historical, linguistic, demographic, etc.—but also to a set of some supposed real or imaginary properties" (Dolar 30). In the story "Randy Travis," the proper name 'Randy Travis' is used twenty-two times (Thammavongsa 43–54) despite the man himself only physically appearing in the story once (51–52). Even in his singular appearance while performing at a

concert attended by the narrator (a child of Laos immigrants who have recently moved to Canada) and the narrator's mother (a Laos immigrant and Randy Travis fanatic), the narrator comments "we were so high up on the outer ring of the audience I could not tell if it really was Randy Travis onstage" (51). As the reader's viewpoint for the entire story is from the perspective of the narrator, it is clear that the idea of 'Randy Travis' is abstractified beyond him being an actual individual; the usage of the proper name 'Randy Travis' in the story is, subsequently, filled by the narrator's own experience with it. By beginning the story with the statement, "[t]he only thing my mother liked about the new country we were living in was its music" (43) and the fact that the rest of the story surrounds the narrator's mother's love for, specifically, Randy Travis' music, it is evident that 'Randy Travis' is positioned as a feature of the country itself, rather than an actual man. With the prevalence of Randy Travis' emblematic name in mind, the lack of established proper names for the narrator and the narrator's family therefore represents their experience of identity dislocation, as their names are *from* Laos but are not used or integrated *into* Canada's sociopolitical structures (Georgelou & Janša 2). Despite the story establishing that the narrator's mother has a beginner's understanding of English (44), she continues to listen and idolize Randy Travis, consequently imbibing the ideology of his stage persona because he represents a revered version of Canadian life. As such, the manner in which the narrator writes to Randy Travis—"*You're ugly. Go back home. Loser*" (48)—demonstrates the narrator's disdain for their geographical position and the influence it is having on their mother's identity. Furthermore, the comment that the narrator's father makes to the narrator's mother when she signs a card to Randy Travis with only her name in Lao—"Randy Travis reads English. He's gonna look at your name and see a doodle" (48)—highlights how the geographic location of the family removes the ability for their own name to be understood and, therefore, withdraws some of their own agency. Thus, Thammavongsa's usage of the proper name 'Randy Travis' is not simply to invoke the idea of the individual, but rather the effect that geography has on the narrator's family and their relationship to their own identity. As the narrator's mother seeks to minimize her Laos identity in favor of a Canadian one, the validity of the narrator's own identity is called into question. Evidently, the story uses the abstractified nature of proper names to symbolize societal structures in order to develop the theme of identity dislocation due to geographical displacement.

The purpose of name usage in "Randy Travis" is conspicuous as the characters directly engage with the proper name itself. However, as scholar Barbara Dancygier notes about name usage in literary texts, proper names can also be

"used in ... narrative[s] not only to refer, but also to participate in constructions which structure the emergent story itself" (121). In "Chick-A-Chee!", rather than a single proper name symbolizing a particular societal structure, the selective usage of proper names interacts with the story's construction and places the main characters in relation to socioeconomic hierarchies. The narrator, who is reflexively described in the past-perfect tense as a child, is never referred to by name in the text. Similarly, the family members of the narrator are not given names. Instead, the characters of the family are referred relationally to the narrator, using the familial titles "Mom," "Dad," and "my brother" throughout the narrative (Thammavongsa 75–82). Within the entire story, only the owners of the "first house ... [with] windows as large as doors" that the children "chick-a-chee" (a derivation of the phrase "trick-or-treat") (80) at, as well as the school lunch woman (82) are referred to by their proper names. Thus, the absence of proper names for the main characters of the narrative means the reader is required to create their abstract idea of these characters relative to the *other* proper names expressed in the narrative. Therefore, by analyzing the proper name usage of the other characters, the unnamed main characters can be filled with meaning. The three named characters—"Harold," "Elaine," (77) and "Missus Furman" (82)—are all described, at one point in the text, relative to their economic position. Harold and Elaine are the owners of a house in the "neighbourhood [the family] wished [they] could live in" (77), while "Missus Furman" is described by her occupation as the school lunch woman (82) which implicitly places her within the middle-class. Notably, Harold and Elaine, whose proper names are used the most and who are the most affluent characters, extend their names when speaking to the children ("Haroooooold!") (81). Thus, the proper names in the text are primed to be filled by the reader in terms of economic structure. Those who are socioeconomically higher than the narrator's family are allowed to have their proper name established and, thus, allowed to have an individual identity within society. Those who are the absolute highest (e.g. Harold and Elaine) are even granted the ability to extend their proper names and, therefore, take up more structural space with their identities. In contrast, the only identifiers granted to the narrator and the narrator's family are those used in relation to each other (i.e., their familial titles), signifying how their individual identities (i.e., their proper names) are not acknowledged within larger society—instead, homogenized within it—and are only observed when in a familial context. Thus, selective proper name usage in "Chick-A-Chee!" not only aids in further establishing the narrative's socioeconomic theme, but also connects this theme to the characters' conceptions of identity.

In "Randy Travis" and "Chick-a-Chee!"

the naming techniques not only enhance the themes of the individual stories, but also contribute to the overall story-collection theme of the effect of Asian diaspora. In both stories, the lack of proper names for the narrator and the narrator's family means that they are not allowed to be a part of the "structured illusion" (Dolar 31) and, therefore, are displaced from being "designate[d] and enact[ed within] cultural codes, social status and power regimes" (Georgelou & Janša 2). Thus, the unnamed characters do not have an "interface between ... society" (1) and, as such, are displaced geographically, socioeconomically, and even from their own individual identity, which linguistically emulates the experience of Asian diaspora. Furthermore, the absence of proper names means that the reader is required to not only create images of the characters in relation to the other named characters, but also in relation to their own identity and their own experience with the given referential expressions (e.g., Mom, Dad). The usage of first-person perspective in both stories (Thammavongsa 43–54; 75–82), coupled with the distinct lack of proper names, prevents the reader from creating distinct, abstractified ideas of the characters and subsequently impels the reader to position themselves as the "I." This then "prompt[s] the blend of reality and fiction, defined through cross-space participation and epistemic transparency, not identity" (Dancygier 136). This blend—between the character's identity and the reader's own—ensures that the impact of geographical dislocation and socioeconomic inequality directly affects the reader, meaning that instead of being *em*pathetic for understanding the experiences of the character, the reader is *sym*pathetic for their communal experience. As, in reality, all readers are distinct individuals with their own identity and agency, this identification ensures that the characters in *How To Pronounce Knife* are not depicted as homogenized individuals who are passive to the issues of Asian diaspora, but rather active individuals in their own right with identities as rich as the reader's own. As shown, Thammavongsa not only *represents* the experience of Asian diaspora in her short-story collection, but is able to *parallel* the experience for the reader, as well.

Proper names—while often believed to be representative to the owner—are filled with meaning by the user and are, thus, an abstractified idea of an individual which greatly impacts the individual's understanding of themselves in relation to societal structures, but also their understanding of their own identity. "Randy Travis" and "Chick-a-Chee!" both utilize the power of proper names in different ways to enhance their narrative's overall thematic resonance. By utilizing these strategies in tandem with first-person narrative perspective and referential expressions, Thammavongsa compels the reader to fully identify with the story's narrators, therefore creating a sympa-

thetic experience of Asian diaspora and, consequently, a newfound sense of agency that allows the characters to be seen as active individuals with hopeful futures.

Endnotes

1 Although often referred to as "the Asian Diaspora" (and, thus, minimized to the single event in time in which an individual is dispersed from Asia), this paper defines 'diaspora' as "a form of consciousness that arises from the experience of migration and exile" (Amrith 57), therefore foregrounding the aspect of 'diaspora' that relates to an ongoing emotional process.

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beetlejuice blood thicker than wine

Grace Liu

smoke has a better chance of ascension than we do
        the ads for cremation say —
we die beggars wealthy only by the arsonists
we make out of the family left behind
        the old customs say —

something cannot be said.

interlocutor to interrogator, the metamorphosis of the century
begins if you invoke our beetlejuice blood

but you always find us guilty:
some ghost (fat with hand-cut coins) gives us away
        you pry open our jaws to find
flawed thick ugly tongues straining past
        godsent teeth
                trying to launch mutiny like a parasite.

something cannot be said.

pacific salt stings less drunk
burn incense to airbrush our bloodied mouths
        bite into veins and call upon
souls held in limbo by bureaucracy, bitter
like white wine left over a grave
        my grandfather says —

from his mouth spills warm smoke:
something cannot be said.

Bittersweet Corners

Samhita Shanker

"Are you ready? We can't be late for our anniversary!"

"Two minutes!" Dilip calls, pushing through loose coins and memories in his closet searching for his cufflinks. His fingers brush aside some dust and instead, find gold glittering in the corner. He reaches in, clasping an errant fragment of summer 1972.

It was the year before he got married, at a time when Navi occupied his every waking moment. The heatwave flooded their houses and ran in rivulets down their spines, giving them no reprieve. Instead, he found it in the river flowing behind their homes and in Navi, a steady presence grabbing his hand when the muddied banks gave out. They threw their clothes on the flat rocks by the shore and floated, fingers tangling under the water and drifting closer. Dilip blinked against the glinting gold necklace pooling in the hollow of Navi's throat and wondered how it would feel to drown in it.

A voice fragments the memory. "The children will be here soon!"

Shaking his head, Dilip reaches deeper into the closet, brushing against soft crushed velvet. He holds it in his palm and glimpses the month before his marriage. He spent every waking moment, and then some, with Navi. Their childhood was filled with Dilip pulling Navi away from whoever he pissed off that day, heart pounding and breath heavy, hands fisted in his shirt. Their adulthood was similar; Dilip pulled him around corners with the same pounding heart and heavy breath, but this time, they ran from something entirely intangible. Navi held him closer and he let himself forget everything, lost in the crevices of time, the blink of an eye, the curve of his mouth. He found that if he put his hand in the hollow of Navi's throat, the gold did overwhelm him but he yielded himself to it each time.

There is a knock on the door. His wife steps in, shoes on and arms crossed.

"I can't find my cufflinks," he interjects before she can say anything.

Neither their formal Hindi, nor their relationship, has softened over time. They talk clumsily, struggling to speak over their wedding garlands tightening like a noose around their necks for the past thirty-five years. Thirty-six today.

"Here," she picks up a box near their

bedside table and hands it to him.

Inside was the week before he got married, when his father came to collect his debts, and Dilip had to pay the price of being the first-born son. The neighbourhood watched as his mother pushed sweets into his mouth and he swallowed the bitterness of marriage, dowry, and stifling silence. He smiled, an odd tug of his mouth. His bride-to-be was beside him but he was only looking for one person, the only home he had felt safe in, unburdened by anything for those moments except for their stolen moments. Even those seemed lighter when their shoulders pressed together. Lost in the sea of clapping hands, the same shoulder brushed his and quietly pressed a little box into his palm.

"Cufflinks," Navi said. "Bought them for the special occasion."

"Navi–"

"Don't."

The shining gold that was Navi had painfully dulled, tarnishing with every moment pulling them closer to the wedding. Dilip searched for any glimpse of the necklace at his throat, any little spark, but it was gone.

"We'll manage. We'll figure it out."

Dilip wasn't sure who was comforting who at that point, but he clasped Navi's hand for just a moment longer before he had to let go.

"I said, is that what you wanted?" his wife repeats.

He looks inside the box and finds straight silver lines blinking at him. They weren't the cufflinks he was looking for, but he nods anyway. He puts the cufflinks on, tightening the circles around his wrist, and leaves the closet.

The Persistence of Renaissance Tropes in Literary Representations of Africa and Africans throughout the Eighteenth-Century: An Analysis of Aphra Behn's Oroonoko and Mungo Park's Travels in the Interior of Africa

Dan Miller

Africa and Africans have long been the recipients of the West's (1) collective imaginings. In literature, the geography and the populus of Africa have served as provocative Others constructed by the West to better help the West define itself. In this sense, Africa and Africans have functioned in Western discourse as literary receptacles into which the West has poured, and continues to pour, a host of ideas, beliefs, and associations. Elaborated later in this essay, these ideas, beliefs, and associations include notions of African peoples as bestial residents of a wild land; outsiders lacking the civility and superior qualities of European society.

By the eighteenth-century, Africa was not a free subject of thought, but rather one constrained by the legacy of associations and tropes established centuries prior that had come to characterize the continent and its people. Comparing the representation of Africa and Africans in Aphra Behn's short novel *Oroonoko* (1688), based on the story of the titular character Oroonoko, and Mungo Park's travelogue *Travels in the Interior of Africa* (1799), to each other—while taking into account the precedent Renaissance representations—reveals the staying-power across time and genre of the tropes of representation established in the "long sixteenth century" (Spicer 9). These comparisons

also reveal how the tropes of representing Africa and Africans evolved in tandem with the evolution of Enlightenment ideas, specifically the scientific/anthropological gaze exhibited by *Travels*.

Contrary to conventional belief, the rise of the scientific age towards the end of the eighteenth-century did not entail the death of imaginative representations of Africa(ns) and the rise of objective, empirical accounts. Rather, Africa and Africans never ceased to be subjects of the West's invention—a realm onto which the West continues to project its fears, desires, "truths," and myths. Owing to the subjective task of representation in literature *en masse*, the Age of Enlightenment merely provided a varnish of objectivity that obscured the necessarily inventive work of representation.

Preceding *Oroonoko* and *Travels* was a well-established tradition of African representation during the 'long sixteenth century' (ca. 1480 – 1610). During this 'long century,' Europe came into greater contact with Africa and Africans as Portugese explorers established trade routes along the West Coast of Africa in the 1400s (Spicer 9); portugese explorer Vasco Da Gama sailed around the Horn of Africa in 1497 (Fernandez-Armesto), and cut off from the white slave trade by Ottoman expansion in the early sixteenth-century, Europe began to import African slaves and ushered in "early modern slave trade" (Hornback). It was during the Renaissance that Africans began to truly and consistently rub elbows with their fair-skinned, northern counterparts: the Europeans.

As this relationship between Europe and Africa evolved throughout the long sixteenth century, African peoples and their lands began to be imagined and represented by European art. Flemish artist Adriaen Collaert's engraving of Maerten de Vos' "Africa" from *The Four Continents* series (1580-1600) is a revealing case-study in late-Renaissance representations of Africa and Africans (fig.1). The piece depicts a nude African woman seated suggestively upon a crocodile, behind her a vast landscape dotted with non-European beasts both real and fictional—i.e., elephants, ostriches, a lion, a snake, and what appears to be a dragon. Collaert's bestial, primitive, sensual, and imaginative portrayal of Africa is indicative of sixteenth-century European attitudes towards Africa(ns), and displays the roots of the tropes of representation that Europeans, such as Aphra Behn and Mungo Park, would later employ to reconstruct Africa and Africans in their own works. Collaert's engraving displays that Africa and Africans in the Renaissance were already "a foil to Europe... a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest" (Achebe 15).

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(fig. 1: Collaert, Adriaen. "Allegory of Africa." *The Four Continents*. 1580-1600. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/385673.)

Renaissance scholar Robert Hornback argues these Renaissance representations signify a kind of "proto-racism" (2) that anticipated the development of a form of racism referred to be scholars as scientific racism—a racism exemplified by various European scientific pursuits undertaken during the eighteenth-century, such as the craniometry of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, that aimed at hierarchizing the races. This hierarchical view of race is also prevalent in non-fiction literature concerned with the representation of Africans such as Mungo Park's *Travels in the Interior of Africa*.

According to Hornback, the proto-racist prejudices that preceded the developments of scientific racism arose from the Renaissance slave trade. Such prejudices were based on "the supposed rational and moral inferiority of blackness drawn from religious texts, moral allegory, metaphysical philosophy, and the many blackface fool traditions informed by them" (Hornback 2). The primary figure of Hornback's study is the "pan-European" Renaissance comedic, black-faced Harlequin who

"accreted many stereotypes, reappears in constructions of irrationality/folly, sartorial pride or dandyism, linguistic ineptitude, childishness, racial impersonation,

Otherness versus native/national culture, and highbrow versus lowbrow culture—as Sambo would in Europe and across the Atlantic from the eighteenth century on, and as Jim Crow and Zip Coon would in antebellum America." (25)

The Harlequin, while perhaps the most popular, was far from the only negatively-associated black-faced figure in European traditions. To his account of examples of negatively-associated black-faced figures, Hornback adds the characters of various medieval pageants such as Tutivillus and Hellechino, as well as the plays *Dulcitius*, *De Buskenblaster*, and *The Marriage of Wit and Science*. Such representations of black-faced African figures as these established the tropes of representation that pervaded the literary progeny of post-Renaissance Europe. To this list of Renaissance influences on the representation of peoples of non-European descent, I would like to add Shakespeare's *Othello* as a noteworthy case study. Shakespeare's prominence in the canon of Renaissance English literature, as well as *Othello*'s central depiction of a Moor, marks the play as a prominent and influential instance of non-European representation. Consequently, the reader of *Oroonoko* and *Travels* will profit from keeping in mind *Othello*, for as this essay displays, such a consideration reveals the persistence and evolution of Renaissance tropes of representation in the eighteenth-century. As much as *Oroonoko* and *Travels* might claim to be presenting novel accounts of Africa(ns), both texts continue to participate in the tropes of representation exemplified decades earlier in Shakespeare's play.

Beginning with *Oroonoko* and *Othello*, the striking similarities between these texts suggest the significant influence that Renaissance representations, specifically Shakespeare's, exercised over later representations of Africa(ns). *Othello* and *Oroonoko* share a number of narrative features. Namely, they are tragedies that center royal, dark-skinned figures; they involve wooing a woman constrained by patriarchal obligations; and both texts' climatic scenes revolve around killing a wife. These are all tropes associated with pre-Enlightenment art: they are flush with pathos, and accord with tragic narrative arcs influenced by classical Greek and Roman literature, such as that of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. The entente of literary tropes between *Othello* and *Oroonoko* thus suggests a connection of influence from the Renaissance to the beginning of the eighteenth-century with regard to the representation of Africans.

Neither Othello nor Oroonoko are voiceless depictions of Africans like Collaert's engraving. Each figure is an adept orator in their respective story-worlds, admired by others for their exceptional speech. For example, as the military commander Othello relates to the Duke of Venice, his wooing of the Duke's daughter Desdemona was achieved not by the

"chains of magic" (I, ii, 64) that Brabantio claims, but by his oration: "She'd come again, and with a greedy ear / Devour up my discourse" (Shakespeare I, iii, 149). Oroonoko is likewise distinguished by his eloquence: "...his Discourse was admirable upon almost any Subject; who-ever heard him speak, wou'd have been convinc'd of their Errors, that all fine Wit is confin'd to the *White* Men..." (Behn 14). Though this later excerpt suggests that oral ability is typically associated with white men at this time, it displays how African exceptionalism in the eighteenth-century is associated with the degree to which Africans resemble Europeans. Both *Oroonoko* and *Othello* display a trope of orality associated with Africans that draws its exceptional tone from the eighteenth-century assumption that the more a non-European resembles a European, the more praiseworthy they are. Such a trope, in contrast with the literacy of Europe, serves to Other these men, and suggests an illiterate primitivity couched in their laudable oration.

Orality in *Othello* and *Oroonoko* is also tied to the trope of African credulity. In *Oroonoko* we are told as Oronooko boards a slave ship to discuss matter with the ship's captain that Oroonoko "never had violated a Word in his Life himself, much less a solemn Asserveration, believ'd in an instant what this Man [the Captain] said" (Behn 32). Though the Captain promised not to capture Oroonoko, Oroonoko's inability to recognize the duplicity of the Captain in *Oroonoko* causes him to be "lash'd fast in Irons, and betray'd to Slavery" (Behn 31). This enslavement is a consequence of Oroonoko's faith in the spoken word. Othello's downfall is similar to Oroonoko's. It is Othello's trust in the speeches of the deceitful "honest, honest Iago" (Shakespeare V, ii, 151), such as Iago's hints at Desdemona's infidelity, that leads Othello to make Desdemona's quietus, and subsequently his own. For both Othello and Oroonoko, the belief in the spoken word renders them credulous within the Euro-centric world of literacy, where words and their meanings are separated. This suggests that Europeans viewed Africans as incompatible with literate, "civilized" European culture.

Finally, both Oroonoko and Othello are figures governed by a deep sense of, and obligation to, honour. For Othello, his honour stems from a masculine, military sense of duty. As Othello describes himself to Lodovico after he murders Desdemona "An honorable murderer, if you will / For naught I did in hate, but all in honour" (Shakespeare V, ii, 289-291). For Othello, it is honour that redeems his actions. Similarly, Oroonoko is described as a "*Gallant Slave*" (Behn 1) who "had right Notions of Honour" (Behn 15), and it is his "Brave and Just" (Behn 60) reasons for killing Imoinda that redeem him. Thus, both figures share a heightened sense of honour that distinguishes them in their worlds and makes those around them

inferior.

However, for as much as *Oroonoko* appears to be drawing on the tropes in *Othello*, Behn's novella is not simply a reissue of Shakespeare's play. The ways in which *Oroonoko* deviates from *Othello* displays how the tropes of representing Africa and Africans had evolved since the end of the Renaissance. In contrast to *Oroonoko*, *Othello* is not troubled with exploring and depicting the nature of where Othello comes from. Contrastingly, *Oroonoko* begins with an explicit description of "Coramantien" (Behn 11) that constructs Africa primarily in terms of its sociopolitical structure. The text describes the "King of Coramantien" (Behn 11) who had "the Obedience of the People" (Behn 16), as well as the heir to the throne, the prince Oroonoko, and the sociopolitical dynamics of this African society. This sociopolitical structure is Behn's invention; as Joanna Lipking observes in a footnote, "The Fante people had a 'braffo,' or military leader, [one resembling the military general figure that Behn depicts] though not a strong monarchy. Moreover, as Europeans were slow to understand, descent systems of the Akan-speaking peoples of this region were matrilineal" (Behn 12). This matrilineal descent system contradicts Behn's conception of African society as patrilineal. This invented nature of Cormantien in *Oroonoko* thus says more about the European idea of Africa than it does Africa itself, as is the case with many representations of foreign places. Africa was a place on which to project normative European ideals of socio-political organization.

Oroonoko also establishes a new trope of representation that distinguishes it from *Othello* as a result of its inclusion of multiple ethnicities. Whereas Shakespeare's "Turks" (II, i, 23) only lurk shipwrecked by the storms off the coast of Cyprus, the Suriname people occupy a significant portion of Behn's text. The inclusion of the Suriname people, while it may seem irrelevant to the text's representation of Africans, is in fact crucial to understanding how Europeans were beginning to racialize their world. *Oroonoko* articulates in its description of the Suriname people a persistent trope in the characterization of Indigenous peoples in the Americas: namely that they are "so like our Parents before the Fall" (Behn 9). The edenic, infantile, and savage vignettes of the Suriname people in *Oroonoko* stand in contrast to its depiction of the noble Oroonoko, thus suggesting a kind of nascent tendency to classify by race (a tendency that finds full expression in *Travels*). Furthermore, the gaze of white superiority with which *Oroonoko* constructs the Surinam people and the non-royal African slaves—"Dogs, treacherous and cowardly, fit for such Masters" (Behn 84) as the text depicts them—displays a precedent racial hierarchy that would be taken up and fleshed-out by the development of scientific racism throughout the

eighteenth-century. The Surinam people are constructed in *Oroonoko* not only to help the Europeans define themselves, but to help the Europeans define and classify distinct Others—specifically Indigenous Americans and Africans —and place them beneath Europeans in a racial hierarchy.

Finally, another major deviation that *Oroonoko* takes from *Othello* is its conclusion. Where Othello gives an eloquent, redeeming speech before smiting himself, making his "bloody period" (Shakespeare V, ii, 353), Oroonoko's death is far less eulogistic. Although Oroonoko attempts to commit a valiant suicide to avoid "*fall[ing]Victim to the shameful Whip*" (Behn 63), he fails. Instead, he is kept alive only to meet his end by dismemberment. That he is "cut... in Quarters, and sent... to several of the chief *Plantations*" (Behn 64) is a metaphor for the objectification of the African body. Oroonoko is gradually reduced and degraded, both physically and spiritually, throughout the novel until his final end as an object of colonial exploitation. Oroonoko's cruel and unceremonious death, in comparison with Othello's valiant self-sacrifice, becomes an allegory for the degradation of the African in European literature, and by extension, in European ontology.

Having now elucidated the Renaissance tropes of representation from which *Oroonoko* draws, and the ways in which the text deviates from these tropes (but nevertheless submits to novel ones), let us now turn to Mungo Park's *Travels in the Interior of Africa* to see the persistence and evolution of these tropes by the end of the eighteenth-century. Where *Travels* differentiates from all the aforementioned representations of Africa(ns)—Collaert, Harlequin, *Othello*, and *Oroonoko*—is in its newfound guise of scientific objectivity. A text published at the close of the Age of Enlightenment, Travels exemplifies the scientific zeitgeist of the late 1700s. No longer did imagination and invention reign in literature, but empiricism, objectivity, and positivism began to seep into the literary world. Travels is thus a lens into how the rise of these Enlightenment ideals impacted the portrayal and the understanding of Africa and Africans in 1799.

While *Othello* and *Oroonoko* share narrative tropes derived from the pathetic conventions of classical literature, *Travels* represents a departure from these conventions. There is no central heroic, black figure, no pathetic romance, no noble, tragic end. *Travels*' anthropologic mission and objective tone strip it of the pathos displayed in *Oroonoko*. However, at times Park is torn between his duty to avoid pathos and adhere to objectivity, and his tendency to empathize with the world around him. Like a scientist observing a phenomena, Park seems at times resistant to intrude, such as when one of the Africans who accompanied

Park on his sojourn, Nealee, is left "on the road, where undoubtedly she soon perished, and was probably devoured by wild beasts" (277). The candor of Park's prose in this and other instances suggests a literary repulsion to the emphatic diction of his generic predecessors. But, *Travels* is not entirely devoid of pathos. The commiseration Park feels for the state of the Africans he describes is a condescending kind of pathos derived from the assumed inferiority of African peoples, designed to elicit pity in the reader, but limited by obligations to objectivity.

Travels does not, and could not, abandon its literary predecessors entirely, however. Despite the influence of new Enlightenment ideas on the representation of Africans, Park nevertheless employs many of the tropes that *Oroonoko* inherited from the Renaissance, namely from *Othello*. One such trope that *Travels* participates in is the oral African trope. Although the African is decentred in Park's text (in contrast to *Oroonoko* and *Othello* where a non-European figure is the central protagonist), it nevertheless emphasizes the orality of Africans in two ways. First, *Travels* emphasizes orality by foregrounding the speech of Africans—Johnson is Park's "interpreter" (Park 24) and Park records a "diverting" (Park 26) story relayed by a Mandingo. The second way that Travels emphasizes orality is by foregrounding the illiteracy of African peoples: "The truth is…that all the natives of this part of Africa consider the art of writing as bordering on magic" (Park 32). As with *Oroonoko*, the orality that *Travels* associates with its representations of Africans suggests an illiterate simplicity associated with Africans.

In conjunction with the oral African trope, *Travels* also participates in the honest African trope as articulated in the discussions above about Oroonoko and Othello's faith in the spoken word of others. In describing a grieving mother, Park writes that she "walked on before, quite frantic with grief, clapping her hands, and enumerating the good qualities of her son. Ee maffo fonio (he never told a lie) said the disconsolate mother, as her wounded son was carried in at the gate ; — Ee maffo fordo ahada (he never told a lie; no, never.)" (84). Like Othello and Oroonoko, the Africans in *Travels* uphold a kind of purity free of duplicity.

Furthermore, like *Oroonoko*, *Travels* is keen to observe and theorize the political and social structures of the African nations. For example, upon his arrival in the African village Sibidooloo, Park describes the government of Manding as "a sort of republic, or rather an oligarchy—every town having a particular Mansa, and the chief power of the state, in the last resort, being lodged in the assembly of the whole body" (203). 'Republic' and 'oligarchy' are both European terms and thus signify a European gaze. In instances such as these, it is language that

exposes Park's false objectivity. Just as *Oroonoko* imposes a false, Eurocentric patriarchal monarchy upon Coramantien, so too does *Travels* impose a Eurocentric conception of government upon the people of Manding. The modifier "sort of" and Park's ambivalence between republicanism or oligarchianism displays his awareness of his linguistic limitations in observing Africa(ns). Although he speaks the Manding language, Park is writing in English, and because language shapes how we interpret the world, he must therefore impose linguistic categories that are necessarily somewhat inventive.

Though *Travels* is without a central African figure, it is not without a seemingly exceptional (2) African figure who stands out in contrast to his peers such as the main figures in *Othello* and *Oroonoko*. Karfa, an African himself and a slave trader, is befriended by Park in the later chapters of *Travels*. Karfa serves as Park's companion in his quest to return to the coast. He nurses Park to health from his bout with malaria, and appears to alter his opinion of Africans' intellectual capacity. In describing Karfa, Park writes "I have preserved these little traits of character in this worthy Negro, not only from regard to the man, but also because they appear to me to demonstrate that he possessed a mind above his condition" (298). As in *Oroonoko*, the voiceless Africans in the text are made inferiorized by the exceptionalism of the few who find themselves validated by the European pen. Oroonoko and Karfa stand out amongst other Africans because of their resemblance to Europeans, not to Africans.

Travels is also multi-ethnic like *Oroonoko*. However, rather than Indigenous Americans, the other race Park identifies and categorizes are the Moors. Park describes the "rudeness and barbarity of the Moors" (98) and frequently refers to them in derogatory, Orientalist terms. As with *Oroonoko*'s portrayal of the Surinam people, Travels' depiction of the Moors is more revealing of European attitudes than of the African Moors themselves. If the Moors are rude, brash, and lascivious, then the Europeans are polite, reserved, and contained. Furthermore, as with *Oroonoko*, it appears multi-ethnic texts of the eighteenth-century employed a variety of ethnicities to define these against each other. If the Moors are rude, and Europeans polite, then non-Islamic Africans are neither of these things. The racialization of the peoples in these texts accords with the larger context of the eighteenth-century: the Enlightenment. Science and rationality demanded things be put in their proper place—characterized and categorized.

In a time unconstrained by the anthropological criteria of the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries, and unchecked by any other authority on Africa, Park would have been uninhibited to inject his text with fabricated interludes. The exactitude and assuredness of his

account renders it suspicious. However, this suspicion is a privilege of the twenty-first-century. The average eighteenth-century reader did not have the means to fact-check, nor a wealth of criticism to consult. Their encounters with Africa began and ended in the world of literature—the worlds of *Oroonoko*, *Othello*, *Travels in the Interior of Africa*, the stage-going Harlequin—and visual depictions such as Collaert's engraving. What unites all these texts are common tropes signifying the collective imaginings with which Africa was constructed over the centuries. Although over time the diction changed, the narratives, purposes, ideas, and underlying truth of the representation of Africa and Africans in the eighteenth-century is that it was always fiction. Whether implicitly or explicitly, no writer was able to access Africa without first engaging long-standing tropes of representation.

Endnotes

1 In this paper, the term 'the West', refers to the collectivity of geography that has come to be associated with the concept of 'the West;' i.e., primarily Europe in Mungo Park's and Aphra Behn's respective contexts, but also North America in the present-day.
2 By exceptional I do not mean to suggest praiseworthy. As a slave trader, Karfa is certainly not an morally admirable figure. Rather, exceptional in this instance refers to the degree to which Park's text foregrounds Karfa as a remarkable figure in contrast to other Africans.

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About Our Contributors

Dax Avery Hamouth is a fourth year Classical Studies Major and an English Literature minor (for now at least). She aspires to be a writer of prose, poetry, politics, and philosophy in the vein of her idols: Virginia Woolf, Hannah Arendt, Cáo Xuěqín, Bertolt Brecht, and Tolkien. She is in love with languages as both the realization of all human thoughts and hopes, and as the most beautiful art; to that end she is currently learning French, Latin, and Ancient Greek—though they all suck so much, English especially.

Elise Juncker is in her fourth year at UBC, double majoring in International Relations and Political Science with Philosophy. Outside of academics, she is active in her sorority and works as a legal assistant at a Vancouver law firm. The most important things in her life are coffee and her cat, Schnitzel.

Audrey Castillo is a fifth-year undergraduate student studying English Literature and Creative Writing. In her free time, enjoys watching Youtube and Netflix, cooking with her family, and spending time with friends.

Kayla Wilford is a 3rd year student in the History Honours program at UBC. She focuses her studies on Eurocentrism and hetero-patriarchy within the historical field, with the end goal of hopefully getting rid of both. Kayla's parents want her to go to law school, but she likes not hating her life, so she'll probably go to grad school and keep writing poetry to delay her inevitable entry into adulthood.

Katrina von Salzen is a fourth year English Literature and Language student. She enjoys working with youth through facilitating violence prevention workshops in Vancouver high schools. After her undergraduate degree she is planning to become an English teacher.

Cicely Williams is a 4th year English literature honours student who specializes in gender, sexuality, and women's writing in modernist and postmodernist texts. Along with Toni Morrison, she plans to focus her upcoming thesis and graduate studies on such writers as Virginia Woolf, Anais Nin, Jean Rhys, Clarice Lispector, and Alice Walker. Her work has previously been featured in The Garden Statuary Volume 10 and The Foundationalist Volume 4.1.

Allen Huang is in his third year of a Mathematics degree but despite that, he enjoys his English Literature classes. He still needs to read the overflowing stack of novels on his bookshelf and is probably behind on his classwork, but procrastination is surely a vice of us all. One can usually find him reshuffling his Spotify playlist for that one good song or perhaps playing the current earworm on repeat.

Valentina Sierra has always been a storyteller - from childhood, she's loved

creating characters, building worlds, and taking her creations on wild adventures. An avid reader and writer, she is currently working towards her BFA in Creative Writing at the University of British Columbia. Her writing has a dominant focus on family dramas and she strives to build her craft around the development of emotion and how feelings interact between family ties.

Aimee Koristka is a third-year Honours English Literature major with a minor in Archaeology. Her research interests include (trans)media studies, superhero/cyborg figures, conceptual viewpoint, and narrative mental spaces. She would like to express her gratitude to her brother, Matthew, for being her perpetual paper editor.

Grace Liu is a 2nd-year English student at UBC. She was raised in Richmond, B.C. and spent much of her life abroad. Her work was also published by LittleDeathLit this past spring.

Samhita Shanker is a 4th year student, majoring in English literature with a minor in law and society. Her primary interest is in writing fiction - she tends to focus on creating brown and queer stories and write what she needed to read growing up.

Dan Miller is a 5th-year English Literature undergraduate student who is also pursuing a minor in History. The academic field of study he is most interested in is Renaissance Literature and History.