

DA 2021

DELTA ARTS JOURNAL

2021 DELTA ARTS JOURNAL

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Looking

Inwards

my Truth,

my voice,

my language

Should.....JAHCAH

*Sykina Butts
First Place Poetry*

When black folk greet,
we have family reunions
right where we are.
“Oh! So good to see ya.”
Nappy cousins scan you
Up, down, and around.
“You look just like your father JimmyWanye!”
I say thank you and return to my seat
Catching a whisper as I turn my back
“Should have been born a boy.”

I rarely thought about what it meant to be a
GURLLLLLL.
Let alone a boy.
Just liked trying on my uncles' shirts
And biting the fingernail polish off my big toe.
Watching Bratz and the Mutant Turtles.
Wanted to marry Angel and swing nun chucks with Michelangelo.
Never occurred to me that I should have been a boy.
My mother never told me.
She only let me grow wildly
With nature's decree.

When black folk fight,
we hiss and pull knives.
Blasting a prelude of:
“I swear on God you gone get yo ass whooped!”
“I promise you, you got the wrong one!”
Aunt Rose will shout,
“Ya'll stop all that mess!”

Mama told me to stay in the house

Watching old cassettes of Jet Li
Preparing to break down
Whatever drunkard would come in
Hissing at my grandma
Spitting on his mother.
Taking my stance and bellowing my ninja war cry:
“HI YEA! JAHCAH!”
Kicking my foe in his balls,
I became a Fist of Legend!

Impotent egos screaming in pain
“Fuck you little nigga!”
My mother becoming a barrier,
“You should have left her alone.”
Devil’s fury replying,
“You should whoop that boy.”

I rarely thought of beating girls
Let alone of disciplining boys.
Mother never used corporal rods.
She forgave
And wept far from Gethsemane¹.
Refusing to conjure authority
Using a wand
Full of fear and atrocities
Just as much as paternal sovereignty.

My mother never told me,

“Should have been born a boy.”
She only let me grow wildly
Biting the fingernail polish off my big toe
While black folk hissed and pulled knives
Letting me become a Fist of Legend
Taking my stance and bellowing my ninja war cry:
“HI YEA! JAHCAH!”
She forgave
And wept far from Gethsemane.

Beauty and Gender Norms in Literature

Rebecca Hahn

How is a society affected by gender and beauty standards? Ursula K. LeGuin explores this question in her science fiction novel, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, in which she follows the adventures of the Terran emissary, Genly Ai, on the planet of Gethen. On Gethen, gender is practically nonexistent considering that every human-like being on the planet has the potential to become either male or female during the stage they call “kemmer.” While living with the Gethenians and attempting to form a treaty with them, Genly struggles to understand the Gethenians’ fluidity of gender due to the normal standards he remembers from his own planet. While Ursula K. LeGuin analyzes the role of gender standards on a fictional planet, Thomas Watson and William Shakespeare treat with the standards of beauty in the real world in their poems, “Sonnet VII” and “My Mistress’ Eyes Are Nothing like the Sun,” respectively. Thomas Watson describes a woman who appears to be the pinnacle of beauty while William Shakespeare assesses a woman who appears to be the complete opposite of the first. The descriptions of the two women reveal how aware of beauty standards the authors were and how this awareness affected their perceptions of them. These three literary pieces- *The Left Hand of Darkness*, “Sonnet VII,” and “My Mistress’ Eyes Are Nothing like the Sun”- illustrate how traditional beauty and gender standards are ingrained in the human mind and once ingrained, difficult to dispel. They also demonstrate how those standards influence a person’s perspective of others.

In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the genderless nature of the Gethenians baffles Genly Ai, and his perception of them is distorted by the gender standards of his home planet. Genly was raised on the planet of Terra, on which the differences between the two genders are clearly defined. Despite knowing in his head that the Gethenians possess a vastly different physiology, Genly still attempts to classify them in the same gender boxes as he knew from home. As Christiane Luck states in the “Problematising the Linguistic Status Quo: *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *Häutungen*” chapter of her book, *Rewriting Language: How Literary Texts Can Promote Inclusive Language Use*, Genly’s tendency to do this is demonstrated “linguistically by his predominant use of male nouns and pronouns to refer to the Gethenians” (55). Furthermore, when dining with Therem Harth rem ir Estraven, Genly views Estraven’s efforts at hosting as “womanly, all charm and tact” (11). The gender standards on Terra predispose Genly towards expecting certain types

of behavior only from one specific gender, and this leads him to subconsciously attempt to assign a gender to Estraven despite knowing intellectually that Estraven is without one. His struggle between the standards he was accustomed to in his world and the reality of the androgynous nature of the Gethenians is further illustrated by an encounter he has with a Gethenian from the country of Orgoreyn who is in the stage of kemmer. Although Genly initially views the Gethenian as male, a flash of light reveals “a girl...in kemmer...drawn to [Genly]” (171). The realization of this as well as the realization that he cannot help the Gethenian shake Genly; it causes him to move away and “not come back to my place for a long time” (171). This encounter challenges Genly’s previous attempts to classify the Gethenians according to his homeland’s gender standards. Thus, Genly’s native views of gender prevents him from fully accepting the absence of permanent gender on the planet of Gethen, and his failure to understand it influences his perception of the Gethenians.

The differences between the gender standards of Terra and Gethen influence Genly’s perception of the Gethenian people, especially his perception of Therem Harth rem ir Estraven. For example, Genly struggles to understand the physiology of the Gethenians as seen by his dinner with Estraven early in the book. Seeing both masculine and feminine traits in Estraven, leaves Genly unsettled as seen by his words, “It was impossible to think of him as a woman...yet whenever I thought of him as a man I felt a sense of falseness” (11-12). Genly even admits that when speaking with Estraven, he attempts to “[force] him into those categories so irrelevant to his nature and so essential to my own” (11) in regards to gender. This inability to understand Estraven leads Genly to distrust him and even after Estraven saves his life, Genly questions him, saying, “What were you after?” (198). The issue of the vast disparity between the two races and their gender standards affect Genly’s views of the Gethenians and similarly, affect the Gethenians’ view of Genly.

The Gethenians experience many of the same struggles Genly faces in regards to the perception of each other. The Gethenians have only ever known their androgynous society with only a fraction of their people being in kemmer for an abnormal period of time. These few beings are called “Perverts” and are viewed by normal Gethenians with distaste (63). Thus, Genly stands as an anomaly among them, being, like the Perverts, permanently in kemmer, that is, assigned a permanent gender, which is something completely foreign to the Gethenian culture. This significant difference between Genly and the Gethenians causes the Karhidish king, Argaven, to fear Genly and accuse him of being from “a society of perverts” (36). A guard at the Orgota Farm refers to Genly as “the Pervert...the ugly freak” (190). The Gethenians are accustomed to a singular society possessing unity in the one person. In the “8 Dreams and desires: four 1970s feminist visions of utopia” chapter of her book, *Dangerous Ideas: Women’s Liberations - Women’s Studies -*

Around the World, Susan Magarey explains that “[t]he very dualism that forms sexual differentiation is absent” (131) in Gethenian culture and thus they find it nearly impossible to understand a culture where such differences exist. Hence, the Gethenian gender standards are challenged by the vastly different physical nature of Genly and this causes them to view him with distaste and apprehension.

Like *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Thomas Watson’s “Sonnet VII” reveals the predominance of gender standards in culture, dealing specifically with beauty standards for women. Throughout the poem, Watson describes the woman whom he loves. Line after line details all the traditional standards of beauty which the woman fulfills from “[h]er yellow locks exceed the beaten gold” (2) to “[h]er fingers long, fit for Apollo’s Lute” (14). However, the singular focus of the poem illustrates the fixation of the author on these standards of beauty. Watson fails to look beyond the woman’s outward appearance and even admits that, “[w]hat other parts she hath I need not say” (17). This statement stresses the importance of outward appearances; it emphasizes that the fulfilment of the traditional standards of beauty is all important in a woman. In addition, the woman’s tremendous physical beauty influences Watson’s attitude towards. He states that her “face alone is cause of my decay” (18), which recognizes that Watson’s infatuation centers around that outward beauty and the resultant pursuit of the woman is leading him to lose himself. Furthermore, the woman herself has been affected by the standards of beauty which she fulfills. Because many people, such as Watson, see her only for that beauty, she has been reduced to simply a face. Her “other parts” (17) no longer matter to others. Therefore, Thomas Watson’s “Sonnet VII” reveals the emphasis placed on the fulfilment of beauty standards as well as the negative effects beauty standards can exert on both the beauty and those who view her.

William Shakespeare’s “My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun” poeticizes the appearance of a woman who is beloved by the author, and although the woman is vastly different from Thomas Watson’s subject in his “Sonnet VII,” the poem also illustrates the prevalence of beauty standards in society. Akin to Watson’s poems, Shakespeare uses the traditional standards of beauty for women to describe the woman he loves. However, unlike Watson’s subject, the woman of “My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun” contradicts all those standards of beauty. Shakespeare reminisces that “[i]f snow be white, why then her breasts are dun” (3) and “the breath that from my mistress reeks” (8). Despite the fact that the woman of Shakespeare’s poem does not live up to traditional beauty standards, the fact that Shakespeare utilizes those beauty standards to describe her proves how ingrained they are in his mind. Michael Bryson and Arpi Movsesian state in Chapter Eight, “Shakespeare: The Return of Fin’amor” in their book, *Love and its Critics: From the Song of Songs to Shakespeare and Milton’s Eden*, Shakespeare and his beloved are living in a time where “everything that grows holds in perfection but a little moment, and she is very probably past that little moment” (365). Each description

of his beloved exhibits the remembrance of that perfection in Shakespeare's mind which illustrates how difficult it is to dispel traditional beauty standards from a person's mind. Still, although Shakespeare's view of the woman is affected by her failure to live up to beauty standards, Shakespeare goes beyond Watson's affection in "Sonnet VII" because his love for the woman does not stem from her outward appearance as seen by Shakespeare's statement that "I think my love as rare / as any she belied with false compare" (14). In his poem, Shakespeare overcomes the traditional beauty standards which exist in his mind to love the woman "for the individual over the ideal" (Bryson 365).

Although they possess stark differences, these three works intertwine to develop a narrative which illustrates the predominance of beauty and gender standards. In presenting Genly's battle with accepting the androgynous nature of the Gethenians in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Ursula K. Le Guin parallels Shakespeare's descriptions of his beloved. For instance, both Le Guin and Shakespeare utilize features which do not exist in their subjects; that is, Genly attributes male and female pronouns to the Gethenians just as Shakespeare explores traditional beauty standards in order to describe what his beloved is not. In addition, both Genly and Shakespeare illustrate how ingrained beauty standards can affect a person's perception of others as seen in previous paragraphs. Similarly, the negative effects of beauty standards in Thomas Watson's "Sonnet VII" mirror the harsh judgments made by Genly against the Gethenians because of the differences between the gender standards of his home planet and those of Gethen. Therefore, the combined conversation concerning *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Watson's "Sonnet VII," and "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun" by Shakespeare illustrates how the issues of beauty and gender standards and how they affect a person's mind.

Ursula K. LeGuin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Thomas Watson's "Sonnet VII" and William Shakespeare's "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun" demonstrate the effects of gender and beauty standards in regard to their prevalence in a person's mind and in the influence they exert over one's perception of others. *The Left Hand of Darkness* presents a drastically different society concerning gender and the difficulty in understanding that arises between it and a person from a different society with more traditional gender standards. On the other hand, Watson's use of typical beauty standards to describe his beloved in "Sonnet VII" exhibits the negative effects a fixation on such things can cause. Shakespeare also elaborates on traditional beauty by using them to describe an unconventional woman. Through its descriptions, "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun" displays how beauty standards affect a person's view of another even when both persons care deeply for each other. Thus, the explorations of gender and beauty standards in these three pieces of literature allow insight into the effects of such standards.

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Chit-Chat

K'na Rose

Born into a family who already spoke my language.
The art of persuasion by principle,
To speak only when spoken to, out of respect, not out of spite.
To be outspoken with nothing else to add to the conversation
Except inquiry and doubt.
The implosion of Scripture and Verse, a direct reply from our deity;
The Good Book knows all.

Despite the affliction of worldly influences,
The Word was still my sword.
To prevail in the midst of temptation,
To lyrically admit to Sin - the melodies on my CD player
Singing to me, the Truth I now wish to seek.
Empowered by the words of someone else,
Though my voice was adequate enough.

They did not speak my language for long,
When I switched up my dialog and kept a different type of company.
Enthralled with the alluring sweet promises of men, of friends,
Whose words soothed a songless Soul,
Whose acknowledgment made more sense than
Preaching the Word of God to my neighbors.
To choose sin over sanity, to salvage my voice for safekeeping.

Writing like a Warrior in my bedroom alone,
Venting and plotting my escape, Stanza by Stanza.
The binding of my notebooks kept me bound to secrecy.
My world, where genuine conversation was a luxury,
Where lead from my pencil or ink from my pen
Was the only safe passage to my true intentions.
How rendecritical of them, to assume my silence was for free.

I am more verbal, more vibrant, more vigorous with my speech.

A newfound freedom unleashed by too many kitchen pep talks.
Too many times told to simply
“Do as I say, not as I do.”
How redecritical of them, to assume, to presume, to consume
My Truth, my voice, my language,
Without Repercussions.

In Stinky Yamper I Trust

Riley Hardin

Second Place Creative Nonfiction

Growing up, I was always very mature and motherly. There are many times I would be told to stop bossing my siblings around, or to stop nagging everyone, but that's just me. There were also many times nobody would listen to what I said, which would anger me and lead me to bossing my siblings around even more. I guess that comes with being the oldest kid, or maybe it's just a part of my personality, as it is for many people. It always has been, and I have no doubt it always will be. My motherly instincts have taken me far honestly.

I'm what someone would call "The Mom Friend". This means I give out lots of advice to people, I look out for everyone in my group, protect them, nag them, scold them, reason with them, ya know typical stuff your mom would do for you. Except I'm cool. Now, where does this go? How else do I use it? Well, it also plays largely into how I form relationships and cope with my depression and anxiety.

This past Fall my boyfriend, Ben, and I took a huge step in our relationship. We got a pet together, an adorable little corgi puppy we decided to name Yamper, after the new corgi Pokémon. We had been trying to get a pet for a couple months, we both wanted a little furry friend, and we had hoped it would help me not feel so lonely and paranoid since I am often home alone. We have tried a couple of times to adopt a cat from the animal shelter, but the cat we would choose would get adopted before our applications were even looked at. I was constantly devastated, but I took it as a sign it wasn't meant to be yet.

Well, that changed in August. Ben has always wanted a corgi, but they are an expensive dog breed and hard to find in shelters, especially in the south. The other thing is I have always been terrified of dogs. I am able to get used to certain dogs sometimes, but it takes me being around them a lot to even let them sit near me. Ben's sister had messaged him saying that there was a Craigslist ad for a corgi pup right outside Oxford. The best part, for only \$800 dollars. This was an amazing opportunity for a Corgi, and we had been saving up to buy one in the future. I could tell Ben really wanted to try and get one of the puppies, so I said for our anniversary I would put up the money to get one if he wanted to.

This was a big step for me, he knew how I felt about dogs, but something about this felt right. We both needed a pet in our lives, and this felt like a sign that it was meant to happen. So, we drove out to Oxford to meet with the breeder and pick

out the puppy. The entire drive there, Ben was bouncing excitedly in his seat, and I was nervous. What if I got freaked out? What if it wasn't a legit offer? But, when we got there, these fears went away for me. The minute I held this 6-week-old puppy in my hands, I felt complete. My motherly instincts kicked in, all my nagging, bossiness, and capacity to care for a living being kicked into high gear when this little furball snuggled up to my chest. Ben and I both knew she was the perfect first dog for me, and the perfect first addition to our little family.

We put a down payment on her and agreed to come back in two weeks to pick her up and pay the rest of price for our new addition. There was no going back, and I had not felt like I had a purpose like this in a long time. I was going to help raise a living thing again. This purpose, this drive hadn't been around in over a year since I moved away to college. I hadn't felt that way since my baby sister was born 4 years prior. This puppy gave me a drive, a reason to live, she was my little baby. Even though Ben and I agreed she was his dog, his responsibility to train, we also both agreed she was our kid. Our first real big step in our relationship. I already lived with him, so I could be there every step of the way to help raise our little fur ball.

Now Yamper is almost 8 months old, and she is the best little shithead I could have ever asked for. She has lots of little quirks that get on my nerves, like not wanting to use the bathroom if its been raining outside. God forbid I try to make her go pee on the wet grass. Of course, she has no problem sitting there in the mud looking up at me, or playing in the mud, but no she can not use the potty on the wet ground. That is her biggest quirk, the biggest problem that even my nagging and bossiness can't fix. I still love her though. I do love it when I come home, and she runs into my lap with the goofiest little smile on her face. I love bossing her around to come cuddle with me, or to sit by my side while I work. Being a dog mom is fun, it's different, a new way to use my motherly nature. Even though she irritates the piss out of me, I wouldn't change it for the world.

I previously mentioned my baby sister and how she was another driving force behind my motherly instincts, my favorite memory of both of my babies was when they met for the first time. It was December, and Ben and I had driven down to spend Christmas with my family and of course we brought Yamper with us. Well, we got to my family's house and the first thing that happened was my baby sister, Addie, ran up to me and hugged me with the squishiest hug her little body could muster. When we brought Yamper inside they immediately clicked. The two of them became best friends. Nothing has ever made me as happy as watching the two of them, the two biggest lights in life bonding with each other.

My heart swelled immensely as they sat in the living room playing with toys together. It swelled every time Addie would say "Silly Yamper! She's so silly Riley!" she would giggle each time she would say it too. Yamper would continuously try to give Addie kisses, and chase her around the living room. It was beautiful. I will

always remember them together. I will always remember the two of them cuddling up to me as we took a nap. I will always love the two of them with all of my heart. The trust I have in them to always put a smile on my face, and the love I have for them will never change. Even though my mom side comes out most for both of them, it doesn't stop the fact that each time I felt as though my life was dark, it was them coming into my life that made me feel like I had a purpose again.

bones

are not

for lunch

Yeah, She's Mine

Riley Hardin
First Place Creative Nonfiction

We live in a time where divorce rates are high, as well as the increase in people with second marriages. Sometimes, this leads to blended family's forming with a couple of kids from one parent, and a couple from the other. Then sometimes the newly remarried couple have a kid of their own, and that's exactly what happened with my mom and stepdad. My youngest sister and I are thirteen and a half years apart, a large age gap between siblings. This led to her often being mistaken for my kid and sometimes this bothered me, but ultimately, she is my kid in a way. She didn't grow inside of me, but I put my life into her. This beautiful little girl saved my life and continues to every single day.

As I was growing up, my mom often told me that my birth saved her life and I always thought she was just being silly. How can a parasite that grew inside you save you? How did me crying in the middle of the night make my mom a better person? What did my brothers and I do to bring meaning into her life? I always thought she was crazy and said that stuff to show me she loved me, but that changed when Addie came along. Her birth made me realize what my mom meant, just hearing that my mom was pregnant with her changed my life in a beautiful way. A child really could change my life, my mom wasn't just making up stories.

When I was little I was often very lonely at school because I was the dorky girl who just wanted to read and didn't want to wear pretty dresses and skirts. I was incredibly shy and had lots of trust issues, which made it even harder for me to make friends. I was such a weird kid that I carried my teddy bear, Mr. Purple Bear, around with me until I was eleven. When my mom married my stepdad, I was scared. I had already met his kids plenty of times before, but I knew they wouldn't like living with me, just like the kids at school didn't like to play with me. Adjusting to my new family was hard, and it became even harder when my mom lost her job and we had to move across the state.

I became increasingly more depressed. At twelve years old I lost my will to live, I fell into a hole full of monsters that the only way to fix everything was to hurt myself. I began to cut at my legs, scratch my wrists, burn myself where no one could see. That summer when my brothers and I went to spend a couple of weeks back home with my aunt I became convinced the only way I could truly fix everything was to kill myself. In my mind no one needed or wanted me, I was all

alone. One phone call changed my plans though. My aunt got a phone call from my mom, and when I went to talk to her I had fully intended that it was going to be the last time I talked to my mom. However, she told me she was pregnant, and it was like a sign had been given to me that I couldn't go yet. There was no way I could kill myself now, what if this child grew up thinking I killed myself because of them? What if they thought I hated them being born so much that I had to die rather than be with them? In all those thoughts...I became hopeful.

I was already the oldest of all my siblings, so I knew what being a big sister meant. There was something different this time though, I was old enough to understand what having a new baby would mean. I began to think my purpose was to help this baby grow, I had to protect them from all the evil I faced. The days leading up to Addie's birth had me excited, but anxious. What if I couldn't protect her? What if I wasn't who she needed me to be? The day she was brought home though, it was like a literal light had come in my life to guide me out of the darkness. She became my reason to live, she changed me.

Addie needed me; I became a provider for her. While I didn't give birth to her, she really became my own child. When my mom was at work, I fed and changed her, I gave her cuddles while she tried to nap, I protected her. I took over a role I didn't have to, but as she grew older it was just the way it was. My stepdad didn't really act like a parent, so I stepped in. Addison's laughter, her smile, her cuddles, her high fives, her dance parties, her adventures are what constantly keep me going. I still struggled with self-harm and depression though. I still constantly toyed with the idea of killing myself, because I didn't think I was good enough for her or for anyone. The fear of her growing up without me kept me alive though, but it was also her that made me realize I needed help.

I remember the first time Addie saw my scars. She didn't really know what they were, but she knew I was hurt, and she wanted to play doctor to fix my boo-boos. This was when I finally opened up to my mom and told her about the years of self-abuse, when I finally told her that I felt like Addie was my only light in life. I was my mom's rock for so many years, and I felt like I let her down. I was her first reason to live, just like Addie was for me. I couldn't leave because she would lose her rock, and Addie would lose her protector.

It has been six years since Addie was born, and I have fought hard with myself to get better still. I have constantly had to find other reasons to live, especially now that I am so far away from her. Even though people may mistake me for her mother, I am not. I know she is not my kid, but sometimes it really feels like she is. I have to keep living so I can make the world a better place for her. I have to help her keep her innocence for as long as possible and protect her from all the bad thoughts that have plagued me for years. Nothing will ever change the fact that Addie changed my life in an inexplicable way, but she helped shape into who I am today. She's made me excited to have my own family one day, and she makes me

2AM Plastered to My Brain

Kelly Foster

Second Place Poetry

The problem I've encountered
With the way I walk is this:
On rainy days, when I'm
Looking down,
I make myself witness to
A fairly nice pair of shoes, my shoes,
Collecting the melted mist
And mud, the twigs like
Chipped off bits of
Brown-bagged bone.

This becomes an issue at a certain point
Because
Well
Bones are not for lunch.

Take the other day, for example.
I'm walking, right?
My neck follows its traditional axis,
And my face bares resemblance
To the torn appendage of a
Teddy bear,
Reigned into its dangling place by
One final, solitary thread.
(Of course,
Some stuffing tumbles free,
Or beans,
Whatever you
Have to offer.)

Bear in mind,
I had never seen the world
Through shades of an overflowing

Mug from an Irish pub,
 But there I was,
 Tracing my footsteps across the pavement
 With undercooked, raw eyes that I
 Tucked in a little too often for their age.
 If I squinted, I could
 Catch
 My reflection in the
 Puddles staining the path.

I chose not to squint,
 But I did
 See, at one point,
 As I was rounding a corner,
 This little carved heart
 With two illegible names scrawled inside, and
 My heart could only hope for
 Such permanence and such unity.
 Concern gnashed its teeth across my skeleton
 Like blind, elderly bats
 Aiming for insects hiding
 In green, sharp sword grass.
 My eyes were like an incisor
 On that poor, crude heart,
 That poor heart crushed
 By soles and souls,
 Because I thought
 Do we really have to carve our own?

I mean,
 We built a helmet for the earth
 To keep ourselves from stepping across
 Twig-bones and sword-grass;
 Only the weather appears to have stepped on me,
 Leaving me with fragments,
 None of which can build a sword.
 The best I can hope for is a
 Reconfiguration
 Of what I already had, and hopefully
 It still works the same.

The pavement is and was
Unbearably smooth.
Five minutes and I can already hear
The gasping of
Cracks now filled,
Choking on cement.
People make death out
Like it's a chorus,
But I fear
I will go like this.

As I begin to think of the world
As nothing more
Than branching slabs of gravestone,
I remember that

The problem I've encountered
With the way I walk is this.

The Curse of Repressed Trauma and Its Effects on the Family

Riley Hardin

The effects of repressed trauma and secrets can be detrimental to a single person over a short period of time, or their entire life. This effect grows larger when the trauma and secrets surrounding them remain unresolved for generations of people who are connected, especially in the form of the family. These effects are explored in Lee Smith's *Oral History* and Tananarive Due's *The Good House* both of which center around families whose houses have become haunted by the hidden, unprocessed traumas and secrets of their ancestors. Smith's *Oral History* offers a multigenerational reading of various members surrounding the Cantrell family who live in the haunted Hoot Owl Holler located in a small Appalachian town. Within the novel, three generations of Cantrells, and those who become intertwined with them, reveal individual parts of the family's traumatic past. Through the story's multiple narrators, it is revealed that the Cantrell family fails to process through each generation's trauma, which then collectively build up and negatively haunt their family home in the form of a curse that forces them to continue the cycle. The family in Due's *The Good House* centers Angela Toussaint, her son, and grandmother who each experienced traumas that led to an evil taking control of their lives. These traumas and evil entity connected themselves to her deceased grandmother's house, the Good house, located in the small town of Sacajawea, Washington. Unlike the Cantrells though, Angela builds up the courage to return to her family's haunted home, and through uncovering the secrets of her grandmother's past, is able to work through her family's trauma and release the house of its ghosts. While the Cantrell's intense negative detachment and burial of trauma and secrets prevent them from being able to escape the haunting of Hoot Owl Holler, Angela's drive to overcome her own trauma allows her to free her entire family of its trauma and secrets, thus eliminating the haunting for good. Each family and house experience negative hauntings related to repressed trauma, and while one story represents the dangers of allowing trauma to haunt over multiple generations, the other shows how hauntings can positively lead to a freedom from trauma.

In the beginning of *Oral History*, a young woman named Jennifer, an estranged member of the Cantrell family reconnects in order to begin an oral history project for school that focuses on the haunted family home, Hoot Owl Holler,

and thus sets the stage for the investigation into the family's trauma. For this part of the book, the third person narrator speaks for most of the chapter and reveals how "embarrassed [Jennifer] was even so slightly to be related to people like [the Cantrells]-about her real mother's family and their haunted house in Hoot Owl Holler" in which Jennifer's outside perspective of the family's lifestyle is influencing her view of the hauntings (17). This, however, contrasts what Jennifer writes in her notebook later in the chapter when she acts as narrator because she says that "one feels that the true benefits of this trip may derive...from my new knowledge of my heritage, and a new appreciation of these colorful, interesting folk. My roots" (19). This, according to Rhonda Armstrong in her article "Reading around the Narrator in Lee Smith's *Oral History*" demonstrates "the disconnect between Jennifer's interpretation of the scenes and the third-person narrator that occurs alongside her own thoughts and writings" because there is another voice available to act as a voice of truth (Armstrong 11). With this Armstrong also argues that this might lead to the "[consideration of] alternate perspectives for what the narrator does interpret; and to pay close attention to what the narrator might be ignoring" which could be beneficial in helping to identify the main sources of trauma (Armstrong, 8). Since the family's trauma revolves around their inability to process the past, finding the true source of the trauma through the investigation of things outside of the narrator's perspective can be key in finding out why they may be repressing it in the first place.

Beginning with the first of the three, arguably, most influential trauma holders of the Cantrell family, Almarine, as well as a look into the cause of his trauma, and how repressing it changed him is crucial to understanding how the family and its home first began to become haunted by repressed trauma and secrets. Through the narrator Granny Younger, a member of the small Appalachian town Hoot Owl Holler resides in, the first half of Almarine's tale is told, and reveals its climax with the death of his beloved wife Pricey Jane and his son Eli. Prior to her death, Pricey Jane narrates a small portion of Almarine's tale in which she reveals that "sometimes he'll cry in the night and when she wakes him...What's he afraid of Almarine? Of losing her, he says" showing how important Pricey Jane was to him (70). Then, following her death, Almarine is unable to properly work through the pain he feels; he instead "looked, but he never saw. He never minded nothing, and this went on for the longest kind of time, for days and days" in which he even ignored his surviving child, baby Dory, who was his last piece of Pricey Jane (82). It is following this tragic event that Almarine's character begins to change from a thriving family man, to someone holding back intense amounts of grief that start the family's cycle of traumatic repression, and thus the curse of Hoot Owl Holler.

The next trauma holder then, is Dory who, because of her father's inability to cope with the loss of his wife, grows up in a house that is haunted by a curse that gets passed down to her as she fails to work through her own trauma,

on top of her father's. Dory's trauma is exposed in two parts of the novel, primarily through the narration of Richard Burlage and one of her daughters Sally. The cause of her trauma is the betrayal felt by her lover Richard Burlage, a city-raised schoolteacher who falls for Dory and offers to help her escape Hoot Owl Holler and be with him but ends up getting tricked into leaving without her. Even though Dory doesn't narrate her own trauma, both Richard Burlage and Sally allow pieces of Dory's experience to come forward and show the effect it had on her. In Burlage's narration of his and Dory's relationship he recounts the following line being spoken to him by Dory, "You never come...I have been waiting but you don't come" which not only foreshadows her actual trauma, but hints at her own inner fear of having to wait, or being forgotten by who she loves (144). This shows that Dory cares deeply for Richard because she wants to see him and be around him, which explains another reason why Richard leaving without her caused her such deep pain. This pain is revealed and verified through the narration of Sally, who describes her mother as often appearing to be in a distant place and following some force no one else can feel. That force is the trauma she experienced following Richard's departure alongside the curse of not being able to work through that trauma that was passed down to her by her father. Sally describes that her mother would often walk off by herself and reveals that when she does this she walks "down the spur line mostly, just walking along the tracks with her head cocked a little bit like she might be listening out for the train" which shows that the trauma was in fact related to Richard's departure and her inability to leave Hoot Owl Holler (244).

Pearl, Richard and Dory's daughter and Jennifer's birth mother, serves as the final large trauma holder because she characteristically represents a part of her mother's trauma on top of the original curse created by Almarine's trauma. Pearl's story is also narrated through Sally, her sister, and given Sally's descriptions of her, appears to directly embody a part of Dory's trauma, because her insatiable desires to learn, travel, and have the best come from her father Richard, who also had an insatiable hunger to learn, explore and interpret the world around him. Sally describes Pearl as "never satisfied, not for one minute, always worrying...Pearl was the worst one for wanting, of all of us" which sounds exactly like her father, who desired everything so that he could feel superior over the rural townfolk (241). Her inability to contain her desires leads to her committing the root of her trauma, her relationship with a student at the school she works at. In regards to why she got with the student, Pearl says, "I *don't know* why I did it...it was like a voice told me to and I did" which is also another way that Pearl is embodying her mother's trauma, because she too was guided by a voice, that ultimately led to her creating her own trauma (273). This event caused her to have to return to Hoot Owl Holler where she gave premature birth to the student's baby, a trauma that led to "Pearl [dying] of complications" (275). In "Character Analysis, Unspeakable Secrets, and the formation of the Narrative" Esther Rashkin explains that "the configuration in which a shameful, unspeakable secret is silently transmitted to someone else in whom it lodges is called a *phantom*" which could prove that the ghost that haunts Hoot Owl Holler is

in fact the built up unprocessed traumas of the Cantrell family (Rashkin, 4). With the inability to process trauma building over generations of the family, the family's trauma has grown larger and stronger, and in turn making it impossible to ever defeat it. This then leads into the investigation of the traumas presented in *The Good House* and their relationship to the haunting of the Toussaint family home.

Similar to *Oral History*, Due's novel has three main trauma holders that create the haunting of their own family, and its original oppression is what allows the haunting to almost destroy them. In this novel the primary source of the family's trauma comes from Marie Toussaint, Angela's grandmother, and a powerful practitioner of vodou, whose personal trauma caused her to use her magic to unleash an evil spirit called a *baka*. In her writings Gramma Marie reveals that her whole life had been filled with hatred against her because of her skin color, and she admits that "the longer [she] was hated, the more [she] learned to hate in return" which caused her to stray away from her god Papa Legba, and it caused her to "with the utterance of a single word, I sinned three times and scarred my life beyond recognition" (347-348). In an interview with Dianne Glave, Tananarive Duesays that "racism affected the grandmother profoundly, the root of a family secret that has a ripple effect through generations" which explains why, despite the wishes of Papa Legba, Marie Toussaint would breach his trust and curse her entire family (Glave, 70). The curse, and its consequences are revealed by Corey, Angela's son, as he describes that "[Gramma Marie] was under a curse. It was a bad one, a curse that could live for generations...this is the year the curse could have been broken for good, seventy-two years later" but reveals that instead of breaking it, he made it worse (352). Since the effect of Marie Toussaint's trauma is a curse that shows itself in the form of an evil entity, an idea presented by Kathleen Brogan within the introduction from her book *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature* in which she describes the use of cultural haunting in a story and says that "At the most basic level, its ghosts function as a plot device-providing crucial information, setting in motion the machinery of revenge or atonement" which would show that the hauntings in this story do come directly as a consequence of Marie Toussaint's unprocessed trauma, because the ghost itself is what drives Angela to inevitably connect with her past (Brogan, 2).

The next of Due's trauma holders is Corey Toussaint, who is a teenage boy that has trauma related to the stress of his parents divorce, that leads to him not feeling close enough to his mother which causes him to delve deeper into the Toussaint family curse on his own, without her help. Corey reveals he has a lot of resentment towards his mother, such as when he is describing that with his dad "he always had someone he could be himself with, watch whatever movies he wanted to, not worrying a cussword would slip out of his mouth, because Dad just laughed at it" versus his mom who was "so tight, Corey felt like she was choking him. It wasn't his damn fault they were so messed up they couldn't live in the same area code" (120-121). This reveals that Corey puts blame on their family's separation on his mom, which creates a disconnect between the two of them that only heightens the original trauma of his parents' separation. The trauma

induced separation shows its toll on Corey, when he realizes that he may die trying to correct curse and he wishes to ask for her help. He reveals that “He had tried to convince himself that he didn’t need Mom while living with Dad, but he did. She brought out some of the best parts of him and soothed him in a way no one else could. What if he went straight home, fell on the floor at her feet, and told her everything? What if he could tell her the truth?” which is demonstrating how important she is in helping him process difficult and traumatizing situations, yet he feels as though he can’t (418). He plans to give her back Gramma Marie’s ring in hopes that it will protect her from the baka that is after him and believes that her not knowing at all is better than brining her into his fight against the baka. This, however, has the opposite effect and only ends up bringing her deep into the family’s trauma and its haunting.

Angela Toussaint is the final holder of trauma within *The Good House*, and her trauma relates to the suicides of both her son and mother, which are events that force her to flee her grandmother’s house and continue in the family’s damaging cycle of traumatic repression. The level of this repression causes her to completely cut off contact with all of Sacajawea, despite it being the place she grew up. She reveals that upon returning to California following Corey’s death she “had changed her number and became a ghost. Clients had her phone number, that was what mattered” showing that following his death she threw herself into work, rather than working through the intense trauma she had endured (46). She does also reveal though that she had gone to a “private mental retreat where she’d checked herself in for three months after Corey’s death” because she was “afraid she was going to hurt [her]self or someone else” due to the intense violent thoughts she had begun to experience towards her ex-husband after Corey’s death (57). While this represents a small step towards working through trauma, it isn’t the correct step in erasing a haunting created by generations worth of repressed trauma. This then leads towards an examination of the importance Angela’s decision was to return to Gramma Marie’s house and free herself from the hauntings and trauma, versus the Cantrell’s decision to turn their haunted house into a tourist attraction and continue to ignore their families traumas.

The final chapter of *Oral History* reveal the Cantrell’s ultimate decision to completely ignore the traumas that have been repressed over generations that caused the ghosts of Hoot Owl Holler to appear, and create Ghostland in a final act of repression of the family’s horrors. Ghostland’s creation by Al Cantrell, demonstrates a final closing off of the family from the house’s ghosts, and in turn the traumas that created them. In her article “‘Honey I’m Home!’: Splintering the Fabrication in Domestic Horror,” Gina Wisker describes the ability of narratives to “produce further versions of narratives, each bound by frames themselves resembling the frames of the house: there are hidden versions and secrets as there are walls and doors, hidden tombs” which relates incredibly with the creation of Ghostland, given that the house’s hauntings, and thus structure in the case of the amusement park, was created by the secrets and traumas the Cantrell family chose to ignore (Wisker, 110). Ghostland’s description as an amusement park

further demonstrate the family's disconnect from trauma when it reads "while the night settles in, to be here when the dark comes and the wind and the laughter start, to see it with their own eyes when that rocking chair starts rocking and rocks like crazy the whole night long," because in this statement the Cantrell's are commodifying the chair Billy died in, thus showing that they are unwilling to properly process the trauma behind his death (286). With the conclusion of the novel focusing in the Ghostland, the Cantrell's demonstrate their inability to properly cope with trauma and continue to be forced to live with it.

The ending of *The Good House* is more intricate in that Angela ends up reversing the Toussaint family curse because she was able to push through the struggles that were created by her own trauma and face the past of her family. Angela uses her strength to find out the truth about what happened to Corey and, in turn, discovers the truth of Gramma Marie's past, and allows the ghosts within the Good house to guide her into finally defeating the *baka*. This ability to allow the house's ghost to communicate with her directly from her ability to accept the story of what really happened within the walls of her grandmother's house and embracing her family's trauma. Jeannie Banks Thomas in "The Usefulness of Ghost Stories" accentuates the importance of Angela being able to listen because "sometimes, at least for a moment, a story can help us reach across the boundaries that we don't normally traverse" (Thomas, 57). This idea comes to light even further during Angela's final fight against the *baka* when Gramma Marie takes over Angela's body in a scene where "Angela's hips swayed, lifting high. She whirled, but she didn't feel dizzy...Angela Marie Toussaint danced" because this action allows both women's stories to mingle, and together they fight away the ghost of the Good house (454). In this mingling of stories the history of the family becomes completely open, and the power of the history of both women coming to light is what ultimately allows them not only to defeat the Good house's ghost for good, but it also allows their traumas to not hold power over them anymore.

The power of trauma and its holders in both novels demonstrate its power over generations as well as the home, which highlights the importance of working through trauma before it can spread across the lines of different generations. Both novels engage in the idea of trauma being a curse over the family, yet the trauma holders in each novel react to the curse differently, demonstrating a different level of the understanding of trauma by the characters. Due's novel uses the repression of trauma to show directly the haunting effects trauma can have on one's family, and thus also shows how the generations worked together to ultimately defeat the evil within their home and work through the problems that led them there in the first place. On the other hand, Smith's novel uses each trauma holder to define each generation of Cantrell's through the trauma they repressed, and how its buildup over time can lead to the denial or refusal of it

altogether, thus leaving them haunted by it forever. The differing representations of cursed traumas allow for both the negative and positive effects both trauma and hauntings can have on a familial unit and the individual.

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Looking

Outwards

of course

We're

still here

Nightlight

Kelly Foster

First Place in Fiction

It took Billy a little longer than most to realize he'd fallen into a black hole. He supposed he should've realized when his parents never answered his distress signal, but his mommy and daddy always took a while to answer him, he was independent like that. A big boy. Or maybe he should've picked up on the whole no-light thing, but wasn't that how bedtime was supposed to be? His parents had certainly never given him a nightlight. Not that he needed one. Again, he was a very big boy, and also very blind.

Perhaps the weightlessness should have been a giveaway, but then he never really felt connected to anything anyway. One time when he was little, his gramps had taken him to see the Sun at the very end of the Sol era. And Billy had really felt like he could see it, in his own way, with the pulsating heat filtering through the protective plexiglass and warmly humming across his skin, making him feel toasty and safe, like a baby in a rocking chair. What he couldn't see, he could feel, and that in and of itself was a form of seeing. Gramps had been the only one to understand that, had known to help Billy feel a little more, so he'd told Billy stories about the ancient Sun. Had carved out a tale in his old, whittled voice about a Sun even older than he was, that hadn't aged nearly as well as he had (he'd laughed heartily at that, and Billy had wondered if the color pink was like his laugh, brilliant and bright and only for happy things). Anyway, Gramps joked that the Sun had let itself go, that it had gotten all tiny and pale in its old age, and somehow even hotter. But Billy, who only knew this Sun, marveled at the way it warmed his tears through the glass. He'd gotten in trouble with his mommy earlier for knocking over one of her glasses of Earth water ('I'm never going to replace that!'), and he'd cried and hoped his tears would be enough to replace the water, and Gramps had taken him out, and now he felt better. He felt warm. He could see warm. He felt connected to it, could actually see gravity.

But then the Sun had died. He stopped feeling connected after that. A lot of people did. Gramps must really have, because he stopped showing up.

Another clue that Billy was falling through a black hole could have been that weird stretchy tug all through his body, as if he were a worn out slinky doll. Truth be told, Billy had noticed that--he'd assumed it was one of his nervous tummy aches. He'd never noticed them before, but then Mommy had started pointing them out to him a lot, and now he felt them all the time. Daddy sometimes got mad at Mommy for giving Billy tummy aches, but Billy knew she was just trying to help. He tried to notice them faster now, so Mommy didn't have to help him

so much. Whenever he went to a new place, wandered too far away from his parents, he looked for his tummy aches, and they were always there. It had made sense that he would have one when scurrying atop the length of the ship in his little space suit, directly and purposefully away from his parents only to trip and tumble into space. It made sense he would have a tummy ache now.

So, no. The lack of a response or of light, the weightlessness, the stretchy spaghettiness – Billy had not questioned any of it.

What really told him something was wrong was the lack of sound.

Because his parents were loud people, especially together. Especially when they attempted to fix repairs together. And yes, Billy had run far, but he'd run far before, and the sounds of his parents would always follow him via the mic in his ear, scratchy and tinny and biting, and he felt it, and he could see it.

He couldn't see it anymore, or feel it, or hear it. Things were more quiet than they'd ever been in his entire life, and it gave him a tummy ache. After a moment of pondering he remembered what his mommy had told him about black holes, about how signals couldn't get through. And that made sense.

So. He was inside a black hole.

He was also still breathing, oxygen tank still full, heart still beating. He must have gotten lucky and fallen into one of the really large ones, which he knew played tug-of-war with a lot less ferocity, weren't nearly as invested.

Maybe he'd get even luckier and live. He was still holding out hope for Gramps.

§

His parents' messages didn't make any sense.

They started off normally enough. Billy, who was quite worn out by the day's proceedings yet equally jarred awake by them, hardly flinched as the first burst of sound crackled through his ear. The entirety of his small frame was tense and ready, prepared for any new turn in this bizarre string of events.

Also, he was used to his mom being loud in his ear.

"Billy!" snapped the garbled audio. "Where have you gone? I've told you time and time again not to wander off! And did you turn your locator off? Do you not want us to find you? Get back here right now, and I swear, if I find you before you decide to come out of hiding, you're going to be in so much trouble!"

Billy had not turned his locator off; he supposed the signal simply wasn't reaching her. He had also already figured he would be in trouble since Mommy hated it when he ventured off by himself (which she was right about, because it gave him tummy aches). All in all, nothing she said surprised him.

The next few audio messages contained a similar tone and were equally unsurprising. Billy sat and listened. In summary: his mom told him to come out of hiding, where was he, and he better not be in the kitchen making a mess again or so help her, and Billy, it's past your bedtime. Where are you?!

Which. That was a little odd. Because when he'd first run away, it had still been the day--nowhere near bedtime. And he really didn't think he'd been gone that long. But he ignored this oddity because Mommy knew his schedule better

than he did, so there was no reason to question her.

Then it got weirder.

After an onslaught of more messages that started off with similar threats before devolving into simple shouts of his name and frantic questions about his location, his mommy said the following:

“Billy, please . . . it’s been a week now Where are you?”

She didn’t shout it. The weirdest thing she could possibly have said, and she didn’t shout it. Her voice was choked and brittle, a harsh brush of wind on an otherwise barren planet. She sounded like the snapping of branches; he’d heard as much before, recreated in artificial biomes dotted here and there across the galaxy, but only now could he truly picture it.

Billy realized: The strangest words were spoken in the softest of voices. He could see it clearly.

What he could not see clearly was how he’d been gone a week, but his mom insisted, and she was never wrong.

“Hi, darling. It’s Mommy again. I know this is hard because there’s nothing you can look at, but do you think you could maybe tell us anything about where you are right now? Something that can help us find you? Please, sweetie, be a big boy for Mommy and just try, okay? I’m right here waiting for you. I know it must be scary . . .”

“I think you may have accidentally switched your locator off, sweetie. You know how to turn it back on, don’t you? It’s in your space suit, remember? Right near... .”

“Your father and I miss you so, so much Billy. We’re looking for you every day. Just stay strong. I know you must be so scared. Is your tummy hurting? When you’re home, Mommy will kiss it and make it better. Mommy promises.”

And so on and so forth. Billy couldn’t truly answer his mommy, but he replied nonetheless, whispering his responses in the small, plastic world of his helmet. It made his tummy stop hurting, to feel that his mommy was closer.

He received one message from his daddy:

“I’m coming to find you.”

Short and to the point. Daddy was like that.

§

“Hi, sweetie. . .”

“Hi, Mommy.”

“You’ve been gone for two months now.”

“Sorry, Mommy.”

“We’re still looking for you. . .”

“Thank you, Mommy.”

“. . . and I know we’ll find you!”

Billy said nothing. Not that it mattered.

§

“Happy birthday, Billy!”

Turning ten years old in the matter of a few hours was weird. Billy won-

dered if he should start behaving differently now. Be even more of a big boy. Maybe if he was more of a big boy, he wouldn't be so sad that he was missing his birthday.

"I made you a big cake; I went all around the galaxy trading people for just the right ingredients, because today is your special day, and everything needs to be perfect for my sweet boy."

She was always doing that now. Calling him "my sweet boy" or "sweetie" or "darling," nicknames she hadn't used since he was little. He was getting older, and she was acting like he was younger.

". . . I couldn't find any buttercream frosting, but I did get sprinkles! I'm going to leave the cake in your room, so you can come back and eat it whenever you want to, okay? Take your time of course, sweetie. I don't want you getting a tummy ache! How are your tummy aches? Are they bothering you? Are you feeling okay?"

The answer was no. Billy felt no, could see no, wanted to shout no so loud it broke through the black hole, wanted to cry so much that his tears flooded the hole, lifted him out. He missed his mommy and her hand through his hair and her sweeties and darlings and my sweet boys, missed being younger, missed the feel of her hugs and missed seeing her, as well as he could. Billy did not feel ten. He felt three.

Things were going backwards.

§

The messages stopped for a while.

That scared him.

§

Muffled cries. She'd started talking, said "Billy—" Then she cut herself off, and muffled cries. Sobs. Billy could see them.

He could see a lot now.

If he looked one way, he saw Mom busily baking a cake for which she'd spent months finding the rarest of ingredients. He could see her masterpiece slowly rotting, her tears plopping on runny blue icing as it trailed down the crumbling yellow cake, adding to the freefall. Billy would know a thing or two about freefall.

In another direction was his mom just after he'd gone missing, hair frizzed in all directions, face flushed, the dearly departed Sun now resurrected in her eyes. She would find him, scream at him, and his dad would scream at her for being so loud, so she'd scream even more loudly, to prove a point. Mom would send him to his room without dinner, because a good dinner was hard to come by, and why would she waste it on a child who clearly didn't appreciate it? Who would run away from her just as she was about to prepare it?

This Mom was familiar. Was sharp in his ears sometimes, but familiar. Anyway, he understood her a lot more these days. He felt like screaming too. When there was no one to scream too, it was all you wanted to do.

He saw his dad in the distance, never speaking, always looking. Dad used to scare him, but now Billy realized he just wanted to get things done. Billy understood that, too. Space was vast, and people were small. Everything anyone did was dwarfed.

“Happy birthday,” Billy whispered to himself. He finally felt it. Could see himself as he once was, burning perpetually, and sometimes if he focused he could almost feel the licks of fire on his skin, branding him. When he let himself think about it, it was like he was still there.

But he could also see another version of himself, just ahead, age unknowable. Just older.

“Happy birthday,” he said again, louder.

§

“Billy. . .”

“Hey, Mom.”

“B-Billy . . . I-I’m so . . . my tummy . . .”

“It’s okay, Mom. Sweetie. I promise. You’re going to be fine. I’ll stay with you. Just close your eyes, okay? And you’ll see me. I don’t have to be there for you to see me. Close your eyes, and we’ll be together until the very end, okay? It’s not so scary on the other side.”

Billy knew this. He was already there, after all. Soon his mom would be, too.

His heart broke for her, for being so old and yet so young at the same time; he knew what that was like. But he also knew from his side that the actual passage was quicker than it looked, and really, there was no use fighting it. Gravity pulled you every moment of every day, and where gravity pulled you, you had to go. People just didn’t like being pulled toward the new.

His mother would get used to it, though. Being pulled. Once upon a time, the Sun pulled all of humanity. It had connected everything, provided the same warmth every day to every man, every woman. Every child, every adult. Every missionary, every activist, every criminal, every saint. People across the globe woke up, saw the Sun, and called it day. Day was for everyone, in the same comfortable little spot in the Milky Way.

So was death. Even the Sun died. Now, people only had the one constant.

Black holes were a connective force. People just had to wait and see. Like Billy.

§

One day, Billy passed through the singularity, and there was Gramps’ smiling face. Billy wasn’t surprised.

*Strong Black
Woman
Saraí Cook*

A woman is what I am
A woman is what you see
A Strong Black Woman is in me
Others see it differently
Others see a woman that's angry
Others see a woman full of hostility
A woman that's mad at the world just because she's outspoken
When she cries they see a woman that's broken
That's what they see when they look at me
A Strong Black Woman
I am more than what they see
I am more than what they think I should be
A Strong Black Woman is in me
My pain gives me strength
My tears don't make me weak
My scars beautify my skin
My experiences make me stronger
My outspokenness makes me a leader
That is the woman that I see
I see a woman that possesses all of these things
Something that I was created to be
Because a Strong Black Woman is in me

Sorrowful

Jack Vernon

soft supple Innocence caged in a world of reckless loathing
or is it reckless

remember the Past the Pain the Persecution
remember the Hate the Hurt the Howling

of the Child crying
weeping as it cooks in the Misery of this world

for what justification can be brought to this
under Who's Eyes are we being watched
life never seemed as meaningless as this

sounds like the Rapture
of course We're still here

remember her Laugh, her Love, her Little smile?

remember her Hands, her Hair, our Humanity
or do You lie

when your Youth die

fake it and sing gospel

unless No-One's really watching

life never seemed as meaningless as this

Bradstreet, LeGuin, and the Unification of Distortion and Reality

Kelly Foster
First Place Formal Essay

Perception is often an unconscious process, reflexive as a subtle breath, the steady rise and fall of a chest. That said, despite its unconscious nature, perception can influence one's actions. In much the same way that a man who touches a hot stove will reflexively withdraw his hand, a man who perceives his wife as solely a housekeeper, even unconsciously, may reflexively furrow his brow or even argue with her if she decides to pursue a career. Thus, perception influences action, so it is important to understand one's perceptions in order to understand one's actions. This can be a difficult process because, as mentioned, perception is often unconscious, placing people in the messy predicament of having to understand views they may not even realize they possess. Authors Ursula K. LeGuin and Anne Bradstreet both deal with this problem as they wrestle with contemporary views on feminism and gender in their works, and to counteract the issue, they employ a similar method of coating their messages in the very gender roles they are questioning. LeGuin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* and Bradstreet's "The Author to Her Book" present visionary worlds translated for their contemporary readership; they defy gender roles, but their defiance is constructed via those roles. They are subsequently able to force acknowledgment of gender roles and call them into question, thus demonstrating the ability of speculative fiction to deconstruct reality simply by mirroring it.

LeGuin mirrors reality in her use of Genly Ai, a human ambassador on the strange, alien planet of Gethen, where the resident Gethenians do not experience gender and sexuality as humans do. Rather, they are mostly androgynous, save for a point in their "kemmer" cycle where they can meet with others in kemmer and, while one takes the male role, the other takes the female role, thus allowing for the pair to engage in sexual relations. For a Gethenian, then, gender is impermanent; there is no solid concept of a "male" or a "female." This concept is quite literally alien, so Genly Ai plays a vital role as a means through which humans can relate to the story and gain some understanding of its more alien elements. He enters the narrative with many of the same assumptions that men may have had regarding gender at the time *The Left Hand of Darkness* was originally published. In his journal, Genly remarks on his inability to see outside his human perspective, noting, "Though I had been nearly two years on Winter I was still far from being able to see the people of the planet through their own eyes. I tried to, but my efforts took the form of self-consciously seeing a Gethenian first as a

man, then as a woman, forcing him into those categories so irrelevant to his nature and so essential to my own” (11). Genly displays awareness of his limitations as an observer, but at this point in the story, he cannot refrain from categorizing the Gethenians into male and female. He views these categories as essential to his identity, thus exemplifying the human compulsion to make assumptions based on gender. Confronted with a society of people who are for a good portion of their lives androgynous, he cannot root his assumptions in their appearance, so instead he turns to their behavior. Reflecting on the lack of war on Gethen, Genly comments, “They lacked, it seemed the capacity to mobilize. They behaved like animals, in that respect; or like women. They did not behave like men, or ants” (48). Genly is assuming that a lack of mobilization is inherently feminine; rather than assume behavior based on gender identity, he is assuming gender identity based on behavior. He is unconsciously, and perhaps desperately, clinging to any way he can maintain his staunchly human, binary approach to gender. He is clinging to humanity, so human readers may cling to him. As the fictional Genly explores this speculative world, so too may any existing humans explore it. LeGuin uses the familiar to explore the unfamiliar, but creating a relatable character is not the only way to accomplish this.

Rather than create a relatable protagonist in her poem, Anne Bradstreet instead engages with familiar ideas, the same ideas that Genly Ai himself might possess. In an article for *The English Quarterly* entitled “‘Once Masculines...Now Feminines Awhile’: Gendered Imagery and the Significance of Anne Bradstreet’s ‘The Tenth Muse,’” Alice Henton describes a tendency in Bradstreet to use feminine symbols in her writing; she states, “Working within established poetic tropes and traditions, Bradstreet’s poetry simultaneously destabilizes accepted gender assumptions and seeds the poetic landscape with feminine symbols” (304). Bradstreet’s poetry, per Henton, is destabilizing in nature precisely because it works with traditionally feminine symbols. Applied specifically to “The Author to Her Book,” this tendency reveals itself in Bradstreet’s engagement with childrearing and motherhood, two traditionally feminine pursuits. In this poem, Bradstreet makes a connection between motherhood, the feminine, and authorship, something which her contemporaries perceived as typically masculine. Personifying an unnamed book of hers as a child, she describes, “Thou ill-formed offspring of my feeble brain, / Who after birth did by my side remain” (1-2). Writing and motherhood are intrinsically linked here, and Bradstreet sustains this metaphor throughout the rest of the poem. This poem centers around a female author, an unfamiliar idea to Bradstreet’s contemporary audience, but it is made more digestible because it is rooted in something that is feminine – namely, motherhood. With the connection thus made, Bradstreet can then proceed to call the apparent separation of femininity and authorship into question.

Bradstreet, having engaged with the unfamiliar notion of female authorship on familiar terms, is then free to fully speculate as to how femininity and writing may not actually be so opposed. She cements the connection by picturing the editing process as a form of traditionally feminine caretaking, writing, “I wash’d thy face, but more defects I saw, / And rubbing off a spot, still made a flaw”

(13-14). Editing, a process highly associated with writing, is now, per Bradstreet's imagery, akin to washing a child's face, an act which has clear motherly connotations. Thus, implicit in Bradstreet's poem is the idea that any man who engages in writing and editing is engaging in a motherly act, much like that of cleaning a child. In depicting writing in such a traditionally feminine manner, Bradstreet subtly raises the question of why writing has ever been considered masculine when one could just as easily picture it as a feminine endeavor. In her article "Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor: Gender Difference in Literary Discourse," feminist scholar Susan Friedman notes the historical significance of Bradstreet connecting authorship and motherhood, writing, "Like the male metaphor, her comparison of motherhood and authorship reminds the reader of their historical separation. But unlike the male metaphor, her analogy subverts the contextual resonance instead of reinforcing it. . . . Bradstreet's metaphor unites motherhood and authorship into a new whole" (60). Friedman's point is that Bradstreet's poem serves as a reminder of the historical and societal division between women and writing, yet it simultaneously unites the two. Bradstreet begins by engaging her audience on familiar territory, that being a woman acting as a mother, but as she strengthens the metaphorical link between motherhood and authorship, she pulls contemporaries into the unfamiliar and forces consideration of the abnormal. In this respect, her work is similar to that of LeGuin, who also forces such reconsideration in *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

Using Genly Ai, LeGuin is able to achieve an effect similar to that which Bradstreet achieves; as Genly grows to accept the unfamiliar, he acts as a symbol of humanity embracing the unfamiliar. He loses his relatability, and so LeGuin, like Bradstreet, poses a question: she forces consideration of why Genly is able to change and accept Gethenian custom when many of LeGuin's contemporaries, faced with the idea of second-wave feminism, cannot consider a breach in established gender norms. Genly, unlike the naysayers of LeGuin's time, shows growth as he has an intimate conversation with Therem Estraven, a Gethenian whom he once severely distrusted and on whom he now relies to get across the treacherous Ice. Genly describes finally accepting Estraven for the person he is, observing, "And I saw then again, and for good, what I had always been afraid to see, and had pretended not to see in him: That he was a woman as well as a man. Any need to explain the source of that fear vanished with the fear; what I was left with was, at last, acceptance of him as he was" (248). Having finally allowed himself to recognize Estraven's differences, to recognize that his only companion is both male and female, Genly no longer fears those differences. At last, he can accept them, and he can accept Estraven. Genly, the human, has accepted something that defies the traditions of humanity. Symbolically, he represents speculation regarding a world in which all humanity could follow in his footsteps and display that same accepting nature. Genly is an Envoy, or representative, in the story, but he is also a representative in reality; he represents the unifying of the real world and LeGuin's speculative world, where humanity's expectations regarding gender are completely defied.

A prominent theme in *The Left Hand of Darkness* is that of unity and

of balancing opposites, and as it explores these themes in the fictional setting, it works toward the unification of opposites in the real world. and LeGuin's speculative world, where humanity's expectations regarding gender are completely defied.

A prominent theme in *The Left Hand of Darkness* is that of unity and of balancing opposites, and as it explores these themes in the fictional setting, it works toward the unification of opposites in the real world. The theme is made clear when Genly, explaining the philosophy of yin and yang to Estraven, reflects, "It is yin and yang. *Light is the left hand of darkness* . . . how did it go? Light, dark. Fear, courage. Cold, warmth. Male, female. It is yourself, Therem. Both and one. A shadow on snow" (267). Genly is claiming that Therem Estraven is the embodiment of yin yang; in a broader sense, he is saying that Estraven is the embodiment of balance. Estraven embodies the unity that is thematically omnipresent in LeGuin's novel. Moreover, Genly is also contributing to the theme of unity as he connects Estaven's alien customs, biology, and philosophy to the human philosophy of yin and yang. The thematic implication is that customs which are historically divided in the real world, such as those regarding gender, should, in fact, be united. Susan Magarey notes this theme of opposition in "Dreams and desires: four 1970s feminist visions of utopia," explaining, "The whole narrative [of *The Left Hand of Darkness*] balances opposites: images of light against those of darkness, unfolding through the long journey that sexed male Genly Ai and the androgyne Therem Estraven make through the Antarctic void of the white darkness" (11). In her analysis, Magarey is stating that this theme of balance has been woven into Estraven and Genly's journey. In having the two characters succeed in their quest, working with each other as peers and friends despite their differences, LeGuin implies that a united society, one that accepts unorthodox and seemingly alien stances on gender and feminism, would be a successful society. Again, LeGuin has mirrored reality by having Genly, humanity's representative, only succeed with an alien by his side.

LeGuin and Bradstreet both mirror reality in *The Left Hand of Darkness* and "The Author to Her Book." Through Genly, LeGuin crafts a speculative narrative in which a human grows to accept seemingly alien gender norms, and through her use of motherhood as a metaphor for authorship, Bradstreet symbolically links these two historically divided roles. Both authors use concepts which would have been familiar to their contemporary audiences, those concepts being a relatable human and a woman acting as a mother, respectively, to then call the very nature of this familiarity into question. They lull their audience into a false sense of comfortable normality before steadily introducing that audience to strange, new concepts. LeGuin and Bradstreet are able to unify the real, problematic world with a speculative, ideal world in which gendered tradition is totally deconstructed. Thus, as the works of LeGuin and Bradstreet show, the power to speculate is the power to unify reality with whatever distant, hopeful ideal prompted that initial speculation.

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craftily

escaping

the light

Paramour
Jack Vernon

lust and passion are the bait
listening to our every desire
fanning the flame of our sin
she desperately clings to our false presumption of innocence
playfully stealing our joy and holding it just beyond our reach and understanding
alas she is a Queen of disguise
about to be unveiled but craftily escaping the light
tree of death and hatred killing all that her roots touch and i am
Callous

Satan's Embodiment of Evil

Riley Hardin

The idea of evil has been explored throughout the centuries in various forms of literature, and within this a common idea is that of a character being the embodiment of evil. John Milton also explores this idea in his epic poem *Paradise Lost* in which he explores the biblical tradition of Satan being the first embodiment of evil. This is shown through Satan's transformation from an angel, into a being of Hell, and thus an embodiment of evil. Throughout the poem, there are multiple speeches given by Satan, or other characters, depicting his eventual resolve into becoming the embodiment of evil. Within these instances, Satan slips further and further into his evil self, and strays away further from God, until he is finally completely cut off from him. The poem's highlight on Satan's transformation into an evil being serves as a warning for those who may be easily corrupted by his rhetoric, just as Eve was when she ate the apple, and how easy it is to succumb to evil.

When the poem first opens, there is an explanation of the events that are about to occur in the poem, but it immediately follows with a speech given by Satan that shows the beginning of his transformation and establishes his emotions into the story's beginning. Before Satan speaks the poem's first pieces of dialogue though, the narrator gives a description of Satan as "Th' infernal Serpent... whose guile / Stirred up with envy and revenge, deceived / the mother of mankind," announcing that he is the poem's antagonist and was driven by forces associated with evil (1.34-36). Yet, it is Satan who speaks the first pieces of dialogue towards his fellow recently fallen angels and says that those who "Joined with [him] once, now misery hath joined / In equal ruin: into what pit thou seest" again highlighting negative emotions, while also appealing to those who acknowledge that they have just been defeated in war (1. 90-91). This immediately establishes that Satan is experiencing emotions representative of something other than a heavenly being and showing a disconnect from God.

Satan continues his opening speech by further displaying his becoming of the embodiment of evil, by attempting to rally his troops in more acts of revenge against God although they have just been defeated by him. Satan says that "All is not lost; the unconquerable will, / And study of revenge, immortal hate, / And courage to submit or yield" are still theirs, and showing that feelings of "revenge" and "immortal hate" are some of their driving forces to continue against God highlight the evil that has grown inside Satan (1.120-121). This strong sense of resolve inspires his followers, who worship him in a way similar to that of a hero, and this is explained in William R. Herman's article "Heroism and Paradise

Lost” in which he describes a “Hellenic hero [whose] qualities of individuality, of self-determination, and physical courage” which resembles qualities that Satan is currently displaying (Herman 13). However, given the opening explanation the poem gave, Satan can not be a hero, although he may appear to be to his followers. This idea of a hero early on in the poem makes Satan’s character captivating and wanting to be followed, much like Milton is trying to highlight. His resolve is then revealed to be false by the narrator who says that throughout Satan’s speech he was speaking “in pain, / Vaunting aloud, but racked with deep despair,” which shows again Satan’s transformation into a different being (1.125-126). This, according to Jack Foley in his article “Sin Not Time: Satan’s First Speech in *Paradise Lost*,” demonstrates “that [Satan’s] chaos is not only external but internal,” and this chaos within in is the transformation into the embodiment of evil (Foley 40).

Once Satan finally makes his way into Paradise, he engages with his inner transformation in the form of a soliloquy that highlights his inner struggles. Satan begins to realize that he is no longer a being of Heaven, but one of Hell when he says “Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell” meaning that he is beginning to be consumed by Hell starting to become its embodiment (4.75). He continues by saying that his current state is “the lowest deep a lower deep, / Still threatening to devour [him]...To which the Hell [he] suffer[s] sees a Heav’n” because he knows that as he continues to stray from God, his Hell will consume him and transform him into a worst being (4.76-78). According to Merritt Hughes in his article “Myself am Hell,” about Satan’s soliloquy “the structural importance of the hell within him [adds] to the design of the entire poem” because Satan’s fall from Heaven and transformation into the embodiment of evil leads to an understanding of why he was able to fully commit to having man fall (Hughes 80). His commitment came from this Hell within Satan, and he then spreads it across the Earth through the fall of man.

The ending of Satan’s soliloquy demonstrates his resolve to complete his transformation and truly become the embodiment of evil and strip away his connection to God. Satan realizes that he is now the ruler of Hell and decides that he can never ask for his forgiveness because he does not want to submit to him. Within this decision Satan strips away all good from himself as he says, “So farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear, / Farewell remorse: all good to me is lost; / Evil be thou my good (4.108-110). Allan Gilbert in his article “The Problem of Evil in ‘*Paradise Lost*’” says that at this moment “Satan has looked his sin in the face and decided that evil shall be his good,” and thus fully embraces himself as the embodiment of evil (Gilbert 177). Thus, if Hughes’ ideas about Satan’s hell structuring the poem are correct it would make sense that “if evil was to be personified at all, it must be by a character who expressed its nature; hence Milton’s Satan-the embodiment of troubles which afflict mankind” because were it not for Satan’s connection to evil and Hell, he would not have fallen from Heaven, nor would man had fallen from Paradise (Gilbert 177). Satan has lost his connections to God, is now embracing the evil within himself.

This resolve, and information he gathered by eavesdropping on Adam and Eve, leads to Satan creating a plan into how he will corrupt man to spite evil

God. When he begins this plan, he is caught by the angels who guard over Adam and Eve, who were instructed to find Satan before he could corrupt Paradise. Upon finding him “squat like a toad, close at the ear of Eve” the angel Zephon describes Satan’s appearance as “no more wast good, / Departed from thee and thou resembl’st now / Thy sin and place of doom obscure and foul” showing that Satan’s physical form has also transformed into resembling his new embodiment of evil (4.800, 838-840). This new embodiment of evil, and his strong resolve against the angels who have “threatened he, but Satan to no threats / Gave heed, but waxing more in rage” shows again characteristics in Satan that show him in his obvious new form driven by evil and rage, but also again in an admirable light similar to that in book one. While Satan is a “hardened and conscious sinner, whose surpassing egotism cannot admit any law but his own will, possesses characteristics which, though perverted, were originally admirable,” because he is able to hold his ground against his foes, who he believes has wronged him (Gilbert 177). This is yet another example of how Satan can appear appealing to those who are unaware of his embodiment and highlights the importance of acknowledging it within the poem.

With Satan’s evil embodiment and plan to corrupt Paradise being known, God sends Raphael to tell Adam and Eve the story of Satan’s fall, so that they may be made aware of his abilities to charm them, and his purpose for doing so. This story told by Raphael is the first and only time in the poem Satan is shown, and thus highlights when Satan’s transformation into evil began and why he did. His beginning transition into Satan is described as “fraught / With envy against the Son of God” who had just been “anointed...to him shall bow / All knees in Heav’n, and shall confess him Lord” showing that Satan was driven an envy driven by greed and a lust for power (5.661-662, 605-608). Stella P. Revard in her article “Satan’s Envy of the Kingship of the Son of God: A Reconsideration of ‘Paradise Lost’ Book 5 and Its Theological Background” states that “envy arises when one creature willfully resents the person or the accomplishments of another” (Revard 195). When applied to Satan it is clear that his envy is experienced because in Heaven he was “of the first, / If not the first Archangel, great in power, / In favor and preeminence” he felt cheated by God in his decision to have the Son be praised rather than himself (5.659-661). Satan then takes this envy and uses it to gather a “third part of Heav’n’s host” who also wish to fight against God in the war of Heaven (5.710). The power of this envy is demonstrated through the sheer amount of followers Satan was able to gather, and thus show a part of Satan’s power, while also previewing him as the embodiment of evil.

During the battle that ensues, it is revealed how influential Satan’s evil was in Heaven, but also shows how weak Satan is compared to God. Once the battle begins and Michael and Satan meet each other on the battlefield. Michael addresses Satan, “Author of evil, unknown till thy revolt, / Unnamed in Heav’n, now plenteous, as thou seest / These acts of hateful strife, hateful to all” which suggests that before Satan’s envious drive against the Son and God there was no evil in Heaven (6.262-263). The battle ensues with both sides fighting until the third day, when God sends the Son in to end the battle for good. When he appears the

Son “Grasping ten thousand thunders, which he sent / Before him, such as in their souls infixed / Plagues” that ended up sending Satan and his troops “With terrors and furies to the bounds / And crystal wall of Heav’n” where they fell through a hole in the ground beyond the gates of Heaven (6. 836-838, 859-860). Within this description of Satan’s fall, it not only draws focus onto the power of the Son, but highlights Satan’s literal fall into Hell as him being overpowered by the good of God that is within the son.

Following the end of the story Raphael parts from Adam and Eve and the story returns to the present time, where Satan is still lingering in hopes of destroying man and shows his evil strength to man in finally coaxing Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. His chance to do so finally arrives when he, disguised as a serpent, catches Eve by herself working in the garden. He then approaches her and begins to convince try and convince her to eat the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, and within this coaxing Satan further reveals part of his evil embodiment. In order to convince Eve to eat the fruit he tells her “That ye should be as gods, since I as man, / Internal man, is but proportion meet, / I of brute human, ye of human gods” trying to convince Eve that if she eats the fruit she will have the knowledge to make her a god amongst man, just like he is amongst the animals, since he has eaten the fruit (9. 710-712). This mimics the drive that first drove Satan to fall in the first place, in that he wanted to be considered an almighty being worth being worshipped, just like God. Much like Satan’s block to power being the Son, the fruit is Eve’s block from becoming a god in her own realm, and Satan is playing the idea that Eve would be driven by a greed for power much like he was.

This act successfully convinces Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, and with his plan having succeeded, he returns to Hell to tell his followers this wonderous news and showcase his embodiment in full. This event is unfortunately not met with much enjoyment though, because after he gives a speech about his success he “expecting / Their universal shout and high applause...hears / On all sides, from innumerable tongues / A dismal universal hiss” because God’s punishment on him, as a serpent, would be doomed to be punished by man for eternity (10.504-508). Satan turns into a serpent, bound to the ground and doomed to eat fake fruits off the ground. In this moment, his success in being a corrupter to man and embodiment of evil is destroyed by God’s power, because it is he who still controls Satan even though he has strayed so far from him.

Throughout the poem Satan transforms into his fallen state as the embodiment of Hell and evil, corrupter and ruler of all who also refuse to follow God. Although this portrayal of Satan is intriguing to some, it is to show how easy it is for him to corrupt those willing to believe in his purpose. Satan’s revolt against God seems justified and is convincing on Satan’s part because he acknowledges the emotion of greed and injustice such as he first felt. He understands how to manipulate these emotions to his own needs, and this is exactly what he did to Eve when he caused the fall of man. However, in showing that while his transformation was powerful, Milton ultimately ended up showing that God was still the all powerful one no matter how convincing Satan may appear to be.

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point me

to the

skies

Abide with Me; Fast Falls the Eventide

Jack Vernon

Second Place Fiction

October 10, 1483

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide;
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me.
Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see—
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.
I need Thy presence every passing hour;
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's pow'r?
Who, like Thyself, my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.
I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless;
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness;
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.
Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies;
Heav'n's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.
-Henry Francis Lyte (1847)

I'm awake, a rush of consciousness floods my eyes, nose, and mouth as I am written alive in a whirl of ink and paper. My eyes drawn a dull, piercing grey and my face soft and hairless. I gaze down at my chest as its penciled in and I see my arms and hands appear before my body like an apparition. On my right arm is a watch and a tattoo. A tattoo of Gil-Martin, constantly shifting and changing, seducing me towards a suicide pact.

I bend over and tie my newly formed shoes around my white ankles, I do this with great care as the laces feel brittle and for some reason I am concerned for their state. I pull up my slacks over my slender frame and secure them with a belt made of thorns. After this I slide into a warm but slightly bristly woolen sweater that is the color of milk. As it covers my chest and back, I let out a sigh of relief at the pain it brings me.

I put on my cap and turn towards the door that just appeared in the midst of the impenetrable nothingness and reach for the handle. I pull it open and gasp at what I see. I would go on, but I am forbidden. He beckons me with open arms, and I am the Elect, I come at His bidding

I'm awake.

§

I'm awake, a rush of consciousness floods my eyes, nose, and mouth as I feel the crust break apart between my eyelids, the smell of Downy-washed bed-sheets rips through my nose, and my mouth struggles to open as my jaw is tired and tends to lock. Weirdly enough my ears have not risen and that confuses me. The world feels empty without the typical sounds of my neighbors cooking or fighting or fucking or dying pouring through the not-so-thick walls.

I roll over and turn off my alarm, I make a habit of doing so gently to show that I am not mad at having to wake up and risk offending whatever Being deemed it important that I be alive for this day. I turn to my back and stare at the analog clock directly across the room. It has little birds and leaves and other things that I guess I thought would make me feel happier on it between the hands that seem to dictate my life. 5:45 it says and I'm not quite sure if it is the morning or evening. I still hear nothing.

I roll over once more and face the window while lying on my left side. I scream. In the window I see Them. I am terrified because of Them and what it is doing. Slowly but surely, I see through my newly uncrusted eyes Them pull a tooth from its mouth and smile a bloody smile and yell to me something I cannot make out, I still can't hear.

I'm awake.

§

I'm awake, I open Book One and begin to skim. How foolish does Hubbard think I am, not foolish enough I suppose. As my alarm continues to call to me, unaware that I am already awake, I pull out my phone and open my agenda for today. It reads, "March 13: Survive" just like every day since August 26th of AD 46.

I roll over and turn off my alarm. I slam my right hand on it, and I swear I could hear it whimper as it quickly shuts the hell up, not that I believe in a Hell other than my in-laws' cabin in Nova Scotia. I turn to my back and stare at the ceiling. It's navy blue and some kind of off-white that reminds me of my high school, perhaps that's why she chose it for our room. I can feel her soft breaths beside me. Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale. How easy would it be for me to smother her, after all it is foolish to wake up in the same bed as someone whose only goal in life is to survive, just ask a black widow, her husband couldn't tell you.

I roll over once more and face her sleeping figure. I stroke her cheek and as she wakes up, I remember to smile. She smiles back and yawns. I hate her but dianetics refuses to let me show how she makes me retch, not yet at least. "I love you honey", I whisper into her face then I get up and vomit into the toilet.

I'm awake.

§

I'm awake, and to be honest I wish I wasn't. Now you know why I'm never

honest, it bums people out. That's why I stick to sports, cards, and cheap women with even cheaper liquor. Can't have cheap cigarettes though, if I'm gonna kill myself I'm making sure that I do it right.

Speaking of, I think it's time for a smoke. Like my lighter? I engraved it personally back when I was on the outside. See, there's my initials right there on the side, R.P.M. I've been in here going on twenty years now and I'll probably be here for twenty more unless I can get 'em to give me a muzzle like you got there. Patience may be a virtue, but silence is golden around here. What I'm saying is shut up and get out quick before they chop something off ya.

If you want my advice, and trust me pal you do, you'll beg 'em to keep you muzzled even after they unstrap you. Its just easier for us all if the only time we speak is during the group sessions; that's how the Nurse likes it anyways. Oh, and I guess since we're friends now I gotta be honest with ya; I didn't really engrave this here lighter. I bummed it off that guy over there, Mac we used to call him. He don't need it anymore now that he's part of the produce section, if you get my drift. Sure you don't want a smoke?

I'm awake.

§

I'm awake, and as I jerk skywards my head hits the limb above me. My forehead explodes in pain. I slap my hand on my head and feel the knot swelling and I'm pissed because adding this to the sweat and sun and mosquitos and bruised and cut feet just reminds me how much I hate this God forsaken island.

I roll over and spit some blood onto the sand and stare as I watch some drip down the side of a moss-covered rock and see an ant drown in the fluid of my life. I scratch my beard and a patch comes out and I place it into a box where I keep my kindling, life gives to life. I grab some dried fruit and nuts and a bit of leathery meat and set out upon the prison that is Paradise.

I walk and walk until I don't. I stop and stare into the eyes of an old stranger, the first being I have seen since my damnation to Paradise. He walks to me with a slight limp supported on a cane that seems closer to snapping with every step towards me. As he approaches, I hear what he is saying, repeating it over and over. Are you on the right trail, my brother? Are you bound for the land of delight? Is the Savior your guide and your helper? He will lead to the mansions of light. Right as he passes, I greet him with a smile and a nod and turn slightly to watch him fade out of my peripheral. I pivot swiftly and strike him on the top of his balding head. It splits like a coconut; I'm slightly surprised with my own strength, but shrug and look into his skull. Inside are maggots and blood. The old man wasn't worth food for the dogs.

I'm awake.

§

I'm awake, and I open my mouth and water rushes in, and I can feel myself drowning. My heart beats faster and my eyes widen, and my soul pours out of my nose and over my body. I look into my eyes and watch me thrash against the inevitable. I don't feel sad, rather melancholy at the fact that I was wrong, and my fate is not as decided as that body's.

There's a chain attached to the ankle of the body and I guess that's what is keeping me here too. Watching to see if my body can defeat the cold iron clasped around the swollen ankle. I can feel myself becoming more real as my body fades into the dark ocean, and relief washes over me, but is quickly replaced with anxiety. Will my atheism be proven right, or will I begin to ascend—or descend—towards a greater being than I?

Shit. I start drifting upwards and I think back to the bet I made with the Calvinist in Norwich and I am glad to be dying lest I die again from embarrassment for my ignorance—at least he won't receive his 100 euros he is due. I arrive and honestly the throne isn't quiet as impressive as I expected. A frail man walks towards me and as he approaches, he shifts from my father to my priest to my wife and finally my son which I aborted. He looks at me and frowns. I can't open my mouth, but he wants me to tell you something.

I'm awake.

fond of you
Jack Vernon

look at you
might be found of you
many have loved you
bards have sung of you
Ducky that's easy to do

however i...
i am fond of you
barring death i'd always bond with you
barring death i'd always correspond with you
barring death i'd forever respond to you
if i was to die i would die still fond of you

as you may have noticed this poem is about You
about how i am increasingly fond of You
even startled by You
could i love You?

*God's Not Dead;
He's a Fat Lady
The Use of Christ
Figures in J. D.
Salinger's Nine
Stories and Franny
and Zooey*
Jack Venon
Second Place Formal Essay

God is not dead; contrary to Nietzsche's infamous statements in his collection *Gay Science*, God is not dead. He is, however, a Fat Lady. In addition to a Fat Lady, Christ is anthropomorphized and analogized throughout literature as anything from Faulkner's Joe Christmas to the literal incarnate Christ of the Christian Bible. The Christian Christ, that is Jesus Christ the Nazarene, is often seen as a rigid and uncompromising character of religion who is to be revered and treated with the utmost respect and honor possible. However, the concept of "the Christ" is often utilized much more abstractly throughout literature. In many instances, author's use this archetype of "the Christ" in even the most irreverent or unchristian works; this reveals a much more complex and intricate character of Christ. The character of Christ is not some simple, rigid, or even real, person, but rather the character of Christ is manifold in its meanings and multiplicities throughout literature. This is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in the writings of J. D. Salinger. A man of many religions, Salinger was born Jewish but known to practice Catholicism, Vedantic Hinduism, Christian Science, Scientology, and, most relevant to the soon-to-be-discussed works, Zen Buddhism. Salinger demonstrates this manifold nature of the Christ through his inclusion of Christ-figures in his works "Just Before the War with the Eskimos," "De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period," (both from his collection of short stories, *Nine Stories*) and *Franny and Zooey*. Salinger uses these Christ-figures to express his personal philosophy and views on enlightenment that there is Christ in everything.

Perhaps one of the most obscure Christ-figures in J. D. Salinger's *Nine Stories* is the character of Franklin Graff from "Just Before the War with the Eskimos." At first glance Franklin seems to just be some pathetic, boyish man who has cut himself deeply and is overly insistent on sharing a chicken sandwich; however, upon further inspection the case for Salinger's Franklin Graff as a Christ-figure seems undeniable. The argument for Franklin as a Christ-figure is astutely made in James E. Bryan's "J. D. Salinger: The Fat Lady and the Chicken Sandwich" when

Bryan writes:

Franklin's appearance ("a long man ... no slippers . . . sparse blond beard . . . mouth ajar") may be a caricature of an El Greco-type crucified Christ. He has an abnormal heart condition (perhaps signifying his heretical ability to love in a loveless world) and he served the war effort in an airplane factory. His time of service, thirty-seven months, recalls the Christ ministry; and airplane-making may be a startling metaphor for the Christ mission – the implementation of spiritual levitation (Bryan 227-228)

Bryan's omission of the physical similarities between Franklin and Christ is overwhelming evidence of Salinger's intent to use Franklin as a Christ-figure when it is accompanied by the fact that Franklin has cut his hand (resembling Jesus' hands in John 20:27 where John writes, "Then [Jesus] said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve but believe.") while searching through the wastebasket (Salinger 43). Here stands Salinger's "bleeding Christ," offering a downtrodden and wronged Ginie Maddox a chicken sandwich (45). Bryan refers to this chicken sandwich as a sort of Salingerian eucharist (228) and goes on to explore even more evidence of Franklin's role as the Christ figure in "Just Before the War with the Eskimos."

Salinger utilizes Franklin as a Christ-figure as a means of showing his views on enlightenment. Ginie begins the short story indignant over the cab fare that is owed to her by Franklin's sister, Selena Graff (40); however, by the end of the story Ginie seems to understand that Franklin is indeed a Christ-figure and her behavior drastically changes. Ginie embarks on a path of enlightenment beginning with her forgiving Selena's debt (54). Ginie seems to have learned from her experience with Franklin a similar experience as shown in the famous "Lord's Prayer" in Matthew chapter six when Jesus prays that God will "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Ginie realizes through her encounter with Franklin that she must first forgive Selena's debt before she can be forgiven herself. Ginie then says she intends on returning to the Graff household before finally leaving (54). She is drawn back to Franklin much like a follower of Christ and as she is leaving to catch the bus, she realizes that the sandwich is in her pocket (55). She considers throwing it away but instead decides to hold onto it while thinking back on the time she had kept a dead Easter chick for three days before finally disposing of it (55). This shows Ginie's acceptance of Franklin's "last supper" while drawing an analogy to the death and resurrection of Christ. Salinger uses this allegory of Christ to divulge his personal philosophy that there is Christ in everything. However, Salinger does not seek to use Franklin a replacement for Christ; rather, Salinger seeks to retell the story of Christ through Franklin. Borrowing from T. C. De Leon's essay, "The Man Christ in Literature," it seems that Salinger follows in a similar fashion to Wm. Norman Guthrie as he wrote *The Christ of the Ages: In Words of Holy Writ*. In De Leon's review of Guthrie's novel he states, "realizing this, [Guthrie's] intent seems to be to retell the story of the Bible, in a form so condensed and simple as to be read by all, yet so attractive in the glamour of its poetry and its scenery as to hold every reader, and sink into his

memory indelibly” (248). Like Guthrie, Salinger seems to use Franklin as a gripping adaption of Christ in his short story. Furthermore, Salinger is intentionally vague in his use of Franklin as Christ-figure to further prove Salinger’s philosophy of the existence of Christ in all things, even those that are not easily perceived. This philosophy persists throughout his other stories and works.

Similarly, in *Nine Stories*’ “De Daumier-Smith’s Blue Period,” Salinger implements a “hefty girl of thirty” as a Christ-figure who serves to enlighten John Smith in the short story (163). Smith is shown throughout the novel as a character who is consistently caught in a battle between his ego and his crippling desire to be accepted. Smith’s ego is best demonstrated in his dinner experience with Bobby and his girlfriend. While recounting the encounter, Smith states, “[Bobby’s girlfriend] was an altogether charming person whose every attempt to be friendly to me, to gently persuade me to take off my armor, or at least my helmet, I chose to interpret as an implied invitation to join her in bed at my earliest convenience – that is, as soon as Bobby, who clearly was too old for her, could be given the slip” (137). Smith’s account reveals his overwhelming pride and ego that fuels his encounters and convinces him that he is better than those around him whom he deems are lesser than himself. In contrast to his ego, Smith’s unyielding desire to be accepted undercuts his ego and confines him to a constant cycle of pride and insecurity. This is best seen as Smith attempts to fit in with the Yoshoto’s. Upon his arrival to the school where he would also live M. Yoshoto shows Smith his room and apologizes to him for the lack of chairs; however, Smith swiftly tells M. Yoshoto that the lack of chairs “was little short of a godsend” and that, in fact, he hated chairs (140). Smith’s search for approval did not simply stop with chairs, but it intrudes into his religion as he proudly informed the Yoshotos that he was a student of Buddhism before later discovering that they were Presbyterians (141). John Smith is absorbed with the desire to fit in and be accepted that he is willing to compromise even his physical comfort and religious beliefs; this insecurity coupled with his ego result in Salinger’s character of Smith being extremely cynical of those around him all while doubting himself and proving that he is desperately in need of an enlightening.

Again, Salinger utilizes an unusual means of enlightenment when he enlists the aid of the “hefty girl of thirty” (163). Smith ventures off to get drunk before mailing a letter to his former student, an artistically gifted nun named Irma, but ends up in front of an orthopedic supply store (162-163). There he sees the Hefty Girl in the window whom he startles. She falls and as she gets up Smith has his “Experience” (164). When describing this “Experience,” Smith says, “It was just then that I had my Experience. Suddenly (and I say this, I believe, with all due self-consciousness), the sun came up and sped toward the bridge of my nose at the rate of ninety-three million miles a second...when I got my sight back, the girl had gone from the window, leaving behind her a shimmering field of exquisite, twice-blessed, enamel flowers” (164). Smith’s “Experience” stuns him before prompting him to neglect to send his letter to Irma. Instead, Smith writes in his diary, “I am giving Sister Irma her freedom to follow her own destiny. Everybody is a nun,” and then he writes letters to his other students, whom he originally saw

as inferior artists, reinstating them in the school (164).

Salinger writes “De Daumier-Smith’s Blue Period” as a means showcase his enlightenment philosophy through a comic Christ, the Hefty Girl. This idea of a comic Christ is found in Richard B. Hauck’s “The Comic Christ and the Modern Reader.” There Hauck states:

The source of humor surrounding [the author’s] comic Christ is his and the reader’s awareness that the Christ figure’s position is an absurd one. The figure is an absurd man because his divine spark makes him an anomaly in a fallen world whose inhabitants long ago lost divinity. He is doubly absurd because there is no way for him to know whether his divine spark is true illumination or ignis fatuus. As Camus’s Clamence points out in *The Fall*, Christ himself died in doubt (“Why hast thou forsaken me?”), and, if He had not, He would not have shared man’s humanness (Hauck 499).

Through this definition of a comic, and absurd, Christ, it is possible to view Salinger’s Hefty Girl as a comic Christ. She is even more absurd than the comic Christ’s mentioned in Hauck’s essay as she is not even aware of her role as a Christ-figure and Hauck does not even venture to consider the absurdity of a female “Christ.” She indeed is an anomaly as no one could have expected her to be the source of John Smith’s enlightenment. This could be Salinger’s intent, as the biblical Christ was to be “the least of these” (Matthew 25:40) and Smith’s encounter with her resulted in an immediate shift in his demeanor and actions as he goes and immediately writes to his former-students, similar to the reaction to Christ seen in the “woman at the well” (John 4). Salinger again does this to show the enlightenment of a previously destitute character who is then made aware that there is Christ in everything (all are nuns).

Much like “De Daumier-Smith’s Blue Period,” Salinger’s *Franny and Zooey* also employs the use of a larger woman as a stand-in for Christ in his works; however, the “Fat Lady” mentioned at the conclusion of Salinger’s novel is not the sole Christ-figure of the novel. Instead, Salinger uses the metanarrative of the Glass family in his works, Seymour’s “Fat Lady,” and Zooey Glass as his Christ-figures. This idea of the metanarrative of the Glass family is found in Sam S. Baskett’s essay, “The Splendid/Squalid World of J. D. Salinger.” Baskett discusses the connected world of the Glass family throughout Salinger’s works and many of his works’ lines cross in *Franny and Zooey*. Salinger gives some history of the Glass family as he mentions Boo Boo Tannenbaum, seen in “Down at the Dinghy,” Seymour Glass, seen in “A Perfect Day for Bananafish,” and Buddy Glass, the narrator of the “Zooey” section of *Franny and Zooey* as well as the author of much of the *Nine Stories*. Baskett clues in on Buddy’s authorship of *Nine Stories* when he reveals that Salinger admits that Buddy is “indistinguishable from the author” (49). The metanarrative culminates in *Franny and Zooey* as many of the pieces of the Glass family begin to come together and by doing so Salinger further displays his belief that everything is connected, and Christ is in everything.

The next Christ-figure in the novel is Seymour’s “Fat Lady.” While talking

to Franny on the phone, Zooey recalls a time when he was frustrated with the “morons” on “Wise Child” and Seymour encouraged him to shine his shoes for the “Fat Lady” (169). Franny also remembers Seymour saying the same thing; however, neither seem to really know what the “Fat Lady” really is at the time. Near the end of the phone call Zooey tells Franny two things about the “Fat Lady.” The first is that “there isn’t anyone out there who isn’t Seymour’s Fat Lady” and the second is that the “Fat Lady” is “Christ Himself” (170). Zooey’s revelation of what the “Fat Lady” is perhaps best understood through Bennett and Royle’s *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*; in the chapter titled “God,” they discuss the link between ‘God’ (or Christ) and ‘meaning’ in the Bible. Quoting from the book of John, they state, “‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’ (John 1:1)” (222).

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