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# articulate

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A Graduate Student Journal of Literature & Rhetoric Studies  
Department of English  
California State University, Northridge

Special Inaugural Edition // 2018–19 Thesis Pilot Program

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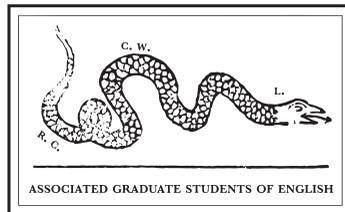
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# [ ABOUT ]

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**Aims + Scope:** *Articulate* is an open-access and peer-reviewed graduate student journal of the Department of English at CSUN, published once a year in the Spring. We seek to publish original critical and theoretical papers of Literary & Rhetoric studies with a focus on all genres, periods, and languages.

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MODJE TAAVON

## Letter from the Editor

The artifact you hold in your hands is proof of the “impossible” made possible.

In the Fall of 2017, the first semester of my first year, I suggested to one of my fellow students that we should start a literary journal to publish student work of literary and rhetoric studies. Our department has long had a literary magazine which affords our creative writers the opportunity to have their work published and—not one, but two—journals which publish essays written in the stretch composition courses; I hoped that a similar opportunity could be created for the graduate literature and rhetoric students. My colleague—nearly two years ahead of me in the program and well-liked by all—swiftly disabused me of any hope: “It’s just not possible.”

I was galvanized by the response and the journal began to take shape in my mind. Why shouldn’t we aspiring literary critics and rhetoricians—like our creative writer colleagues—have the experience of writing with the intent to be read by an audience beyond our professors? Why wouldn’t we carve out a space for critical engagement with the texts and ideas we spend so much time studying? Why shouldn’t we create a mechanism by which graduate students could write scholarship that ‘reflects a clear and thorough understanding of the critical conversation’? *Articulate*, I hope, is such a space: a platform from which to connect, to bring together in conversation all the varied views, experiences, and undertakings that make up a student body such as ours in defiance of the impulse to go along to get along; above all, *Articulate* is a platform from which to speak all our intellectual curiosities and hopes into being and to speak them well.

The inception of this journal coincides with the resurrection of the thesis program, and this inaugural issue features work by the first cohort in the English department to have the opportunity to write a thesis in nigh on *eight* years. It is for this reason, and this reason alone, that the present issue of *Articulate* includes two creative works. Six of the nine students who took part in the thesis pilot program graciously agreed to lend *Articulate* an excerpt of their work. Karen

Bram Casady's *Octopi Wall Street* is an experimental play offering a poignant snapshot of the depths and far-reaching effects of climate change; and Abraham Zapata Jr.'s *Borracho* is an homage to Mart Crowley's classic Off-Broadway play, *Boys in the Band*, reimagined from the perspective of young gay men of color and thus a sharp commentary on inclusivity and representation in drama and theatre. I am pleased to report that both dramatic works were produced and featured in this year's Hollywood Fringe Festival, and I have never been more proud of my colleagues than when I sat in the audience at each of their shows. Elizabeth Alvarez-Mize guides us through a close-reading of Tolkien's epic fantasy series, *The Lord of the Rings*, offering us a rather timely reminder that the primary source should never be overlooked in favor of its secondary scholarship. Cesar Osuna leads a charge against the reigning orthodoxy in translation studies, examining the myriad mistranslations of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and identifying the precise locus of the problem: uncritical recitations of the same fragmented theories of translation. Jessica Penzner excavates the racism and xenophobia that underpins H.P. Lovecraft's well-loved stories, using archaeological race theory to argue that the very texts in which Lovecraft expounds his racist ideologies also contain the elements that successfully disrupt his claims, rendering his efforts futile. Finally, in opposition to much of what is taught in literary theory courses, my own work argues for the worldliness of language and literature by way of articulated female rage.

At first glance, the pieces featured may seem wholly disparate, but read each work and you will notice a pattern emerge: experimental drama, queer drama, fantasy fiction, weird horror and science fiction, criticisms of the ossified paradigmatic trends of our discipline using early modern Spanish literature, medieval Persian literature, and literary representations of female rage—we write from and about the margins of what tends to be covered in the typical English department, ours included. This issue, in many ways, is a collective pressing of the bruise; and while the work featured represents a cohort of students unwilling to settle for less than the intellectual rigor which makes creative and critical writing possible, I would be remiss not to extend heartfelt gratitude to the professors whose willingness to serve on our thesis committees made our participation in this program officially possible. The following pages, I hope, will prove that we are worth the

effort. On behalf of myself and my graduate student colleagues, many thanks to Professors Dorothy Barresi, Michael Bryson, Mauro Carassai, Charles Hatfield, Christopher Higgs, Rick Mitchell, Martin Pousson, Danielle Spratt, and Sandra Stanley. It should not go unnoticed that Professors Bryson, Hatfield, Spratt, and Stanley worked with multiple thesis students; it is rare indeed to find professors with such generosity of spirit willing to encourage the free pursuit of graduate student learning and a free and open exchange of ideas, and to them we owe a special debt of gratitude. Thanks also to three professors who teach outside of the Department of English at CSUN, but were willing to support our efforts nonetheless: Robert Bailey (USC), Mario Ontiveros (Art Department, CSUN), and Svetlana Tyutina (Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures, CSUN). Deep thanks are due to the current chair of our department, Professor Kent Baxter, under whose leadership the thesis was reinstated and whose support of *Articulate* gave me license to will the “impossible” into being; and to Sean Pessin for his advice during the early stages of production.

Even so, there is still much work to be done to build a departmental culture in which a platform such as *Articulate* will be championed. I dedicate this issue to the incoming class of graduate students, and I leave this journal in their very capable hands.

Modje Taavon  
May 2019



[ DRAMA ]

**Octopi Wall Street**

**A One-Act Play**

*Winner of the 2019 Kennedy Center Region 8 Award for Best Monologue*

[ excerpt ]

*Karen Bram Casady*

Creative Writing

Thesis Committee Members:

Michael Bryson (chair), Dorothy Barresi, Robert Bailey

## CHARACTERS

[ excerpt from scenes 1-3 ]

### Scene 1

THE BUILDER  
ONSTAGE COUPLE

### Scene 2

FARMER 1  
FARMER 2  
JED  
TED  
NED  
REPORTER  
POLICE CHIEF

### Scene 3

NERD 1  
NERD 2  
ALGAE 1  
ALGAE 2  
ALGAE 3  
TREVOR  
JOAN

*Actors will play more than one character.*

*Initial projection as audience enters—Octopi Wall Street cartoon. THE GLACIER is downstage and will very slowly cross the stage during the course of the play. She/he/they is holding a doll and will give the final monologue.*

## Scene 1

*Lights up. The projection of the cartoon remains. A gaggle of the play characters enter carrying signs reminiscent of the signs on the slide behind. They circle around the stage several times calling out slogans from their signs. They march off the stage still calling out.*

*Slide of Octopi Wall Street fades and becomes an underwater ocean slide. The sound of ocean waves comes up in the background. On the stage is a small pile of broken bricks, a trowel, a small contractor's mixing of tray of "cement" and a partially built, ramshackle wall. The brick pile is opposite the cement tray and wall. There are several conch shells on the stage. As the scene proceeds, THE BUILDER will add several more conch shells to the stage. THE BUILDER is dressed in oversized overalls. THE BUILDER will work steadfastly on the wall using the broken bricks.*

*THE BUILDER enters and picks up the trowel. Looks at it. Hefts it. Balances it. Moves it from one hand to another. Puts it down. Turns and looks at the brick pile. Walks over to it. Lifts one brick. Looks at it. Puts it down. Picks up another. Looks at it. Considers it. Shakes her/his/their head. Puts it down. Picks up a third brick. Turns it in her/his/their hand. Looks closely at it. Blows on it. Nods in satisfaction. Walks back over to the*

*wall. Tries adding the brick to the wall. Turns it around a couple of times. Balances it upon the wall. It falls. She/he/they picks it up. She/he/they tries again. It falls again. She/he/they picks it up. Walks back over to the brick pile. Picks up another brick. Compares it to the first brick. Puts the first brick down and begins to walk back to the wall. Stops. Goes back to the brick pile. Picks up the first brick. Considers both bricks again. Puts the first brick back again. Walks over to the wall. Turns the new brick around in her/his/their hand. Balances it upon the wall. This brick stays in place. THE BUILDER stands back. Puts her/his/their hands on her/his/their hips. Looks at it. Nods her/his/their head. Moves back to the wall. Picks up the trowel. Puts a bit of cement on it from the tray. Lifts the balanced brick from the wall. Dabs the cement on it and lays it back in its place. The brick appears crooked on the wall. THE BUILDER sighs. Pulls a conch shell from a pocket in her/his/their overalls. Looks at it. Runs her/his/their hands over it, taking time looking and feeling each spiral. Holds it out in front of her/him/them. THE BUILDER is pensive and thoughtful. She/he/they looks up and notices the audience. Walks towards them still holding the shell. Stops and addresses them. The ocean sounds cease.*

## **THE BUILDER**

You know me. I am a doer of things. Perhaps not of doing things in the way that you may know of doing things, but of doing things nonetheless. In your way of doing things I might be known as a builder. Build is the closest I can come to explain my doing of things. I start from no thing and then there is a done thing. It is through my done thing that you know me. Perhaps intimately. Perhaps as a curiosity. A thing of beauty. Of mystery. Of sound. Put it to your ear, and you hear the hum of movement and momentum.

*THE BUILDER takes a beat and listens to the conch shell she/he/they is holding. She/he/they puts it down near the shells already on the stage.*

### **THE BUILDER**

I never learned to be a doer of things. I've always known. It is a state that just is. I do. I build. I start. I end. I have a sense that others like me do and build. I cannot hear them or see their done things, but I feel an ever-so-slight change in ambiance such that I know that a thing has been done. Built. Finished.

*She/he/they pulls out another conch shell from her/his/their overall pocket and deposits it on the stage near the first shell.*

### **THE BUILDER**

Finished is relative. What I feel and sense would be of nothing to you, for the it of the sensation is so fleeting and minuscule that even I am not certain. I know of it only once it is done. An afterthought of sorts, only I do not think, so to have an afterthought is not possible. But even still I know.

*She/he/they pulls out another conch shell from her/his/their overall pocket and deposits it on the stage near the other shells.*

### **THE BUILDER**

Time for me is not measured. It is just a beginning with an end. The building is the doing of things that I just do. An end comes when I no longer need to do or build. I am finished though I do not know it as finished. I simply stop when I reach the end. There is no measure of the doing that happens between no thing and a done thing.

*She/he/they pulls out another conch shell from her/his/their overall pocket and deposits it on the stage near the other shells. She/he/they stoops and brushes each shell as if to clean them.*

### THE BUILDER

When I finish the doing, the done thing falls away. Though it is only a hint, I sense a loss as the thing that was done disappears. It leaves. There, and then not there. But the thing of my doing continues. Goes on. Endures. Persists. My doing and building is as an adding. I build not just as a doer of things but as a part of something larger.

*As THE BUILDER continues to speak, a couple stroll arm in arm across the stage looking at the scattered conch shells. They pick one up. Admire it. Put it down. Pick up another. Admire it. Nod to each other. Take it and leave the stage. THE BUILDER notes their crossing and follows their activity as she/he/they speaks. The couple should be gone by the time THE BUILDER says the words "your taking."*

### THE BUILDER

You often walk along the sand and come across my built things and the built things of others. You admire. You take. You make it yours. I and the other doers of things know this. One senses a hum. A vibration. And without seeing or hearing we come to know collectively of your taking.

*THE BUILDER takes a beat as she/he/they watches the couple disappear. As she/he/the speaks the next section, she/he/they begins to pick up the remaining shells. She/he/they looks at each one before putting them in her/his/their pockets. She/he/they will hold the final shell in her/his/their hand. THE BUILDER will finish this process by the words, "The sameness is gone."*

### THE BUILDER

I am a doer of things. I start from no thing and then there is a done thing. I have always built done things. I know that each done thing is different yet the same but now I sense the sameness of each done thing is different. The feel of my done things has changed. I cannot start and end as I always have. I sense

the end before I start. My done thing is no longer different but the same. It is now just different. The sameness is gone.

*THE BUILDER stands, shell in hand.*

## **THE BUILDER**

Other doers of things have felt this too. Collectively we understand that existence as we know it no longer is. The ambiance within which we do pushes against us. It no longer understands us. And as our done things fall away, in the state such as they are, our sense of loss deepens; our sense of adding lessens. The takers no longer take. Our done things are now no things.

*Ocean sounds come up again. THE BUILDER puts the final shell in her/his/their pocket. Walks back over to the wall. Picks up the trowel. Looks at it. Hefts it. Balances it. Moves it from one hand to another. Puts it down. Turns and looks at the brick pile. Turns back and looks at the wall. Looks up. Black out. Sound ceases. The underwater projection changes to a projection with a quote.*

## **Scene 2**

*Lights up. FARMERS 1 and 2 are standing onstage dressed in goggles and flippers, holding farm tools. Towards the end of their interlude, JED and TED enter and begin to harass the FARMERS.*

*JED, NED, and TED are birds. They are tipsy, drunk, loaded. They are dressed simply and identically, perhaps in uni-tards? They wear bird masks.*

*REPORTER and POLICE CHIEF are off to the side (either right or left) and in darkness as the scene runs. Projections are used throughout the scene.*

*Quote below is a projection on the back wall of the stage.*

*“Politicians say nothing, but U.S. farmers are increasingly terrified by it—climate change. Research forecasts Iowa corn yields could drop in half within the next half-century thanks to extreme weather—yet it’s not part of the political conversation.” The Guardian, October 19, 2018*

**FARMER 1**

I been itching to go after my amber wave of corn, but there was that 5-inch rain/

**FARMER 2**

and then a 7-inch rain.

**FARMER 1**

My soy beans ain’t worth much at the grain elevator/

**FARMER 2**

thanks to Trump’s trade war with China.

**FARMER 1**

It’s a lot soggier than it used to be.

**FARMER 2**

Used to be we had 500-year floods.

**FARMER 1**

Now 100-year floods happen all the time.

**FARMER 2**

Everyone knows it’s been getting wetter and weirder out here.

**FARMER 1**

Everyone but those damned politicians.

**FARMER 2**

Those huge rainfalls wash our precious black dirt down the river/

**FARMER 1**

faster than we can replace it.

**FARMER 2**

No wonder NASA's predicting that crop yields could drop by half within the next half-century.

**FARMER 1**

No one is listening.

**FARMER 2**

Our soil runoff created a dead zone the size of New Jersey down in the Gulf of Mexico.

**FARMER 1**

Now the shrimp industry chokes on nitrates from our fertilizers.

**FARMER 2**

The Des Moines Water Works had to put in \$100 million to remove agricultural chemicals from the water supply.

*JED and TED enter and begin harassing the FARMERS. FARMERS attempt to fend them off.*

**FARMER 1**

Those damned politicians aren't talking about climate change/

**FARMER 2**

or the implications for food production/

**FARMER 1**

or how water will be handled.

**FARMER 2**

So much money is wrapped up in the corn-ethanol-meat-soy bean business.

**FARMER 1**

You can say that again. *(beat)* It's all about money/

**FARMER 2**

and the Koch Brothers/

**FARMER 1**

and Bayer-Monsanto/

**FARMER 2**

and Dow-Dupont.

**FARMER 1**

Meanwhile, my corn's standing in six inches of water waiting on a combine to sweep it up.

*FARMERS 1 and 2 exit. Projection disappears. Replaced by a new projection of a standing tree. Lights come up on two very drunk birds, JED and TED. The third bird, NED, also drunk, will enter later. JED and TED should start out standing very close to each other. JED, TED, and NED should exhibit birdlike behaviors like heads constantly moving (birds do this), wing stretching, occasional preening, beak yawning, nipping at tidbits on the ground, etc. Actors need first and foremost to be drunks and then, secondarily, to inhabit the part of a bird.*

**JED**

Are we a gaggle? A murder? A flock?

**TED**

A flock I think. (*wing stretch*)

**JED**

Yes. A flock.

**TED**

And yet we perch on the ground.

**JED**

Yes. On the ground. (*pecks at the ground*)

**TED**

And not in trees?

**JED**

No not in trees. (*wing stretch*)

**TED**

But we should perch in trees. (*hops a few steps away and looks up*)

**JED**

Should is relative when it becomes a maybe or maybe not.

**TED**

There is nothing relative about maybe and maybe not.

**JED**

There is when it comes to perching. (*beak yawn*)

**TED**

The very word perching implies trees. (*looks up and back down*)

**JED**

Implies is not a definite.

**TED**

Well it doesn't have to be a tree. Perching can occur on a wire. (*hops a couple of paces and faces JED*)

**JED**

Perhaps. (*beak yawn*)

**TED**

Or a ledge. (*hops one pace back towards JED*)

**JED**

Maybe. (*beak yawn*)

**TED**

Or a roof. (*hops one more pace back and is in JED's face*)

**JED**

But if the ground is closer?

**TED**

One doesn't perch on the ground. (*he is slightly exasperated*)

**JED**

Can't one?

**TED**

Perching implies height. (*he gestures upward*)

**JED**

Look here. I'm perching. (*he stands on one foot.*)

**TED**

Standing on one foot is not perching.

**JED**

But it can be if one wants it to be.

**TED**

Standing on one foot is standing on one foot.

**JED**

Okay. *(he puts down his foot.)* How about now?

**TED**

Perching involves a perch. *(he returns to standing next to JED)*

**JED**

Define perch.

**TED**

A resting place. *(he nestles closer to JED)*

**JED**

We are resting.

**TED**

A high resting place. *(glances upward)*

**JED**

But we are resting, and we are high. *(wing stretch)*

**TED**

Resting implies relaxing.

**JED**

There's that word implies again. *(wing stretch)*

**TED**

One cannot be relaxed on the ground.

**JED**

But one can be high on the ground. (*preens a bit*)

**TED**

High but not up high.

**JED**

But up high is too high.

*(another bird hops in)*

**TED**

Hey. Look. It's Ned.

**JED**

Hello Ned.

**NED**

Hello Jed.

**TED**

Hello Ned.

**NED**

Hello Ted.

**JED**

We were just perching. (*beak yawn*)

**NED**

Ummm . . . perching? (*wing stretch*)

**TED**

I know. Right? (*wing stretch*)

**NED**

Perching means resting in a high place. (*TED nods and stands next to NED*)

**JED**

We are high, and we are resting.

**NED**

One does not rest on the ground because, cats. (*TED and NED nod in agreement*)

**TED**

Always, cats. (*NED and TED nod*)

**JED**

Meow!

*Scares TED and NED. There is great deal of fluttering, scrawking and hopping around. They settle down. Beat.*

**NED**

Fred is dead.

*NED, TED, and JED arrange themselves into a semi-circle. NED is in the middle. They become a story-telling chorus of sorts.*

**TED**

Because cats?

**JED**

Ground perching?

**NED**

Flew into a window.

**TED**

Fred? Into a window?

**JED**

Was he high?

**NED**

Not high enough.

**TED**

A powerful flyer he was/

**JED**

enamored with himself/

**TED**

liked to look at his reflection in the glass.

**JED**

He'd always pull up at the last second.

**NED**

Not this time. Straight into the glass he went.

**TED**

Must have left a mess.

**JED**

Feathers. Blood.

**TED**

Must have been speeding and banking.

**JED**

A sidelong hit.

**NED**

Point is he's dead.

*Beat.*

**TED**

Damn berries. (*wing stretch*)

**NED**

Sure tasted good though. (*wing stretch*)

**TED**

Sure felt great after. (*preen*)

**JED**

Went straight to my head. (*beak yawn*)

**NED**

I couldn't get any lift. (*he hops and falls over*)

**TED**

Slowed me down some. (*hops over to NED*)

**JED**

Twisted my balance some.

**NED**

I sputtered along then dropped. (*gets up*)

*The three birds line up side by side, close to each other.*

**TED**

Poor Fred.

**JED**

Poor Fred's dead.

**TED**

That tree looks mighty high. (*looks up*)

**JED**

Trees aren't high.

**NED**

But we're high.

**TED**

Not high enough.

**NED**

But cats.

*Black out. A quick projection of a cat and a loud meow is heard. A beat. A slide with fact/source (Fact Check: "Drunk birds are causing havoc in a Minnesota town. Police say they'll sober up soon." The Washington Post, October 4, 2018) quickly appears then dissolves into berry slide. The lights come up on REPORTER interviewing POLICE CHIEF. She is interviewing him in a light-hearted, joking manner. She is using as many different words for drunk as possible to be funny. A projection of berries appears on the back wall of the darkened stage.*

**REPORTER**

Birds in Gilbert, Minnesota are getting boozed up and drunk. For more on

the story, I've got Gilbert Police Chief Ty Techar with me. Good morning Chief. So what's up with the blotto birds?

**POLICE CHIEF**

Good morning. *(he laughs)* Well, we first heard about it when we received reports of birds appearing to be sloshed flying into windows.

**REPORTER**

Since when do birds get sozzled?

**POLICE CHIEF**

Since an early frost caused our local berries to ferment sooner than normal. The birds ate 'em and got crocked.

**REPORTER**

Bingeing birdies. Cheers! *(she mimics a toast)* But why now?

**POLICE CHIEF**

Because many of them had not flown south yet and they overindulged while storing up fat for the journey.

**REPORTER**

Any such thing as a birdie breathalyzer?

**POLICE CHIEF**

Not that I know of. *(they both laugh)* We looked at their in-flight behavior to judge the level of avian intoxication.

**REPORTER**

And just how pickled were those birds? *(she playfully nudges the POLICE CHIEF)*

**POLICE CHIEF**

I'd say pretty stewed. *(he nudges her back)* They were flying erratically through traffic.

**REPORTER**

Any tickets issued? *(they both laugh)* Any particular type of bird more likely to tie one on?

**POLICE CHIEF**

I'd say robins, cedar waxwings and thrushes. They got pretty sloppy and clumsy.

**REPORTER**

I know drunks like that. *(they both laugh)* Any end in sight?

**POLICE CHIEF**

We're expecting the birds will likely sober up soon after the fermented berries are eaten.

**REPORTER**

Well there you have it. Till then, the police department is asking folks not to call if you see Angry Birds laughing and giggling or Tweety getting into confrontations with cats. Say, chief, got any of those berries? I could use a drink.

*Black out. The projection for the next scene/interlude appears.*

**Scene 3**

*NERDS 1 and 2 are gamers. They are seated holding controllers and playing a video game. There is an actor dressed as a pirate to the left and an actor dressed as a mouse to the right. The latter do not speak but pantomime game characters as NERDS 1 and 2 play. At the end of the interlude, the pirate has killed the mouse.*

*ALGAE 1, 2, and 3 are algae. They are dressed simply, perhaps in unitards. This part of the scene is meant to be done with movement/dance.*

*JOAN and TREVOR will enter when the ALGAE finish their part of the scene. They are arctic researchers. The quote below is a projection on the back wall of the stage.*

*“First Mammal Species Recognized as Extinct Due to Climate Change. The Humble Bramble Cay Melomys Has Disappeared from Its Island in The Great Barrier Reef.” National Geographic, February 20, 2019*

**NERD 1**

Cute little critter.

**NERD 2**

Yeah. It's pretty cute.

**NERD 1**

Some sort of rat?

**NERD 2**

The Bramble Cay melomys.

**NERD 1**

Melomys? Long complicated name for a rat.

**NERD 2**

A mosaic-tailed rat.

**NERD 1**

Better.

**NERD 2**

Won't matter now because it's gone.

**NERD 1**

Define gone.

**NERD 2**

Gone. Extinct.

**NERD 1**

You mean never coming back extinct.

**NERD 2**

Yep. The first mammal to disappear from this earth because of climate change.

**NERD 1**

We're mammals.

**NERD 2**

Poor things lived on a small island off the Great Barrier Reef. Only ones like it.

**NERD 1**

How the hell'd they get there.

**NERD 2**

No one really knows. They think their ancestors floated there on driftwood from Papua New Guinea.

**NERD 1**

Well they're not coming back now.

**NERD 2**

That's what happens when you live on a low-lying island.

**NERD 1**

Nuisance flooding.

**NERD 2**

No. Total inundation. Loss of habitat. Outright drowning.

**NERD 1**

Not a single critter left.

**NERD 2**

February 18, 2019. The day the Bramble Cay melomys were declared extinct due to climate change.

**NERD 1**

February 18 should be Bramble Cay Melomys Remembrance Day.

**NERD 2**

The extinction was caused by sea-level rise due to global warming.

**NERD 1**

I thought you said climate change.

**NERD 2**

Climate change. Global warming. Same thing.

**NERD 1**

Either/or?

**NERD 2**

Yes, but the key word here is extinction.

**NERD 1**

Nope. Key word is mammal.

**NERD 2**

Amen, sir. Amen.

*The quote projection disappears. A projection of pink snow in the arctic appears. The lights come*

*up. ALGAE 1, 2, and 3 enter holding hands. They will expand and contract as a group throughout the scene. (Needs to be choreographed.) Each can have its own personality. A “/” indicates that the dialogue should overlap and be spoken quickly.*

**ALGAE 1**

We changed because we sensed alarm.

**ALGAE 2**

We thought we could stop it.

**ALGAE 3**

Do something.

**ALGAE 1**

Our innateness began to struggle/

**ALGAE 2**

tighten/

**ALGAE 3**

constrict/

**ALGAE 1**

we could no longer breathe/

**ALGAE 2**

only gasp/

**ALGAE 3**

a slight inhalation/

**ALGAE 1**

we could not last.

**ALGAE 2**

Still some of us hoped were/

**ALGAE 3**

optimistic we/

**ALGAE 1**

clustered/

**ALGAE 2**

adhered/

**ALGAE 3**

to each other/

**ALGAE 1**

linked by common walls.

**ALGAE 2**

But we shrank.

**ALGAE 3**

And great holes appeared in our/

**ALGAE 1**

contrived structure.

**ALGAE 2**

We could not go on.

**ALGAE 3**

As one.

**ALGAE 1**

As many.

**ALGAE 2**

Great numbers of us fell away but there appeared a few.

**ALGAE 3**

First one/

**ALGAE 1**

then another/

**ALGAE 2**

a slight adjustment/

**ALGAE 3**

a trifling/

**ALGAE 1**

hardly noticeable.

**ALGAE 2**

A tiny turn/

**ALGAE 3**

towards the light/

**ALGAE 1**

the brightness the/

**ALGAE 2**

luminescence above directed those of us who/

**ALGAE 3**

remained.

**ALGAE 1**

Our inhalation eased.

**ALGAE 2**

We warmed again

**ALGAE 3**

At one with each other again.

**ALGAE 1**

This sensation cheered us.

**ALGAE 2**

Pinkness overtook us.

**ALGAE 3**

Raised us up.

**ALGAE 1**

Made us joyful.

**ALGAE 2**

We asserted ourselves.

**ALGAE 3**

Raised the alarm.

**ALGAE 1**

The ice/

**ALGAE 2**

melts/

**ALGAE 3**

freezes/

**ALGAE 1**

melts/

**ALGAE 2**  
freezes.

**ALGAE 3**  
The sense of melt freeze melt freeze signals our being. We/

**ALGAE 1**  
grow. We/

**ALGAE 2**  
die. We/

**ALGAE 3**  
die. We/

**ALGAE 1**  
grow. We/

**ALGAE 2**  
are sustenance. We/

**ALGAE 3**  
are the beginning.

**ALGAE 1**  
Our smallness underpins immensity.

**ALGAE 2**  
Without us life cannot exist.

**ALGAE 3**  
But there is a pace to life and in our pinkness, we noted/

**ALGAE 1**  
a quickening/

**ALGAE 2**

an unknown uptake/

**ALGAE 3**

a minute change in our cycle.

**ALGAE 1**

And deep within our tiniest selves, we gathered/

**ALGAE 2**

used change/

**ALGAE 3**

turned to the luminescence.

**ALGAE 1**

The light warmed us.

**ALGAE 2**

Our pinkness melted the ice.

**ALGAE 3**

We, in our smallness, raised an alarm.

**ALGAE 1**

We, in our tininess, caused notice.

**ALGAE 2**

In saving ourselves, we save others.

*The ALGAE exit the stage. The pink arctic snow slide disappears. A slide with fact (Fact Check: “A surprisingly happy and healthy ecosystem of algae is not only turning parts of the Greenland ice sheet pinkish-red, it’s contributing more than a little to the melting of one of the biggest frozen bodies*

*of water in the world.” National Geographic, September 14, 2018) quickly appears then dissolves into another arctic slide. TREVOR and JOAN, arctic researchers enter. They are dressed for the climate and carry equipment with them. TREVOR, a twenty-something male, the new hire, a bit “green around the gills” but full of himself. The other, JOAN, is an older female, skeptical and has been around. Tension dances around them.*

**TREVOR**

It’s pink.

**JOAN**

Yep. Pink.

**TREVOR**

Looks like strawberries or watermelon.

**JOAN**

Hey. Careful where you step.

*(grabs partner)*

You could go right through the ice.

**TREVOR**

Yeah. I know. *(he pulls away from her)*

**JOAN**

No. New guys think they know more than they really do.

**TREVOR**

Okay. Okay. I’m an albedo expert. You need me for the project.

**JOAN**

I know you’re an expert on how ice reflects sunlight. But are you an expert on where to put your feet and where not to put your feet?

**TREVOR**

Hey. Quit worrying about me, okay. *(beat)* How 'bout we both just get started. *(he moves away from her)*

**JOAN**

Hey. Careful. You're stepping on the very algae we came to study.

**TREVOR**

There's so much of it. Does it really matter?

**JOAN**

They are living creatures. They don't deserve to be crushed under your boots.

**TREVOR**

What are they? Your little babies?

**JOAN**

In a way, yes.

**TREVOR**

Algae as pets. Now I've heard everything.

**JOAN**

Each one is an individual microscopic entity.

**TREVOR**

And I suppose each has its own personality.

**JOAN**

Each has its own level of UV protective pigmentation, some more than others.

**TREVOR**

That your definition of personality? I suppose you think they talk to each other too. *(he laughs)*

**JOAN**

*(exasperated)* No but the darker the color of the algae, the darker the color of the ice.

**TREVOR**

*(tauntingly)* And the darker the color of the ice, the more heat is absorbed.

**JOAN**

Causing a faster melt.

**TREVOR**

You're preaching to the choir.

**JOAN**

You're an asshole.

**TREVOR**

Yep. Measuring reflection. Measuring heat. It's just numbers.

**JOAN**

That's only part of it. We're talking about living things and their impact on the environment.

**TREVOR**

Okay. Hard science. Soft science.

**JOAN**

Biology is hardly a soft science. I'm not a sociologist.

**TREVOR**

You talk like one. Soft spot in your heart for algae.

**JOAN**

Maybe so, but in their own primitive way they are certainly giving humanity a warning of sorts.

**TREVOR**

Now I have heard everything. (*he steps backwards.*)

**JOAN**

Hey! Look out!

*Soft ice gives way. He falls through. She reaches for him. He grabs her. She falls through too.*

*Black out.*

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**Borracho: Spanish for Drunken Bum**

*Winner of the No Room In The Green Room Award at the 2019 Hollywood Fringe Festival*

[ excerpt ]

*Abraham Zapata Jr.*

Creative Writing

Thesis Committee Members:

Rick Mitchell (chair), Christopher Higgs, Mario Ontiveros

**CAST LIST**

[ excerpt from scenes 1 + 2 ]

**MIGUEL**

*Late 20s, Latino, well-kept, and muscular*

**DON**

*Late 20s, Afro-Latino, energetic, and petite*

**WILL**

*Early 30s, African-American, very preppy, and well put together*

**LEO**

*Late 20s, Latino, handsome, and brooding*

**TIM**

*Early 30s, White, on the brink of being a WASP*

**COWBOY**

*Mid 20s, Latino preferred, but open to any ethnicity; very good looking, wears leather and a cowboy hat*

**ALAN**

*Late 20s, Latino, athletic build, ex-soccer player*

**ACT ONE****Scene 1**

*Highland Park, California. Present day.*

*The stage is set up for continuous action with two levels. On the ground level in the center of the stage is the living room area, complete with a couch and dining table.*

*To one side of that is a kitchen, on the other is an entryway with a door.*

*On the upper level, a bed sits behind a curtain and a small bathroom area with a sink and toilet.*

*MIGUEL in a bathrobe and chanclas sweeps and cleans his kitchen. DON dressed for a night out on the town pretends to put up party decorations in the living room.*

**DON**

Who's coming? *(beat)* Never mind! Don't tell me, I'll let it be a surprise.

**MIGUEL**

*(beat)* There's one surprise guest.

**DON**

For Gerardo?

**MIGUEL**

No, for me.

**DON**

¿Quién es?

**MIGUEL**

An old friend from High School.

**DON**

Didn't you grow up in the middle of nowhere?

**MIGUEL**

Bakersfield. (*DON cocks an eyebrow*) Yes, middle of nowhere, ha-ha.

**DON**

Gay?

**MIGUEL**

I actually don't know. (*MIGUEL thinks to himself*) In high school he wasn't.

**DON**

Did you cyberstalk him?

**MIGUEL**

Yes, but everything's on private.

**DON**

What's his name?

**MIGUEL**

Alan.

**DON**

Girl, he wants to fuck.

**MIGUEL**

Or say hi! It's weird because I never understood why he stayed in Bakersfield.  
His dad was mad rich.

**DON**

Bakersfield rich you mean.

**MIGUEL**

Yes, rich for Bakersfield, you ass. Senior year we took this theatre class together.

**DON**

GAY!

**MIGUEL**

That doesn't make him gay. He was good looking and could act pretty well, maybe now he wants to *get* out there.

**DON**

You two ever do anything?

**MIGUEL**

No!

**DON**

Lame.

**MIGUEL**

Are you going to help me?

**DON**

Ugh. Si, si—what shall I do, master?

**MIGUEL**

Decorating. (*MIGUEL finds a plastic bag and hands it to DON*) It should be pretty self-explanatory.

**DON**

For my bestie I will help BUT we must have a drink first.

**MIGUEL**

Right now? I don't want to be a mess for my own party.

**DON**

This is Gerardo's birthday party, remember?

**MIGUEL**

*(beat)* One drink.

*MIGUEL takes two glasses from the kitchen and makes a drink; DON makes himself comfortable on the couch.*

**DON**

Where's your TV?

**MIGUEL**

I sold it.

**DON**

Why? *(MIGUEL brings the drinks and sits next to DON)*

**MIGUEL**

I'm a millennial—I watch everything on my laptop.

**DON**

You're so boring! I love inviting a dude over and putting on a classic movie.

**MIGUEL**

Like, *She's All That*?

**DON**

Ew, I'm talking about classics! Something black-and-white like how I used to watch with my mama.

**MIGUEL**

You're being awfully sentimental.

**DON**

It's how I became the fierce, fresh, feminine being you see in front of you. My favorite was María Félix!

**MIGUEL**

Who?

**DON**

You're such a pocho!

**MIGUEL**

Fuck you! Don't call me no pocho just because I don't know about some actress.

**DON**

Some actress? Every gay Latin boy should know!

**MIGUEL**

Let me see a picture. (*DON searches on his phone*)

**DON**

See—here she is. (*DON scrolls through*) Look at this one with her in a cowboy hat, FIERCE!

**MIGUEL**

Reminds me of Rita Hayworth.

**DON**

See! You know something.

**MIGUEL**

It's called Google.

**DON**

Powerful. (*DON stands*) Her hair was this shiny, dark black that was always pushed back and came crashing down in waves. (*DON motions with his hands*)

Like any good gay boy, I'd get a towel put it on my head and I would sit, but sit dramatically. (*DON dramatically sits and looks right at Miguel*) And then she would look at the men in these films with this glare, this *don't fuck with me pendejo* look. Since these were old films, there was this glow around her. (*DON looks away from MIGUEL*) I think it was those eyebrows, they were thin but full, they pierced, perfect. AND THEN THOSE LIPS! (*DON pretends to faint*) RED with a perfect cupid's bow . . . But my Mama didn't look anything like Maria; she was stout and dark like the maids in the movies. I feel so bad now, I remember thinking I wish Maria could have been my mama so I could look like her—but like a man version. Be a little less dark, a little less morenito. I felt trapped in this skin and felt that one day I'd end up like my mama—alone. (*DON snaps out of his trip down memory lane*) You have to look her up!

**MIGUEL**

I will! (*beat*) I only ever watched Steven Seagal movies with my dad.

**DON**

Who's Steven Se- Seag- whatever?

**MIGUEL**

Google it!

**DON**

Ay shut up!

**MIGUEL**

(*serious*) Sometimes I wonder what things would have been like if my Mom had stuck around. Once I had went to Virgin Megastore with my cousin Tina and there was this \*NSYNC poster. I was in love with them, but like in a very non-sexual, this was before puberty, type of way. Tina buys me the poster and I was so excited to hang it up on my wall. I rush home and as I'm putting it up my dad comes in, sees the poster, pulls it from my hands, and tears it apart. His son wasn't *going to put other boys on his wall. That's gay*. I didn't even know what gay meant; I only knew gay was bad. I told my cousin about it and she said that she would buy one for her room and whenever I came over, I could look at it.

**TIM**

The surprise guest?

**MIGUEL**

Don already told y'all?

**WILL**

Sort of, but we need details.

**MIGUEL**

He's an old high school friend. (*MIGUEL sits down and the guys group around him*)

**TIM**

What's so special about him?

**DON**

He's Bakersfield rich, sketchy social media, and may or may not be gay.

**MIGUEL**

I didn't say any of that.

**WILL**

Come on there has to be more to the story.

**MIGUEL**

Y'all are being so extra about this.

**TIM**

C'mon Miguel, what's really up?

**MIGUEL**

Maybe he was my first boy crush.

**LEO**

How old were you?

**DON**

That's sweet.

**MIGUEL**

She was the best. I think an \*NSYNC poster was a little out of place in her room, especially with all the Marilyn Manson. (*MIGUEL looks at his phone*)  
Shit! I need to get ready. Can you start decorating!

**DON**

I'll have this place looking like a faggy dream.

**MIGUEL**

You're so inspirational. (*MIGUEL kisses DON on the cheek*) I'll be upstairs, holler if you need me.

## Scene 2

*Later that evening, more guests have arrived at the party.*

*WILL, LEO, TIM, and DON are in the living room gossiping about who else is coming.*

*MIGUEL is upstairs speaking with an old high school crush who will be arriving soon.*

*After a few moments, MIGUEL heads downstairs to join the others in the living room.*

**MIGUEL**

He's coming . . .

*(DON lowers the music)*

**MIGUEL**

Seventeen.

**DON**

You didn't crush on any dudes until you were seventeen?

**MIGUEL**

Besides JC Chalez, I hadn't really felt that way until Alan.

**LEO**

Unrequited love . . . (*beat*)

**MIGUEL**

(*to LEO*) Yes. (*talking to everyone*) Alan had been a huge soccer star for as long as I knew him and I was this quiet, closeted gay.

**TIM**

This is sounding like some sad young adult novel. (*the guys laugh*)

**MIGUEL**

Fine! I don't want to talk about it.

**TIM**

I'm teasing!

**MIGUEL**

Well in the sad YA novel that was my teenage years, high school was pretty uneventful but when Alan showed up to that first day of class—I remember being super scared he was going to tease me for the whole year but after a while all I could think about was being between his thighs.

**WILL**

Did you ever get between them?

**MIGUEL**

No, we ended up really good friends—or I thought we were. We would talk

all the time, he opened up to me about his family, his fears, all that shit. Then after high school we lost touch.

**DON**

And nothing EVER HAPPENED?

**MIGUEL**

No! He was a crush, an unrequited love—like Leo said.

**TIM**

Is he still hot?

**MIGUEL**

I hope so! I'm sure his legs are still stacked.

*Multiple knocks at the door.*

*MIGUEL gets up to open the door, all the guys watch in anticipation.*

*The door opens and a very attractive man, early 20s, stands in a black leather cowboy outfit, complete with hat and boots.*

**COWBOY**

Happy, happy Birthday! ¡Feliz cumple viejo! Happy, happy Birthday!

*The COWBOY puts his arms around MIGUEL and kisses him on the lips. DON rushes over and breaks up the kiss.*

**DON**

No! No! No! This is the wrong guy.

*Everyone else watches as MIGUEL stands stunned and a little turned on.*

**COWBOY**

Bro, I'm sorry. (*to MIGUEL*) Thought it was your birthday.

**DON**

No estúpido, didn't you get the picture I sent you?

**COWBOY**

I get a lot of pictures hombre.

**DON**

I paid—

**MIGUEL**

PAID?!?

**COWBOY**

I'm a gentleman of service. (*the COWBOY reaches into his pocket and takes out a card*) Available for massages, birthdays, and any services rendered are purely for time spent. (*MIGUEL takes the card*)

**MIGUEL**

Well, (*MIGUEL looks at the card*) Mr. Caballero—

**COWBOY**

Or Cowboy, whatever works.

**MIGUEL**

Feel free to help yourself to a nice cocktail, I am going to take my good friend Don upstairs for a chat. Dinner will be served shortly.

**COWBOY**

No worries. Do you mind if I take off this jacket? I'm sweating like a . . . like a hooker in church. (*he laughs at his own joke*)

**MIGUEL**

Sure, why not . . .

*The COWBOY takes off his jacket, he has a leather harness underneath.*

**COWBOY**

Thanks.

*The COWBOY hands the jacket to MIGUEL and makes his way to the kitchen. The guys gawk as he walks past them.*

**MIGUEL**

Don upstairs. Now!

**DON**

You gonna spank me?

*MIGUEL grabs DON and rushes him up the stairs.*

*Downstairs the action of the party continues, while faint music plays.*

*The actors on stage should be interacting with one another but the audience cannot hear what they are saying.*

*The COWBOY should be receiving a lot of attention while LEO is fading to the background and drinking more and more.*

*Upstairs, MIGUEL paces as DON sits.*

**MIGUEL**

Why is there an escort at my party?

**DON**

It's Gerardo's birthday present.

**MIGUEL**

It? He's a person.

**DON**

Who sells his body—

**MIGUEL**

And you paid him?

**DON**

We live in a capitalist society; payment is how one shows gratitude.

**MIGUEL**

I have an old friend coming—I mean, I don't even know how he'll react to you and Gerardo being so . . . so . . . *flamboyant*.

**DON**

Girl, what the fuck are you saying?

**MIGUEL**

I wasn't exactly Mr. Pride in high school and now he's coming to this very random, very gay party.

**DON**

So your gay friends are going to scare him off?

**MIGUEL**

I'm not trying to say that.

**DON**

It sure as hell sounds like it. Look, I'm a fucking queen and I've been man enough to be who I want my whole life. You're making a big deal about this boy you know nothing about.

**MIGUEL**

I am not.

**DON**

You don't even know if he's gay. Boys from back home are always brimming with issues.

**MIGUEL**

Brimming?

**DON**

Callate, I went to Berkeley bitch. (*MIGUEL calms down and sits against the bathroom counter*) You okay?

**MIGUEL**

Honestly, I'm fine . . . I didn't really give the whole story downstairs.

**DON**

You did do something! ¡Cochino!

**MIGUEL**

Ha, no. Closer to graduation we were in charge of cataloging all the props and costumes—

**DON**

Sounds exciting.

**MIGUEL**

Can I tell the story?

**DON**

Perdón; go ahead.

**MIGUEL**

That day we were going to be alone for two hours and, in my head, I was Lindsay Lohan and Alan was my Aaron Samuels. For some reason, he was in good spirits—making jokes, teasing, and in my head I thought flirting with me. I grab this stupid, fake rock and throw it at him. He grabs another and throws it at me. Alan grabs my arms and starts wrestling—like, what the fuck! I got nervous and we fall to the floor and . . .

**DON**

And?

**MIGUEL**

He helps me up and we take a seat. It was super quiet and then BAM! Alan lets out that this whole year he's been fighting with his Dad, how Alan was going to be a soccer superstar, not some Maricon. He confides in me that he's never had more fun than in this stupid theatre class and he grabs my hand, says thank you. Says no one has ever been so kind to him, no one has ever been so sweet, and rests his head on my chest. (*beat*) Then Mr. Gutierrez walks in. Alan jerks away from me, Mr. Gutierrez asks to talk to him in private and after that . . . Alan never talked to me again.

**DON**

You two never talked after that?

**MIGUEL**

Nope. During graduation I went to say hi and he literally acted like he didn't know me. (*DON puts his hand on MIGUEL's shoulder*)

**DON**

Don't get your hopes up. You're a handsome slut. No seas pendejo.

**MIGUEL**

But all I know is pendejadas.

**DON**

OMG that was kinda funny.

**MIGUEL**

You're such a jerk.

*MIGUEL and DON head back downstairs.*

*Drunkenly, LEO grabs a bottle from the kitchen and takes it to the living room. WILL looks upset and TIM is keeping a close eye.*

**LEO**

Who wants shots? (*The COWBOY walks over*)

**COWBOY**

How about some body shots?

**DON**

Me! Me!

*LEO pours a shot and hands it to the COWBOY. DON takes the body shot. WILL grabs LEO's hand.*

**WILL**

You weren't about to do that body shot were you?

**LEO**

Babe, no, no of course not.

**WILL**

You've been drinking a lot we still haven't eaten, maybe—

**LEO**

I'm fine. (*LEO kisses WILL to shut him up*)

**DON**

C'mon let's dance bitches!

*DON goes to the speaker and turns it up. Janet Jackson's "Love Will Never Do Without You" plays.*

*LEO places WILL's arms around him. TIM watches from across the room.*

**DON**

This is my song!! (*DON clears the table and gets on top*)

**MIGUEL**

If you break my table, you owe me!

*DON takes off his shirt and begins to lip sync to the song, touching his body as if he were Janet Jackson.*

*The guys egg him on while MIGUEL shakes his head in disapproval.*

**DON**

Now I need my mens!

*DON jumps down and begins to grind on the COWBOY. The COWBOY begins to place his hands up and down DON's chest.*

**DON**

I need my Djimon Hounsou!

*DON grabs WILL's hand and tries to pull his shirt off. WILL stops him.*

**DON**

Come on!

**WILL**

I don't want to!

**LEO**

C'mon babe, be that sexy bitch I know you are!

**TIM**

Sexy bitch?

**WILL**

Yes, I am a sexy bitch, thank you very much.

**DON**

Come on, African beauty! (*WILL takes off his shirt*) Yes, bitch, black pride! (*DON grabs WILL's hand and moves next to the COWBOY, he jumps back up to the table, he continues to perform*) Remember, feel me like I'm Janet Jackson in the middle of the desert.

*As this continues, two knocks bang against the door. The music and the guys are too loud to notice anything.*

*LEO grabs WILL by the waist and begins to kiss his neck, TIM notices and rolls his eyes.*

*Two more knocks.*

*The door opens and ALAN enters in full drag makeup, heels, and costume.*

*Everyone turns and sees ALAN in drag. The music plays but the guys are silent.*

**MIGUEL**

You hired a Drag Queen?

**DON**

I actually . . . didn't.

**MIGUEL**

(*MIGUEL turns off the music*) Do I know you?

**ALAN**

It's me . . .

**ALAN**

Alan . . .

**ALAN**

Surprise!

**DON**

(*beat*) Miguel you were right—he does have great legs!



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[ LITERARY CRITICISM ]

**Defense of Dragons: Magical Relevancy in a Practical World in J.R.R.  
Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings***

[ excerpt ]

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## CHAPTER TWO

### The Good May Die: Conceptions of Ideal Goodness, Mortality, and the Vices of Mankind

The concept of immortality has appealed to, and fascinated, mankind for centuries. Philosopher Stones, the Holy Grail, and the Fountain of Youth are but a composite sketch of the vast array of folklore, legends, and myths that reveal a societal desire to cheat Death and mortality. Currently, contemporary society places an unequivocal emphasis on perpetual youth as the ideal that is displayed in popular culture, mass media representations of beauty, and the diverse social media platforms that perpetuate this standard. Of course, Immortal Youth would not be complete without an appropriate setting. The Garden of Eden, notions of Paradise, and the literary Romantic's spiritualization and idealization of nature can attest to the importance of the land and world similarly reflecting a perpetual state of perfection. Although humanity strives to create a certain Heaven on Earth, the human element—mankind's tendency to blunder, lie, cheat, steal, fight, die, and otherwise make a mockery of the good and ostensible perfection—typically eludes any real-world manifestation of such an absolute, unchanging ideal. In turn, humanity turns to other methods of making manifest their ultimate desires. Fantasy and fairy-tales of the literary variety—and even more recently, the popularized dystopian genre—become the vehicle for preserving and creating such utopias. These genres act as Platonic and Aristotelian forms of mimesis for our own world and seek to uncover logical explanations and resolutions for problems and concerns which humanity faces daily. Tolkien's work in particular confronts the upsurge of nihilistic thought and existentialist fears of living in an apparently meaningless world by creating a meaning for, and love of, the very thing which people most dread: their mortality. Tolkien addresses this pervasive fear in his works, the sense of isolation in attempting to individually create meaning and authenticity for the self when the end, mortality, seems to eradicate any sense of purpose or importance in life.

Tolkien, as the grandfather of the contemporary fantasy genre, presents archetypal ideals such as the unlikely hero, a wise mentor, a malevolent Dark Lord, and the classic struggle between Good and Evil. Due to the popularity of his works, one can hardly open a book in the fantasy genre without encountering

some amalgamation of Elves, Dwarves, Orcs, Goblins, magic, adventure, and instances of the impossible. However, it should not be assumed that Tolkien's works solely rely on these basic elements to ensure their success and garner a receptive audience. Rather, his epic fairy-tales offer a standard of Good that is typically misidentified by enthused copyists as immortality, perpetual youth, a permanent fruitful vibrancy of the land, and a conventional plot consisting of Good triumphing over Evil. This chapter desires to break this misunderstanding by examining Tolkien's unconventional and complex conceptualization of the Good as residing in human error, the ostensibly ignoble, and a life that culminates in mortality. In fact, Tolkien's epic fantasy tales are pleas to humanity to search for representations and remnants of the Good as they exist not in otherworldly romanticized planes of reality, but as they are reflected in present day-to-day activities of mankind in contemporary society, and within one's flawed and mortal self. To support my argument, I will focus on the heroic qualities depicted and elevated in the mortal Hobbits, the destruction of the One Ring, and the eventual fading of Elvish immortality and perpetual lands of plenty from Middle-earth.

Tolkien's own insistence that his literary works are in no way allegorical<sup>1</sup> has encouraged others to see them as merely escapist, a momentary release from the corruption of the urbanized, industrialized, and civilized (although these elements are not absent from his tales, but rather take a leading role). Critic John C. Hunter notes the "it's just a story" conundrum when he recognizes the tendency of other critics to interpret the intricate mythological style of Tolkien's narrative as an "intellectual smokescreen" behind which no critical analysis can be conducted.<sup>2</sup> This tendency disregards a deeper critical analysis of the text, a problem made more difficult with the rise of the film franchise which posits (accidentally or not) certain characters (i.e. Elves in particular) as the most desirable in both form and function. However, although these characters are described and visually depicted in favorable forms, their beauty does not correlate

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<sup>1</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981), 220.

<sup>2</sup> John C. Hunter, "The Evidence of Things Not Seen: Critical Mythology and The Lord of the Rings." *Journal of Modern Literature* 29, no. 2 (2006): 131, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jml.2006.0020>.

with goodness and should only be seen as good insofar as they turn away from self-absorption, accumulation of material wealth, and isolation from the political activities of the other races. This final assertion is imperative in understanding the motivation for the entire quest and the very nature of Good and Evil in Middle-earth. Political isolation, or the decided ignoring of forces that threaten the balance of the world, spells disaster for all the peoples of Middle-earth. Tom Shippey explains the relevance of Gandalf's unwavering decision to remain involved in the socio-politics of Middle-earth and his resolution to do everything possible to eliminate the core of evil in Middle-earth, rather than merely tossing the Ring aside to be forgotten in time and memory:

[W]hile critics have found fault with almost everything about *The Lord of the Rings*, on one pretext or another, no one to my knowledge has ever quibbled with what Gandalf says about the Ring.<sup>3</sup> It is far too plausible, and too recognizable. It would not have been so before the many bitter experiences of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup>

The events of World War I and II heighten the almost frenzied necessity to see some amount of justice done and a recognition of good. Hope has an almost desperate power, as Shippey points out in his reading of Gandalf, who decries previous generations for letting a sleeping evil grow, and insists that the Ring must be destroyed and that the general “we” must be the ones to do it. Importantly, this hope is not an empty promise but is fundamentally backed by various peoples' involvement in the world and in everyday acts of fellowship. However, the predominant sentiment during Tolkien's day was that evil is born that way, that hope and our menial participation in the wide world are arguably inconsequential. As Shippey shows, traditional constructions of evil, stemming from the Medieval saints' lives, see evil individuals as inherently evil from the beginning. This fatalistic view of inherent *evil* as a corruptive force, contrasts with the view that Tolkien takes, where a *rise in power* leads to corruption. By

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<sup>3</sup> The Ring must be destroyed. See J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1994), 56–71 for the full history on the Ring and Gandalf's insistence on doing something to stop the spread of evil.

implementing themes of mortality versus immortality, Tolkien shifts the nature of evil from being the disease itself, to being a possible symptom of unmitigated power. He does this in conjunction with the rise of modernism, which defied corrupt forms of progress that (in)advertently destroy nature, tempt humanity to greed and selfishness, and otherwise overshadow the good that exists in the world. Therefore, in opposition to Medieval literature and ideology—and contrary to his own reputation—Tolkien presents the radical notion that “nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron [the Dark Lord] was not so.”<sup>5</sup> With this firm foundation, nihilistic and existentialist fears of death, mortality, and isolationism begin to fade away and are re-rendered as redemptive, heroic, and freeing qualities that should be exemplified rather than rejected.

## I Concerning Hobbits

The first characters that need to be examined in a quest for the Good are the race of Hobbits, “an unobtrusive” people, “[who] love peace and quiet and good tilled earth . . . They do not and did not understand or like machines.”<sup>6</sup> As this is the first description we find of the hobbit in the larger epic, it follows that this is the first impression Tolkien would have the reader take to heart. To begin, they are “unobtrusive,”<sup>7</sup> almost to a fault, as is seen later in the story when their ignorance of the world leads to catastrophe for the Shire. However, they do not force their values or beliefs on the rest of the world—a quality that Tolkien, in varying degrees, constitutes as “Good” and bestows on all of the races, with the exception of the Enemy, Sauron the Deceiver, and his legions. Tolkien observes that “the most improper job of any man . . . is bossing other men.”<sup>8</sup> There is a certain degree of tolerance and acceptance of the diverse cultures and societies that populate Middle-earth. This peaceful and idealized coexistence, or rather

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<sup>5</sup> Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 281.

<sup>6</sup> Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 10.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 64.

isolation, of the races only reverses when they are simultaneously threatened by the recurring presence of Evil. Frodo, one of the central Hobbit protagonists of *The Lord of the Rings*, and his companion Sam are humble in their beginnings and spend their lives, like the rest of the Hobbit populace, avoiding the world of “the Big Folk’.”<sup>9</sup> They only venture out of the Shire with the intent of saving it from the forces of Evil, and this remains their sole goal throughout their journey, despite the fact that they would rather have stayed home safe in the Shire.<sup>10</sup> Thus, their willful act of self-sacrifice leads to the salvation of Middle-earth. Specifically, it is their act of true love towards preserving their home, the Shire (importantly a Romanticized version of nature which is inherently a lush, green region), and Sam’s ability to look past the lure of domineering power encapsulated in the depiction of the One Ring, which ultimately overthrow the pending industrial colonization of Middle-earth.

So what is it, exactly—other than self-will—which allows Sam, and to a lesser extent, Frodo, to overcome the power of the ring? Enter Tolkien’s propensity to elevate mortality above immortality. One needs only to gloss over “Mortality” listed in the index of *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* to understand just why Tolkien views death as blessing: “men must accept death,” “death is not a punishment,” “a good man dies of free will,” “death is freedom from the circles of the world.”<sup>11</sup> When Sam comes to terms with his mortality there is a shift in tone during the final acts of the quest. While the text is tinged throughout with the hopelessness of Sam and Frodo’s situation, Sam’s decision to complete the quest, even if he has to die trying, reveals a recognition of his obvious mortality and on a deeper level, his goodness. Sam states that “[he’ll] die just the same”; therefore, the only logical solution for the good-hearted Sam is to destroy the Ring and “get [to the Cracks of Doom], if [he] leaves everything but [his] bones behind.”<sup>12</sup> With this declaration, Sam literally finds the strength to carry out the destruction of the Ring,<sup>13</sup> and through the doom of impending death (the mountain erupts in fire

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<sup>9</sup> Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 10.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>11</sup> Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 484.

<sup>12</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, (1955; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1994), 216.

<sup>13</sup> Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 218.

and it is not clear to the reader that Sam and Frodo will survive), Sam cannot help feeling “joy, great joy.”<sup>14</sup> The hope here is that the burden of the Ring has been lifted and that Frodo “had been saved; he was himself again, he was free.”<sup>15</sup> Death becomes the path to the restoration of natural balance in the world through the acceptance of one’s mortality; it is also part of the reason, I hypothesize, that Sam is able to remain in Middle-earth while Frodo is compelled to retreat over the seas to the Undying Lands.

Importantly, Frodo’s part in the destruction of the Ring is merely as the Ring-bearer. The only reason that the Ring even makes it to Mordor is because Frodo is aided by a slew of other characters in the narrative who serve to either draw attention away from his journey or, as is the case with Sam, to physically/mentally support Frodo in completing the journey. As Ring-bearer, Frodo carries the burden of immortality across Middle-earth and deep into the lands of Sauron where the weight becomes unbearable and he is finally seduced by the power of the Ring: “I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!”<sup>16</sup> Although he begins his quest with pure and good intentions, “neither strength nor good purpose will last—sooner or later the dark power will devour him.”<sup>17</sup> No matter how good or pure Frodo’s intentions may be in his pursuit to rid Middle-earth of Evil, his intimate connection to the Ring and to the lure of power and immortality is his downfall: “all good purposes will turn bad if reached through the Ring.”<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, Frodo is unable to destroy the Ring himself, and it is in his final struggle with Gollum (Sam and Frodo’s guide for a good portion of their journey and a creature enslaved to the lust of the Ring) that the Ring inadvertently topples over the cliff into the Cracks of Doom.

Frodo’s somewhat forced decision to align himself with the Ring’s promise of immortality (brought about by a predestined inability to *single-handedly* overpower pure Evil and master immortality) is unnatural, given his creation as a mortal being, and therefore results in his inability to remain happy in the mortal world: he is permanently tainted/altered by the desire for immortality. The

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<sup>14</sup> Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 225.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 223.

<sup>17</sup> Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 56.

<sup>18</sup> Tom Shippey, *Author of the Century*, 114.

Hobbits astutely summarize the problematic lure of immortality when speaking of Mr. Bilbo Baggins' age at the start of *The Fellowship of the Ring*:

At ninety-nine they began to call him *well-preserved*; but *unchanged* would have been nearer the mark. There were some that shook their heads and thought this was too much of a good thing; it seemed unfair that anyone should possess (apparently) perpetual youth as well as (reputedly) inexhaustible wealth.

'It will have to be paid for,' they said. 'It isn't natural, and trouble will come of it!'<sup>19</sup>

Both Frodo and his uncle, Bilbo, have been touched by the power of the Ring, to the extent where they are unable to return to the Shire and live as they once did. Frodo remarks that "there is no real thing as going back. Though I may come to the Shire, it will not seem the same; for I shall not be the same."<sup>20</sup> This prophetic vision comes true and Frodo recognizes that his only hope for peace is to leave Middle-earth and the home that he had set out to save. His exit from Middle-earth, although it is not death itself, symbolizes the death of this former self, the innocent self that wanted always to remain and live in the world of the Shire untouched by the activities of the surrounding world. This state of innocence cannot last forever, for the "dawn is brief and full often belies its promise."<sup>21</sup> That is to say, goodness as it remains unsullied by experience is an impossibility; change and progress is the teleological end for Frodo, Sam, the Shire, and the rest of Middle-earth. While Sam accepts that mortality is imminent, Frodo struggles with his mortality due to his continued and sustained exposure to the Ring, which provides long-life (a form of immortality) to the bearer. Thus Sam's acceptance of death translates to contentment in his present state and he does not desire or need any other form of consolation in another realm. For Tolkien, this is the epitome of the Good and is one of the reasons that Sam is the true savior of the world. Frodo must find peace over the seas in the land of the immortals to fully

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<sup>19</sup> Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 29.

<sup>20</sup> Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 268.

<sup>21</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* (1977; Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004), 96.

comprehend his mortal state. With Frodo's pending exit from the world (both spiritually and physically), immortality begins to leave Middle-earth, leaving it to the rule of mortal Men.

## II The Immortals

The Enemy's power and immortal life are inextricably tied to a circularly shaped material object; therefore, the destruction of the Ring itself symbolizes the complete eradication of immortality. The final installment of Tolkien's epic, *The Return of the King*, ends with the exodus of the Elves (immortal beings<sup>22</sup>) from Middle-earth and the fading of all their immortal works, which cannot be sustained without the presence of the Elves. In the Elves, Tolkien presents a visual and moral conundrum. Ilúvatar declares that "the Quendi [the Elves] shall be the fairest of all earthly creatures, and they shall have and shall conceive and bring forth more beauty than all my Children; and they shall have the greater bliss in this world."<sup>23</sup> In his letters, Tolkien describes them as "Men with greatly enhanced aesthetic and creative faculties, greater beauty and longer life, and nobility," and he later notes their enhanced powers and knowledge in comparison to all other races in Middle-earth.<sup>24</sup> Peter Jackson's film adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings* further serve to entrench the beauty, majesty, and infallible power of the Elves in the mind of the viewer. They are the unobtainable ideal, and their acknowledgement of any non-elf confers honor on the recipient. Their mysterious lives, made so by their general isolation from other races, inspires grand tales of their workings and dealings with the world. Elven maidens in particular embody the archetypal enchantress, their beauty stunning mortals into languishing heartache.<sup>25</sup> However, despite the alluring depiction of Elves as ideal immortals,

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<sup>22</sup> For Tolkien's description of the Elves and for a further understanding of the nature of the Elves, Men, and the afterlife, see *The Silmarillion*, 96.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>24</sup> Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 176.

<sup>25</sup> In Tolkien's work, consider Beren and Lúthien (*The Silmarillion*, 162); Gimli and Galadriel (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, 371; 392); the rumors from Rohan that a sorceress (Galadriel) lives in

immortality is a curse rather than a gift. Tolkien expounds this notion, revealing that Elves have a hand in shaping the beauty of the world, bringing perfection to fruition. Yet, they cannot leave when the beauty begins to fade; their fate is one of bittersweet sorrow for enduring beauty lost.<sup>26</sup> Tolkien's decision to eliminate immortality in Middle-earth through the destruction of architectural and materialistic culture aligns with the Hobbits' sentiments that it is "unfair that anyone should possess . . . perpetual youth as well as . . . inexhaustible wealth. It will have to be paid for . . . it isn't natural, and trouble will come of it."<sup>27</sup> For the Elves, their inexhaustible wealth is paid for with the curse of immortality and being forced to watch what they love wither away as the power of their three Rings diminishes along with the power of the One.

The Elves transcend traditional understanding of time. In their immortality, the Elves come into contact with a myriad of mortal lives (Galadriel even predates the creation of the moon). Since they have such a wide range of enduring influence, they use their aged wisdom to execute their will and dominance in Middle-earth. They are living historical vessels of a time that is long departed from the perspective of Man. As such, the immortality of the Elves functions as a bridge (not necessarily a blend) between the ancient and the modern. Historically, in their harmonious dealings with Dwarves, Men, and to a lesser extent, Hobbits, the Elves display hospitality. However, the apparent courtesy of the Elves is undermined by their continued efforts to remain apart from every other race in Middle-earth. Isolationist politics are heavily at work in the *The Silmarillion*. Told from the point of view of the Elves, this installment of the history of Middle-earth largely concerns their own socio-politics. Tolkien frames their isolationism as a slightly tempered brand of nationalism. He states that Men in *The Silmarillion* are "not principles" in the tale, but a peripheral glance.<sup>28</sup> In regards to Hobbits, the Elves have records dating back to their origins but "[The Elves'] traditions are concerned with their own history."<sup>29</sup> Their infamously heated animosity towards the Dwarves also betrays their

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the Golden Wood; Arwen and Aragorn (*The Return of the King*, 338-39); and Éowyn (resembling in her golden-hair a beauty attributed to the Elves) and Faramir (*The Return of the King*, 142-43; 237-43). In a similar vein, although she is the River-daughter and not an elf (as far as can be gleaned), Goldberry's effect on the hobbits in the Old Forest (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, 134).

essentially racist tendencies towards anyone but the Elves.<sup>30</sup> In these moments of ignorance and willful blindness, the Elves crack their facade of perfection. As bridges between the ancient and the modern, they bring to full effulgence the pitfalls of immortality, while simultaneously underlining the importance of racial integration, connectivity, and communication by way of their own failed interpersonal relationships with Dwarves, Men, and Hobbits.

Tolkien's Elves represent the pain and bittersweet sensation of nostalgia. Their creations of Art, briefly mentioned in Chapter One, reflect the tendency of the mind to erase any blemish from a pleasant memory, creating an ideal but fundamentally false memory, which tricks us into believing that the past was better than the present. While Frodo resides in Lothlórien, the narrator suggests that Frodo is "wrapped in some fair memory" where the dirt and grime of reality are washed away revealing people and places as they once had been.<sup>31</sup> This intentional washing away of terror brings the dark side of the purity and preservation of the Elves into view. Their constant need to suppress change, manifested in their antiquarian embalming of the world, reflects their dismissive attitude, if not complicit negligence, towards the perils of the world in which they live. Ultimately, the Elves are forced to confront reality and watch what they love wither away, the price of their long lives coming due:

[T]he Elves remain until the end of days, and their love of the Earth and all the world is more single and more poignant therefore, and as the years lengthen ever more sorrowful. For the Elves die not till the world dies,

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<sup>30</sup> During the early days of Arda's creation, Aulë forges the Dwarves without Ilúvatar's permission. Ilúvatar decrees, "often strife shall arise between mine [The Elves and later Men] and thine [the Dwarves], the children of my adoption and the children of my choice" (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 32).

<sup>31</sup> See Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 366; however, this virtually unblemished vision of the past is merely that, a vision. It is not substantiated by fact and readers of the mythos know that every Age of Middle-earth is fraught with hardship and various dirt and grime of the present reality. Hence Frodo's vision of things as they once had been relies on nostalgia, a longing for a better time that had been, and forms more of an idealized hallucination than a vision based on truth. See *The Silmarillion* for evidence on the tumultuous and destructive history of Middle-earth: the destruction of the Two Trees, the Kinslaying at Alqualondë, or the swallowing of Numenor into the sea, are but a small series of examples to draw from.

unless they are slain or waste in grief . . . neither does age subdue their strength, unless one grow weary of ten thousand centuries.<sup>32</sup>

This passage captures the essential grief and sorrow inherent in an immortal existence while one is surrounded by plants, animals, beings, and even a planet that will eventually die. By the Fourth Age, their role in Middle-earth is finished. Their version of constancy and preservation must yield to the will of future generations, and their way of life is unsustainable. Eventually, the Elves' continual confrontation with reality and their work to mitigate the mortality of the world sends them into exile. In their exodus, Tolkien encapsulates the doom of the Elves "to love the beauty of the world, to bring it to full flower with their gifts of delicacy and perfection, to last while it lasts . . . to 'fade' as the Followers [Men] grow and absorb the life from which they proceed."<sup>33</sup>

An example of a gross rejection of mortality comes in the form of the Nazgûl: men corrupted by the nine Rings given to them, endowed with a living deathlessness. The embodiment of the total enslavement of both mind and body, the Nazgûl are antithetical to the fate of mankind and are therefore a physical representation of the horror of living death. Their presence on the battlefield during the siege of Gondor is "unbearable," causing "weapons [to] fall from nerveless hands while into [soldier's] minds a blackness came, and they thought no more of war, but only of hiding and of crawling, and of *death*."<sup>34</sup> Death in living form is the ultimate terror for humanity as it is forced to envision death as erasure of not only life, but also identity, courage, and the hope for peace. The imagery of hiding and crawling elicits the truth of death as a buried corpse, swallowed up by the earth, hidden from the world and forgotten in the blackness of the afterlife. Their existence as mummified-man undermines the lie that Sauron presents: that mankind can, or should, live forever. The Nazgûl represent the utmost torture of mortal man, an existence that is defined by the governance of another, and the horror of denying our irrefutable end. Their enslavement to immortality comes at a terrible price and does not mirror the ostensible perfection of immortality displayed by the Elves, for whom immortality is their doom. Rather, their voices "which uttered only [the Dark Lord's] will and his malice, [are] filled with evil and horror," and hope of autonomous agency is eradicated in their greed to live

a life that was not meant for them.<sup>35</sup> Their rejection of Ilúvatar's gift of Death transforms their gift to a pathetic imitation of immortality, where their whole being is occupied by the will of another. Even their bodies are rendered invisible to the naked eye: "The Black Rider flung back his hood, and behold! he had a kingly crown; and yet upon no head visible was it set."<sup>36</sup> Bodiless, mindless, and will-less, the Nazgûl are the abyss of Death incarnate. The Nazgûl's willful binding to Sauron as their lord and master results in their utter demise and erasure even from the afterlife when they are destroyed. Éowyn's confrontation with the Witch-king of Angmar, the most powerful of the nine and Sauron's trusted lieutenant, encapsulates the dreaded nothingness of death:

Then tottering, struggling up, with her last strength she drove her sword between crown and mantle, as the great shoulders bowed before her. The sword broke sparkling into many shards. The crown rolled away with a clang. Éowyn fell forward upon her fallen foe. But lo! the mantle and hauberk were empty. Shapeless they lay now on the ground, torn and tumbled; and a cry went up into the shuddering air, and faded to a shrill wailing, passing with the wind, a voiceless bodiless and thin that died, and was swallowed up, and was never heard again in that age of this world.<sup>37</sup>

The destruction of the Witch-king, his very name indicating a certain level of unnatural sorcery, fully challenges the notion that death is something to fear. Piercing through the veil, the sword and all symbols of ancient authority wither away: the sword shatters, the crown tumbles, and the mantle is emptied of all form. Bowing to death—the only true fate available to mankind—the pseudo-immortal admits defeat and reveals his facade to be only a delusion, a cheap trick. Proven to be a conjuration of air, the death of the Witch-king reveals the illusion that death is unnatural. The wind issues away any trace that the horrible and inaccurate representation that Sauron envisions as death is in any way real. As a mortal woman, and one who will know death intimately (far more than the immortal Sauron ever will), Éowyn refutes the existential and nihilist sentiments

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 103.

<sup>37</sup> Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 117.

that threaten to eradicate the will of humanity. By confronting and eliminating the horror of death, Éowyn unwittingly rekindles hope for humanity, reminding us that our fear towards death is based on an empty nothingness: an illusion designed to divide and conquer mankind and eradicate our agency.<sup>38</sup> When in fact that agency can never be taken away from us unless we willingly enslave ourselves, mind and body—like the Nazgûl—to an empty promise of immortality and power. Facing our fate is a greater source for hope than succumbing to our fears.

Importantly, the use of “that age” and “this world” in that powerful passage denotes the incontestable fact that Éowyn has eradicated the fear of death for only a moment; it is still a recurring fear that everyone must deal with. The act is not a one-time eradication, it is not for all, and it does not transcend time nor space. It is a personal journey, and one which is inherently cyclical as each age of the world and each person must deal with death—confront it—in its/their own way. Evil only needs a vessel through which to act, as does Good. The benign complacency that one good deed will ensure the safety of everyone forever is a dangerously naïve mindset. The deceit of Sauron, and the earlier Morgoth/Melkor, is based on this complacency as each Age of Middle-earth passes and he gains power in conjunction with the folly of people who forget the history of the world.<sup>39</sup>

In some ways, it can be said that the Elves are appealing parallels to Sauron and the Nazgûl. They represent an image of what Sauron once was: fair and beautiful beyond compare, yet they are not the opposite in the sense that they are devoid of greed and are wholly good. Rather, they represent the beautiful

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<sup>38</sup> The stratagem of Sauron is not unlike political methods of the twentieth and twenty-first century: “Work of the Enemy . . . Such deeds he loves: friend at war with friend; loyalty divided in confusion of hearts” [Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 127]. Consider also Haldir’s words to the Company: “Indeed in nothing is the power of the Dark Lord more clearly shown than in the estrangement that divides those who oppose him . . . that we dare not by our own trust endanger our land” [Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 362].

<sup>39</sup> Consider both the fall of Númenor and Gondor who turn away from the world “falling by degrees into dotage, and thinking that the Enemy was asleep, who was only banished not destroyed”; “Death was ever present, because the Númenoreans still, as they had in their old kingdom, and so lost it, hungered after endless life unchanging” [J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (1954; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1994), 286].

temptation for material wealth, becoming in the process, more dangerous and deceitful than the Enemy himself.<sup>40</sup> Their beauty presents only the appealing aspects of immortality and fails to accurately and acutely reveal the harsher reality of remaining unchanged. Tolkien writes of the Elves that because they are immortal they are “concerned rather with the griefs and burdens of deathlessness in time and change than with death,”<sup>41</sup> and as such their Art is “delivered from its human limitations: more effortless, more quick, more complete (product, and vision in unflawed correspondence).”<sup>42</sup> While these enhanced abilities may be appealing, they also foster a selfish desire to hoard the beautiful objects they create, a habit which breeds racism between the Dwarves and the Elves as they each think their creations are the epitome of beauty. In addition to a desire for materialistic wealth, the Elves are highly elitist: the borders of their homelands are magically sealed to other races, they *very* rarely provide shelter for those in trouble, and they only partake in the political aspects of Middle-earth when it suits them, preferring more often than not to flee from involvement and danger.<sup>43</sup> Even at a cursory glance, the realms of the Elves, Rivendell, Lothlórien, and the Undying Lands, are a testament to this fact.

Therefore, Good is inherently tied to death in Tolkien’s mythopoeia while immortality is linked to more selfish and greedy desires to obtain, preserve, and stagnate development (or imperialistically colonize) at an unprecedented level. Tolkien goes so far as to describe the Elves as doomed to immortality.<sup>44</sup> They linger while the glory of the world fades. In contrast, the Gift of Men is mortality.<sup>45</sup> Tolkien writes that Ilúvatar

willed that the hearts of Men should seek beyond the world and should find no rest therein; but they should have a virtue to shape their life, amid

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<sup>40</sup> Tolkien regards the greedy actions of Finwë, an Elf of the First Age, to be the cause of the release of “great evil” upon Middle-earth (see: Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 57). His actions lead to a series of wars fought over the possession of The Silmarils, great jewels of immense power, and which ultimately lead to the events depicted in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

<sup>41</sup> Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 146.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 280.

<sup>44</sup> Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 147

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

the powers and chances of the world, beyond the Music of the Ainur, which is the fate to all things else; and of their operation everything should be, in form and deed, completed, and the world fulfilled unto the last and smallest.<sup>46</sup>

It is exactly the mortality of certain races that spurs them into action against the onset of Evil in Middle-earth. With death as their fate, Men stumble along continually contesting the status quo that would see them as lesser beings. In recognizing death as a gift of freedom from strife, Tolkien expels the shadow that “confound[s mortality] with darkness,” ultimately speaking against the fears that permeate the social consciousness of his era.<sup>47</sup> By reconstructing how we think about mortality, Tolkien reminds us that even though our time in this world may be fleeting, death compels humanity to react more vehemently, more quickly, to powers of the world, giving us the chance to shape our realities for ourselves, beyond what fate (the Music of the Ainur) may have inscribed for us. This reinvestment of power in humanity is invigorating. Autonomy and agency are found in death, reversing the lie that dictates we must be afraid of the most natural occurrence: mortality. The Elves are slower to react since, to them, time is not of the essence. Their concern is with deathlessness, whereas mortals tend to feel the pressure of time as their lives are short.

Tolkien fashions his world to systemically undermine the immortality of the Elves and their creations. While the Elvish cities, weaponry, adornments, and other crafts are undoubtedly meant to be the epitome of creation as a form of Art, there remains a darker side to their works. That is to say, the immortality of the Elves inherently, if not directly, operates against the mortal nature of the world in which they live. The Elves are incapable of change, growth, and adaptation; Elves are immutable. The Rings are their method for preservation, but unfortunately for them (and perhaps fortunately for the world) their dominion of preservation cannot last forever as it is inevitable that life and the world will progress. Yet, it is through the tumultuous history of the immortal Elves that Tolkien posits a blend between the old and the new. He reminds us that while it is important to

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<sup>46</sup> Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 29.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

take inspiration and knowledge from history, we must not be wholly tied to it alone. Being stuck in the past with an inability to change and adapt is equivalent to imminent downfall. Tolkien focuses on the corruptible power of materialistic wealth as it stands in opposition to both the nature of an individual (which is inherently good for him) and the natural world. In the case of the Elves, their inability to let go of their desire to preserve through their material creations inevitably leads to their fading away from Middle-earth.

Materiality, greed, corruption, and war threaten to destroy good as it exists in our own society. However, alternatives to nihilism and existentialist fear can be found in fantastical literature, such as Tolkien's works. His epic, similar to folklore, legends, and fairy-tales, provides answers for a contemporary world filled with strife and rocked by the events of World War I and II. The small, humble acts of ordinary people are enough to change the course of the future.<sup>48</sup> Death is rendered as a great Good in the world, mortality is a blessing in disguise, and we need but accept it to become free beings. Immortality, the desire of so many, is reimagined as a curse, a doom which brings about greed, corruption, and selfish deeds which, in turn, lead to the destruction of people, places, nature, and cultures that should otherwise be cherished. Tolkien's tale of the One Ring is a cautionary tale of the dangers of greed, the struggle to accept mortality, and ultimately the Good that arises from the simple, charitable, and selfless acts of mortal beings for the benefit of others. That is to say, death is but another step every mortal must take, so it shouldn't be viewed as a looming oppressive force, but rather as a path that leads to freedom from the trials and tribulations of a world vainly striving against its natural mortality. Tolkien therefore provides us with a radical conception of the Good, supplying a nihilistic world with a reason for mortality, thus acting as a "light . . . in dark places, when all other lights go out."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Despite her royal lineage, Éowyn is characterized as ignoble in recognition of the small part that women have to play in a world thoroughly dominated by men: "Yet she was doomed to wait upon an old man, whom she loved as a father, and watch him falling into a mean dishonoured dotage; and her part seemed to her more ignoble than that of the staff he leaned on" [Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 143].

<sup>49</sup> Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 393.

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**A Quixotic Endeavor: The Translator's Role and Responsibility in  
Bridging Divides in the (Mis)Handling of Translations**

[ excerpt ]

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## CHAPTER 1

### The History of Cervantes' *Don Quixote de la Mancha* and the Battle with Translatability

*“Translating from one language to another, unless it is from Greek and Latin, the queens of all languages, is like looking at Flemish tapestries from the wrong side, for although the figures are visible, they are covered by threads that obscure them, and cannot be seen with the smoothness and color of the right side; translating easy languages does not argue for either talent or eloquence, just as transcribing or copying from one paper to another does not argue for those qualities. And I do not wish to infer from this that the practice of translating is not deserving of praise, because a man might engage in worse things that bring him even less benefit.”*

—Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, Prologue<sup>1</sup>

#### I

#### Somewhere in La Mancha

The story begins as it always has: “There lived not long since, in a certain village of the Mancha, the name whereof I purposely omit, a gentleman of their calling that use to pile upon their halls old lances, halberds, morions, and such other armors and weapons.”<sup>2</sup> Perhaps this opening line rendered by the first translator of *Don Quixote*, Thomas Shelton, does not sound familiar. Whether they have read the two-part novel from Miguel de Cervantes or not, most modern readers will recognize the basic plot structure of *Don Quixote*. The story of *Don Quixote* revolves around a poor nobleman who obsessively reads novels about chivalry. This obsession by the protagonist, Alonso Quixano, or Don Quixote

<sup>1</sup> Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, trans. Edith Grossman (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 873–87.

<sup>2</sup> Miguel de Cervantes, *The First Part of the Delightful History of the Most Ingenious Knight Don Quixote of the Mancha*, trans. Thomas Shelton (New York: P.F. Collier & Son Corporation, 1970), 17.

as he is most commonly referred to, convinces him that the events of the novels, such as *Amadís de Gaula*,<sup>3</sup> are real, and he embarks on the journey of a knight, to right the wrongs of society through knightly adventures. As any real knight of the time, he requires the assistance and service of a squire, the poor illiterate farmer whom he names Sancho Panza. Along the way, trouble follows the two of them at seemingly every turn. Those they encounter believe that Quixote has gone mad. Those who find his knightly act charming simply indulge the requests of Quixano and play along with the foolish old man. Those with no sense of humor and an air of superiority over people—usually those in positions of power—find this act to be preposterous and place all blame for Quixano’s delusions on his obsession with reading chivalric novels. As these humorless people see it, any real person with serious business must only read serious work and not waste time on stories of this foolish nature. By the end of the two-part novel, after much prejudice and violence is inflicted on him, Quixano is snapped back to reality and dies in his bed, disillusioned and heartbroken.

Most who are familiar with *Don Quixote* will know this basic plot of Cervantes’ two-part novel. At the very least, they will have known of Don Quixote, Sancho Panza, something about a horse, and that windmills are symbolically important somehow. The first line of Chapter One will probably not sound familiar to them because they will have heard or read that the story begins with, “Somewhere in La Mancha.” In fact, there is no consistency to how this line has been translated over the four hundred years since its first publication. UCLA scholar, Tom Lathrop, translates this as, “IN A village in La Mancha, which I won’t name, there lived not long ago an *hidalgo* of the kind that have a lance in the lance rack, an old shield, a lean nag, and a fleet greyhound.”<sup>4</sup> John Rutherford, in his Penguin translation, writes, “In a village in La Mancha, the name of which I cannot quite recall, there lived not long ago one of those country gentlemen or hildalgos who keep a lance in a rack, an ancient leather shield, a scrawny hack and a greyhound

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<sup>3</sup> First published in 1304, now lost. A 1508 version is the earliest surviving printed copy, written by Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo, was very popular during the time that *Don Quixote* was written. Cervantes makes reference to this Castilian novel in a scene where a priest and a barber search through Don Quixote’s library to burn all of his books of chivalry, which they perceive to be the cause of Don Quixote’s “madness.”

<sup>4</sup> Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, trans. Tom Lathrop (New York: Signet Classic, 2011), 19.

for coursing.”<sup>5</sup> The most popular and readily-available translation is that of the popular translator of Latin American literature, Edith Grossman. The first line of her first chapter is simple and sets the tone for a translation that is easy to read for any reader: “Somewhere in La Mancha, in a place whose name I do not care to remember, a gentleman lived not long ago, one of those who has a lance and ancient shield on a shelf and keeps a skinny nag and a greyhound for racing.”<sup>6</sup> Most people would read those opening paragraphs and would not care which translation to use when choosing one to read. In fact, we see these options all of the time in bookstores, libraries, or ebook outlets. Multiple translations of a single work are often available.<sup>7</sup> Often, the choosing of a translation comes down to aesthetic considerations more than the actual words—for example, which one has the best and most aesthetically pleasing cover.<sup>8</sup> The words on the page are subjugated not only to the visual presentation, but also to the often-idiosyncratic ways in which these translators choose to translate the original.

The opening paragraph, as first written by Cervantes reads, “En un Lugar de la Mancha, de cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme, no ha mucho tiempo que vivía un hidalgo de los de lanza en astillero, adarga antigua, rocín flaco y galgo corredor.”<sup>9</sup> A more accurate translation of these lines would be: “Somewhere in la Mancha, whose name I do not care to remember, there lived not long ago an *hidalgo* with a lance on a shelf, an ancient shield, a skinny nag, and a greyhound

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<sup>5</sup> Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, trans. John Rutherford (New York: Penguin Group Inc., 2003), 25.

<sup>6</sup> Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, trans. Grossman, 19.

<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that the big publishers will always have copies in bookstores. Editions like the John Rutherford Penguin edition and the Edith Grossman Harper Perennial will likely be available at all bookstores over something like the Tom Lathrop Signet or the James H. Montgomery Hackett publishing translations.

<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that the rise of ebook copies has complicated matters even further. Often, when choosing a digital copy, the choice becomes less of an aesthetic preference but rather one of availability and cost. If people are willing to pay for a digital copy, questions arise: which edition? Is it cheaper than its paperback or hardcover version? Is it free? Most will pick up a digital copy of a free edition, which will most often be one of the older translations that are out of copyright like the 1885 translation by British Translator John Ormsby.

<sup>9</sup> Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, ed. Francisco Rico (Madrid: Real Academia Española / Alfaguara, 2016), 27.

for racing.”<sup>10</sup> In Shelton’s translation, he has chosen for the narrator to omit the village or place in La Mancha instead of choosing to show that the narrator cannot be bothered to remember the details when telling the story of Don Quixote. He also gives Quixote piles of weapons and armor where a man as poor as he would not have been wealthy enough to amass such a collection. While it can be praised that Tom Lathrop used the word “hidalgo”<sup>11</sup> in his translation, he places la Mancha in a specific village with the narrator not being able to remember where it was exactly, giving an impression quite different than the Spanish text where the narrator does not care to remember. Somewhere can be anywhere, it is just not something worthy of remembering.<sup>12</sup> John Rutherford translates this similarly, while adding details to the weaponry that are simply not in the Spanish text. These alterations, while minor, are not representative of the Spanish text. By using *hidalgo*, Cervantes is making it clear that Quixote is quite poor, thus implying that his armor and horse would not be up to par to those of actual nobility. Cervantes would know all about the financial struggles of someone like Quixote, having fought in wars while receiving little to no compensation for his service.<sup>13</sup>

While these words may seem similar and interchangeable, their implications can vary drastically. Comparing the opening paragraph across multiple translations is the easiest way to compare the over twenty English translations of Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*.<sup>14</sup> But unless a reader consults with a Spanish edition of the text, the version the reader chooses would seemingly be of little importance. However, is that really true?

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<sup>10</sup> Translation by Cesar Osuna.

<sup>11</sup> The word “hidalgo” is a word that has no real equivalent in English. In his *Don Quixote Dictionary*, Lathrop defines “hidalgo” as a “member of lesser nobility, gentleman.” Even so it does not quite capture the same connotation that it has in Spanish.

<sup>12</sup> It is worth mentioning that La Mancha is a region in central Spain. As Cervantes scholar, Roberto González Echevarría, says in his introductory lecture to his undergraduate class on *Don Quixote* at Yale, “La Mancha is flat, arid, and monotonous.” It was not a desirable place, much less a memorable for the narrator of *Don Quixote* to remember (Roberto González Echevarría, *Cervantes’ Don Quixote: Open Yale Courses* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015], 7).

<sup>13</sup> This struggle led Cervantes to having odd jobs when not serving as a soldier, including a tax collector. Irregularities in his accounts led to Cervantes’ 1597 stay in Seville’s municipal jail. It is during this time in prison that he it is believed that the idea of *Don Quixote* first came about.

<sup>14</sup> As is the case with any translated novel.

## II The Importance of Translation

In *Translating Neruda: The Way to Macchu Picchu*, John Felstiner argues that “[a] translation converts strangeness into likeness, and yet in doing so may bring home to us the strangeness of the original . . . Doing without translations, then, might confine us to a kind of solipsistic cultural prison.”<sup>15</sup> Translations serve as a bridge between cultures when the original language is not available to the reader and it is a way to have access to world literature, often classics, that we would otherwise not have at our disposal. The insight we get into another author, another language, another culture is contingent upon circumstances that are beyond the control of any writer. As Cervantes’ biographer, William Egginton states in *The Man Who Invented Fiction*:

When we engage with fiction we are both within and without the story we are reading or watching; we are simultaneously ourselves, locked into our own particular view on the world, and someone else, maybe even someone very different from us, feeling how he or she inhabits a very different world from ours. [...] That ability to experience different and at times even contrary realities without rejecting one or the other is one of the main reasons we are so drawn to fiction, in all its forms.<sup>16</sup>

One of the stronger proponents of World Literature is Zhang Longxi. In his work on world literature and translation, *From Comparison to World Literature*, Zhang explains the importance of what he calls cross-cultural understanding which allows us to better connect with people through world literature and translations: “It is absolutely necessary to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps, and also to take adequate translation into consideration. The possibility of cross-cultural understanding and the question of translatability are still major issues

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<sup>15</sup> John Felstiner, *Translating Neruda: The Way to Macchu Picchu* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980), 5.

<sup>16</sup> William Egginton, *The Man Who Invented Fiction: How Cervantes Ushered in the Modern World* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), xv.

that challenge comparative studies and world literature.”<sup>17</sup> As he astutely points out, without these translations, there can be no basic understanding between cultures and people. It is through delving into what we perceive as the “other” that we can gain an understanding and that can only be achieved through accuracy in translation.

When we look for a translation, we must look at a few things: what’s being translated, when, by whom, the quality, and the attainability of each. With a work that has over four hundred years of history and over twenty English translations such as Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, the task of finding a “right” or “best” translation is daunting and seemingly impossible. We must ask why there are so many translations with so many coming in the last five to six decades. Some scholars argue that each generation must have its own translation for its time. But that in no way guarantees that the author’s vision and words will be truly represented on the page in translation. This problem can be seen not only in various translations of *Don Quixote*, but across literature in every part of the world.<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps to some readers, any translation is a good translation, but that idea is a utopian ideal. As Felstiner suggests, “Our desultory awareness of Latin American literature until the last decade or so has depended on what a few hardy translators have made available, and any recent translator must be grateful to them.”<sup>19</sup> This not only applies to Latin American literature but all world literature. The reader is at the mercy of the editorial choices made by translators. Aside from having the source texts facing the translation, a reader cannot ever be assured that

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<sup>17</sup> Zhang Longxi, *From Comparison to World Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 3.

<sup>18</sup> This lack of accuracy in translations can be seen in literature across the world. It can be seen when looking at collections of poetry by Persian poet, Rumi; Spanish playwright, poet, and novelist Lope de Vega; Syrian poet, Nizar Qabbani; and Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda. Their poetry, in particular, often suffer from mistranslation. Their translators may conflate various lines of a poem, rewrite the poem as they see fit according to their own ideas instead of the poet’s, or eliminate stanzas altogether. This appropriation of the poet’s work can happen with world-renowned poets like Neruda or Rumi. Often their works are reedited and collected in different editions in order to profit from a new collection. It is even more frightening when this happens to poets whose work is not readily available to the masses because their work is out of print or limited to their country(ies) of origin like Nizar Qabbani or Lope de Vega.

<sup>19</sup> Felstiner, *Translating Neruda*, 14.

the translation is accurate. There is very little transparency with translations, particularly when we reach the big-name publishers and translators. All too often, translation has become an unfortunate practice of misrepresentation. In the case of *Don Quixote*, this is due to editors and translators ignoring the context around and contained within the two-part novel, the ways in which the source texts have been mishandled, and the malpractice by translators who excuse their lack of fidelity to the text by referring to theories of translation such as those of the oft-quoted Walter Benjamin.

### III Context

Although Cervantes' *Don Quixote* is a work of Western literature, it is still treated differently than a work by other Western English writers like Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brönte, Toni Morrison, or Edgar Allan Poe. The difference between these writers and Miguel de Cervantes—despite them all being Western authors—comes down to *Don Quixote* being a work written in Early Modern Spanish. Because of this, works like *Don Quixote* and *Amadís de Gaula* are grouped with literature from Central and South American Spanish-speaking countries—works like Gabriel Garcia Marquez' *Hundred Years of Solitude*, the works of Sor Juana Inéz de la Cruz, and the poetry of Pablo Neruda. From a translation standpoint, they are similar, and the same methods or principles of translation are applied. To understand this point, one needs look no further than the Edith Grossman translation of *Don Quixote*. Grossman is world-renowned for her translation of Latin American authors like Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa. Her specialty is in modern Latin American literature, not the classics of Golden Age Spain. The Spanish or Castilian spoken and written in the Golden Age of Spain is not the same as modern Spanish from Latin America. Even modern Spanish from different countries varies drastically, much less from a different time period. This would be equivalent to the Early Modern English from Shakespeare's time being compared to that which is used currently. To some, the language might sound quaint, but it is not unreadable—difficult like Shakespeare, maybe, but not unreadable.

With all works of literature, especially those that are over four hundred years old, it is important to keep the context around the novel and the author in mind. As stated previously, Cervantes endured a life of poverty and struggle. His experiences as a soldier and his incarcerations would inform the plot and characters of *Don Quixote*. And yet, Cervantes did not feel the need to think simply of himself; he was concerned with representing all of those who were considered *others* like himself, and through his characters he could make his readers find some sympathy and empathy for those struggling through life's obstacles. Egginton reminds us of this fact when he states of Cervantes:

His own disappointments in turn seemed to prime him to be unusually attuned to the suffering and misfortune of others. In a time and culture when xenophobia was the national religion, when the poor were assumed to have deserved their lot, and when women were thought to be naturally subservient to men, Cervantes regularly used his writing to explore the feelings and experiences of religious and ethnic minorities, social outcasts, and women.<sup>20</sup>

Cervantes fashioned these characters as representations of those he had encountered in his life and those he continued to have run-ins with as he struggled to find a place to call home and a way to make a living. This representation of real people and real issues can be seen in other great writers of the period like John Milton and William Shakespeare. This, in part, is why Harold Bloom, the American literary critic, considers *Don Quixote* an important literary work whose significance is equal to that of the works of authors like Shakespeare, Chaucer, Milton, and Dante.<sup>21</sup>

In service of his representational goals, Cervantes placed his story within a framework that readers of his time would be familiar with—one in which he could make his point about his knight living out his adventures and dealing with the disappointment that comes from his dealings with society. This came at a

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<sup>20</sup> Egginton, *The Man Who Invented Fiction*, xx.

<sup>21</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994), 36.

time where Cervantes had not quite risen to the heights of his contemporaries like Lope de Vega during the Golden Age of Spanish drama in the late 16th Century. Vega's plays are characterized with fast action and would not concern themselves with characterization. Cervantes' plays are the opposite, and thus did not engender the same kind of support from theatre-goers who wanted something more entertaining. Vega even publicly displayed his disregard for Cervantes' "old way" of composing plays with a poem titled *The New Art of Writing Plays in Our Time*. Finding little success in the theatre, Cervantes shifted his message and attention to writing his story within the framework of a once popular but dying literary form, the chivalresque novel. As Egginton states, "Cervantes made his books be about books, and the characters in his books into readers and interpreters of other characters in those books."<sup>22</sup> Even if the novels of chivalry were on their way out, Cervantes knew that due to the popularity of such novels as *Amadis de Gaula*, people would recognize the satirical nature of his story while also recognizing the serious moments and messages that he hoped to convey.

*Don Quixote* is an intertextual novel. Cervantes, through the narrator in the prologue, makes his intentions clear and sets up his book within a bookish framework. The goal of Cervantes and the narrator of *Don Quixote* is to write the type of novel of romance and chivalry that Alonso Quixano is obsessed with. The narrator relates a conversation he had with a friend in which he is given advice about the composition of the novel:

You only have to imitate the style of what you're writing—the more perfect the imitation is, the better your writing will be. [...] So, fix your attention on bringing down the ill-founded framework of those chivalresque books, disposed by many, and praised by many more; for if you achieve this, you won't have achieved little.<sup>23</sup>

Having translated these very lines, the text is ignored by translators to serve their own agendas. Some choose to translate the novel into a comedic story; some choose to translate it into a tragic story; and some retain aspects of both as the

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<sup>22</sup> Egginton, *The Man Who Invented Fiction*, xxi.

<sup>23</sup> Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, trans. Lathrop, 9.

original did, but this can only be achieved if the context in which the story is structured around is taken into consideration by the translator. These tragic and comedic tones can change the meaning of a work in a way that Cervantes had not intended. The novels of chivalry and romance were written in a sloppy and rushed way with many of the same inconsistencies that one finds in a cheap romance novel now, where the quality isn't any good but it's entertaining. Ignoring the structure of the novels of chivalry and romance that were popular at this time also changes the perception of how Cervantes wrote this novel, thus, causing more confusion when editors look into the source texts when constructing their translations.<sup>24</sup>

#### IV The Mishandling of Source Texts

Miguel de Cervantes' *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha*<sup>25</sup> was edited by Francisco de Robles and first published by Spanish publisher Juan de la Cuesta in 1605, with the second part being published ten years later. This first printing in 1605 was called the *princeps* edition. The text has gone through malpractice almost from the first printing. As was customary in those times, Cervantes would have handed his original handwritten pages to a professional scribe who would have created a clean copy before handing it over to a printer.<sup>26</sup> In the process of creating the clean copy, the scribe would have added spacing and punctuation that might be missing. Given that the first printing in 1605 was unexpectedly successful, a second printing was needed. This second printing came that same year but not without changes to the manuscript. This second printing by Juan de la Cuesta would introduce the theft of the donkey in Chapter 23 and the recovery of the same donkey in Chapter 30. Cervantes scholar, Roberto González Echevarría concludes that these "hilarious paragraphs" are

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<sup>24</sup> This is, of course, for translators who choose to consult with a source text or any other text to begin with.

<sup>25</sup> *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha* is the original title by Miguel de Cervantes. The two-part volumes are now more commonly titled simply as *Don Quixote*.

<sup>26</sup> Francisco Rico, *El texto del Quijote* (Madrid: Ediciones Destino, 2005), 100–101.

justified: “The writing in these added passages reads much like Cervantes’ prose to me—though not to other scholars who think this is somebody else’s writing—so editors have incorporated them into the final version of this novel.”<sup>27</sup> One of those scholars who thinks this addition to the manuscript was not intended, authorized, or created by Cervantes is UCLA scholar, Tom Lathrop. In the introduction to his 2005 translation, Lathrop explains that “these additions have led some editors to believe that Cervantes went down to Cuesta’s print shop and corrected his huge mistake himself. Far from the truth. The way it was in the first edition was exactly as he wanted it.”<sup>28</sup> Lathrop goes on to explain further why the donkey chapters do not belong to Cervantes. These scenes have been addressed differently by many of *Don Quixote*’s translators, with none having conclusive evidence for the inclusion or exclusion of these scenes.<sup>29</sup> Due to its rising popularity, a third printing with additional alterations by de la Cuesta was available in 1608. It is impossible to tell if Cervantes himself had made changes to the text after the original printing. The problem that arises from the printing practices of this time is explained by Egginton, who states that “[n]one of his original manuscripts survive. In fact, very few manuscripts from that period do. At the time, the very idea of saving manuscripts would have seemed most unusual.”<sup>30</sup>

As literacy rates exploded during this time, so did the popularity of this novel. Before the second printing by de la Cuesta could be released, cheaper pirated copies appeared in London, Valencia, Zaragoza, and Brussels. Not only did Cervantes not reap the benefits of the popularity of his novel through sales because of these pirated editions, there was also no regulating authority that could establish quality control standards over these editions. Because of this lack of oversight, editors made changes to the novel as they saw fit before selling them. In a time when there should be a clear original and authoritative text, we have three different texts by the original printer, and countless pirated copies, all from around the same time period.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> González Echevarría, *Cervantes’ Don Quixote: Open Yale Courses*, 76.

<sup>28</sup> Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, trans. Lathrop, xvi.

<sup>29</sup> This issue of the Donkey chapters will be further discussed in a later chapter.

<sup>30</sup> Egginton, *The Man Who Invented Fiction*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Further analysis of these Spanish editions and how an authoritative text has been constructed

## V

**Translatability Versus Adaptation**

While scholars like Zhang Longxi believe in the importance of world literature and the ability of a reader to connect to art outside of their general purview, such a perception seems to be an increasingly unpopular one in academia, and certainly at scholarly conferences. What has risen to challenge the idea of an easily-accessible world literature is the idea of the untranslatability of texts. One of the bigger supporters of the idea of untranslatability, who has built a career around this idea that all works are untranslatable, is professor of French and Comparative literature, Emily Apter. One need look no further than her aptly titled book: *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* to understand her position. This culmination of a series of lectures, journal articles, and republished chapters clearly states that translation is not truly possible because all works are not the same, and the cultures and languages such works come from cannot be simply analogized or thought of as near-equivalents, each to the other:

I endorse World Literature's deprovincialization of the canon and the way in which, at its best, it draws on translation to deliver surprising cognitive landscapes hailing from inaccessible linguistic folds (what R. A. Judy, citing the eleventh-century Islamic philosopher ibn Sina, refers to as the "arousal" and "wonder" [*takhyil*] sparked by poetic syllogisms). However, I do harbor serious reservations about tendencies in World Literature toward reflexive endorsement of cultural equivalence and substitutability, or toward the celebration of nationally and ethnically branded 'differences' that have been niche-marketed as commercialized "identities."<sup>32</sup>

While she has no problem citing Islamic philosophers, she makes quite clear that these "ethnic branded differences" should not be made the basis of a commercial practice of translation. But her position raises a question: would she argue that

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from these original printings to come in the next chapter.

<sup>32</sup> Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, (New York: Verso, 2013), 9.

a work of Western English literature was untranslatable into another language just as enthusiastically as she would argue that a Middle Eastern work was untranslatable into English? My guess is no. And this impression is strengthened by Apter's *obscurantisme terroriste* writing style.<sup>33</sup> What she does, as do many scholars who have the intention of appearing smarter and superior to their readers,<sup>34</sup> is fill her pages with near-incomprehensible sentences, and name nearly every theorist possible to shore up her notion of untranslatability. In the process, Apter gives credit where credit is due, by naming her influences:

Drawing on philosophies of translation developed by Jacques Derrida, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Samuel Weber, Barbara Johnson, Abdelfattah Kilito and Édouard Glissant, as well as on the way in which the Untranslatable is given substance in the context of Barbara Cassin's *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: Dictionnaire des intraduisibles* (whose English translation I supervised with co-editors Jacques Lezra and Michael Wood), the aim is to activate untranslatability as a theoretical fulcrum of comparative literature with bearing on approaches to world literatures, literary world-systems and literary history, the politics of periodization, the translation of philosophy and theory, the relation between sovereign and linguistic borders at the checkpoint, the bounds of non-secular proscription and cultural sanction, free versus privatized authorial property, the poetics of translational difference, as well as ethical, cosmological and theological dimensions of worldliness.<sup>35</sup>

While something like this might impress or intimidate an undergraduate, this type of jargon is nothing more than an academic version of an over-compensating male revving up his engine and speeding through an intersection. Never does

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<sup>33</sup> As John Searle tells the story, "Michel Foucault once characterized Derrida's prose style to me as '*obscurantisme terroriste*.' The text is written so obscurely that you can't figure out exactly what the thesis is (hence '*obscurantisme*') and when one criticizes it, the author says, '*Vous m'avez mal compris; vous êtes idiot*' (hence '*terroriste*')" (Marc Redfield, *The Rhetoric of Terror: Reflections on 9/11 and the War on Terror* [New York: Fordham University Press, 2009], 85).

<sup>34</sup> See Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* as an example.

<sup>35</sup> Apter, *Against World Literature*, 10.

she identify the translation theories of Jacques Derrida, Samuel Weber, or any of the other theorists she names. Neither does she identify the works she's consulted in compiling said list. Like many theorists, she weaves a veritable miasma of mumbo-jumbo and linguistic squid ink to appear as if she is expressing something profound and beyond the reach of ordinary minds. This piling of clause upon clause all constructed of unexplained terminology seems designed, not to communicate, but to confuse the reader and get him or her to buy in.<sup>36</sup>

The problem, of course, does not begin with Apter or her idea of Untranslatability. In fact, scholars, editors, and translators seem most often to reference Walter Benjamin's 1923 essay, "The Task of the Translator" to explain their methodology or thinking about the theory and practice of translation.<sup>37</sup> Within the first paragraph of his essay, Benjamin states that "No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the audience."<sup>38</sup> Benjamin establishes almost immediately that no work of art, no work of literature, belongs to the reader and instead bring us to the idea that art belongs to the artist. While he is not wrong that the work belongs to the artist, it certainly belongs to each reader as well. He continues to explain what he means with this idea of art not belonging to the reader by clarifying that "Translation is a form. To comprehend it as a form, one must go back to the original, for the laws governing the translation lie within the original, contained in the issue of its translatability."<sup>39</sup> If translation is a form, then Benjamin is stating that the translation is just as much a creative process as the original act of writing. The work of translation is placed side-by-side with the original work, seemingly making them equal because translation requires creativity. While it is not incorrect that choosing the appropriate word requires a certain kind of effort and creativity,

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<sup>36</sup> Not to mention how self-serving this whole act actually is. She manages to squeeze in self-credit for a book she helped supervise to lend credence to her theory.

<sup>37</sup> One can safely assume that scholars have not bothered to read or translate the original essay themselves. What they're most likely referring to when citing Benjamin is the 1968 translation of his essay, if that. As I've witnessed in multiple presentations at various conferences, Benjamin's ten-page essay is reduced to one or two quotes which they all seem to have memorized.

<sup>38</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 1 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 253.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

to claim that that process is a work of art is simply giving it too much credence. With that act alone, the translator, and certainly Benjamin, is subordinating the original language, author, and work to this newly created “form” of the literature. That’s the first step in removing any legitimacy and importance from the original work.

In order to justify his opinions on translated works, Benjamin goes on to make it appear as if this act of translation is doing the original work and author a favor by infusing some type of relevance or life back into the work itself:

Just as the manifestations of life are intimately connected with the phenomenon of life without being of importance to it, a translation issues from the original—not so much from its life as from its afterlife. For a translation comes later than the original, and since the important works of world literature never find their chosen translators at the time of their origin, their translation marks their stage of continued life.<sup>40</sup>

With that, Benjamin sets a precedent for what has become the norm with translations. The idea of a book being an assemblage or line of flight,<sup>41</sup> as Deleuze and Guattari would define it, gives a free hand to translators or editors to alter the work in whatever way they see fit, because as Benjamin states, the art of translation is a creative process that gives translators the creative freedom to bring the original work to light in whatever ways they see fit without any restrictions, as long as it seems right and natural to the translators.<sup>42</sup>

Benjamin further continues his justification for the mishandling of texts through translation by asserting that “[t]o be sure, that theory would be hard put to define the nature of this accuracy and therefore could shed no light on what is important in a translation” and continuous in the same vein by stating

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 503–504.

<sup>42</sup> Deleuze and Guattari refer to these “lines of flight” and “assemblages” as ways to explain the ever-changing nature of any given thing. Their point is that nothing remains static, it is constantly evolving, constantly changing, and if it does become static, it dies and becomes what they define as “molar.”

that “[t]he obvious tendentiousness of a writer’s literary style may in time wither away, only to give rise to immanent tendencies in the literary creation. What sounded fresh once may sound hackneyed later; what was once current may someday sound archaic.”<sup>43</sup> This explains the need for so many translations. The picture suggested here is of a constant cycle of translators wanting to revise each other. Why is it when they are transmitting the words of world authors that it is acceptable to constantly change those words? While it is true that language is constantly evolving, it is by no means an impossibility to read old texts or old versions of languages. For all intents and purposes, we do not do this to English writers, or do we?<sup>44</sup>

With those parameters and its unlimited possibilities, it is no wonder that since Benjamin’s essay was published, there have been at least ten different translations of *Don Quixote* in English. One after another, translators feel like they have to resuscitate not only the dead work of art but also the previous and dying translation that time has passed by. Out with the old, in with the new. A new reinvention. A new re-telling. A new interpretation rather than a translation. Beyond anything that is done to the text itself, the problem originates with the perception of what a translation is and should do. What was once the transmission of the text, the author, and the surrounding context, has become more of an adaptation, even a *rewriting* in all but name.

When presenting at *The Fabricant* conference at the University of California Santa Barbara (Fall 2018), scholars and translators Suzanne Jill-Levine and Jerome Rothenberg argued against my point of translation being a betrayal of the text by constantly referencing these points by Walter Benjamin. When their arguments of translations being a creative work of art by the translator failed

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<sup>43</sup> Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 1 1913–1926*, 256.

<sup>44</sup> We actually do this as well, except with works in English, any altering of the text is given the respect of it being called an adaptation or reinvention. It is not always done with good intentions though. The works of Shakespeare suffer a similar fate as these older works in translation. Readers and scholars find the language to be too archaic and too difficult to read, implying that it is not worth the effort. We see “modernized” versions of Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* and the ever-popular *No Fear Shakespeare* series. Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* is not suffering a similar fate in Spanish with it being rewritten in modern Spanish to help the modern reader. More on this in the next chapter.

to gain any traction with those in the audience, they resorted to referencing a work whose quality as an accurate translation is overlooked, Pope's Homer. While Pope's translations of Homer might have sufficed at the time, they fail to meet even the loosest definition of an accurate translation. They are adaptations, even reinterpretations. They stray from Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and become less about Homer's work and more about Alexander Pope's. Through the simple act of referring to the work as Pope's Homer, Jill-Levine and Rothenberg are admitting that the importance and significance lies more in what Pope did with *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* and less in the original poems as written by Homer.

At the Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association's 116th Annual Conference (Fall 2018), Cervantes scholar, Charles Patterson, attempted to propose an alternative to the idea of translatability by referencing his own work on Cervantes' interludes. As Patterson states in his "translation" titled, *Eight Interludes*, his goal "in translating the interludes is for them to be performed before English-Speaking audiences" and that included "a willingness to *modify the text wherever it seemed necessary* in order for the actors to be able to speak it and audiences to be able to connect with it."<sup>45</sup> Changes like this to any text, changes the intent and, in effect, steals the words from the original author. Despite Patterson insisting that "the plays contained here [are] translations of Cervantes's interludes, not adaptations,"<sup>46</sup> when character names are changed to make them more "humorous" for you, or you change a reference from the original context to reference to Michael Jackson because the modern audience would know that better, those acts alone appropriate the words and meaning from Cervantes and subordinate them to the purposes of the translator. Regardless of whether a work is for the stage, personal reading, or academic reading, when the author's words, and the context surrounding them are altered, even replaced by the translator's personal and literary choices, then the work of the author, in this case Cervantes, no longer belongs to him, but to the translator. Such translations are tantamount to theft.

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**Cannibalizing Cyclopean Ruins: How H.P. Lovecraft's Narratives  
Sabotage Themselves through Archaeological Race Theory**

[ excerpt ]

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## INTRODUCTION

H.P. Lovecraft, with his iconic long, thin, tight-lipped face, has been a central figure in the genres of weird horror and science fiction. Although his reputation fell into decline after his death in 1937, his works would be rediscovered to increasing acclaim in the 1970s and 80s. Authors and prominent media figures such as Stephen King, Neil Gaiman and Alan Moore have praised Lovecraft's work and cited him as a key influence in their works. Moreover, in the early 1970s, S.T. Joshi, the foremost—and arguably the only—Lovecraft scholar during this time helped to draw increasing attention to Lovecraft and his texts, primarily reading his work through the lens of his life and his plethora of letters, diaries, and travelogues. Subsequently, Joshi and other “acafans” examined Lovecraft's works through additional theoretical frames, including mythic and genre studies. Moreover, Penguin Publishing Company published several of Lovecraft's short stories in the early 2000s, giving a new generation of readers access to his works. Highlighting Lovecraft's canonical importance, Carl H. Sederholm and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock have even declared that the twentieth-century ushered in the “Age of Lovecraft,” titling their 2016 book after the phenomenon. In their book, Sederholm and Weinstock note that contemporary scholars are taking varied philosophical approaches, including applying such postmodern theories as “new materialism, posthumanism, speculative realism . . . object-oriented ontology, as well as human-animal studies”<sup>1</sup> to Lovecraft's works.

With this resurgence of interest in Lovecraft has also come criticism, especially critiques of the racism that underpins some of his work. While some critics, such as Joshi, have minimized or ignored Lovecraft's racism, other scholars have dismissed Lovecraft's work as racist. In my thesis, I aim to analyze the undertones of racism and xenophobia in Lovecraft through the lens of race theory, specifically through Charles E. Orsers' book, *Race and Practice in Archaeological Interpretation*. In both his fiction and non-fiction, Lovecraft has been fascinated with archaeological dig sites, often using these sites as a means of

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Hinckley Sederholm and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, “Introduction: Lovecraft Rising,” in *The Age of Lovecraft*, edited by Carl Hinckley Sederholm and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 4.

commenting upon the concept of the “alien other” in the human cosmos. While sociology, anthropology, and history have long worked to reveal systems of oppression through race, Charles Orser states that “archaeologists have typically chosen to focus on ethnicity rather than race . . . [and] have been remarkably reticent in the face of the burgeoning transdisciplinary exegesis on race.”<sup>2</sup> To address this issue, Orser’s work examines the archeological analysis of race and how race has been historically depicted in archeological records. This thesis will be utilizing Orser’s theory to examine Lovecraft’s usage of archaeology in his fiction, specifically analyzing his protagonists and monsters through their antiquarian, anthropological and archaeological pasts. Orser states that “while race does not exist as a biological reality, and racialization is a vastly mutable process, the assignment of race is a social fact with concrete reality in the lives of countless individuals,”<sup>3</sup> having sinister effects on oppressed groups. By applying this analysis to Lovecraft’s texts, I will show how key works in Lovecraft’s oeuvre use archaeology to reinforce his posited claims about race, and how his own works may undercut those very claims.

Timothy H. Evans’s substantial article, “A Last Defense against the Dark: Folklore, Horror, and the Uses of Tradition in the Works of H.P. Lovecraft,” focuses on Lovecraft’s non-fiction, and how his prejudices escalated from simple cultural inheritances to fiercely defended ideologies. Like many scholars during this early period of critical writing on Lovecraft, Evans touches on the issues of race and xenophobia only lightly, stating, “Although Lovecraft celebrated the diversity of regional cultures, he saw recently arrived immigrants and independent African Americans as a threat and retained a lifelong concern about miscegenation.”<sup>4</sup>

Evans writes that Lovecraft’s views were “hardly unusual,” and that his opinions “echoed those of a good many New England intellectuals, politicians, and preservationists of the time;” several influential individuals in Lovecraft’s antiquarian field “despised immigrants and saw them as a threat to [their]

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<sup>2</sup> Charles E. Orser Jr., *Race and Practice in Archaeological Interpretation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

<sup>4</sup> Timothy Evans, “A Last Defense against the Dark: Folklore, Horror, and the Uses of Tradition in the Works of H. P. Lovecraft,” *Journal of Folklore Research*, vol. 42, no.1 (2005): 109.

work” of maintaining tradition both architecturally and socially.<sup>5</sup> In addition, early twentieth-century American beliefs on eugenics and science-based racism held by people such as Madison Grant and Kimball Young, a noted eugenicist and sociologist, respectively, “[have been] linked to Lovecraft.”<sup>6</sup> Such experts in their fields were significantly influential on Lovecraft, who also justified his ideologies through his own experiences as an antiquarian traveler, writer, and proud member of the “unmixed English gentry.”<sup>7</sup> Lovecraft would often utilize such perspectives in his fiction, especially in his later years.

Most famously, his unnamed narrator in “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” calls himself an “amateur antiquarian,”<sup>8</sup> documenting Innsmouth in a way not dissimilar from the way Lovecraft does in his own travelogues. The protagonist in *At the Mountains of Madness*, Dr. Dyer, is a geologist and an expert in his field, well-equipped to analyze the cave drawings found inside the caverns where he and his companion are trapped for the bulk of the story. Lovecraft’s protagonists often seem to draw from a scientific expertise, reinforcing an image of an educated and dominant Anglo-Saxon world to readers. This kind of world-building, shaped around the protagonist’s given evidence, observation and experiential proof, makes up the foundation that will eventually crack and fall out from underneath the protagonist when he discovers the profane and racially-coded origins of society, humanity, or the entire cosmos. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei, contemporaries and confidants of Lovecraft’s, preserved a number of Lovecraft’s letters that provide evidence that Lovecraft, like his protagonists, also felt devastated by what he saw as the devolution of the human race.

Critics such as Bennett Lovett-Graff often look to Lovecraft’s time living in New York to pinpoint the moment in which Lovecraft’s xenophobia bubbles over most viscerally into his writing. Lovett-Graff states that

[during] a disastrous stay in New York from March 1924 to mid-April 1926 . . . Lovecraft, unable to find any sort of gainful employment, learned

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>8</sup> H. P. Lovecraft, *The New Annotated H.P. Lovecraft*, ed. Leslie S. Klinger (New York: Liverlight, 2014), 588.

to hate . . . the immigrant hordes invading America's shores . . . Lovecraft's immigrants, whose existence now displaced earlier fears of racial miscegenation ("Arthur Jermyn") and backwoods inbreeding ("The Lurking Fear"), would assume long after Lovecraft's roiling xenophobia had cooled to a low boil a quieter but more ominous role in "The Shadow Over Innsmouth."<sup>9</sup>

Looking at the history and anthropology of Lovecraft's time and particular geographical location, Lovett-Graff analyzes Lovecraft's views through the same "man of his time" lens as others, but ends up with a different conclusion: when "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" appeared in 1932, the eugenics and anti-immigration movements had already seen their heyday.<sup>10</sup> Rather than considering "Shadow" a distinct move away from the type of xenophobic thought of the time, he states that "its focus on questions of racial degeneration kept it solidly within the spectrum of anxieties from his earlier tales...[and it] ties this broader fictional context to those anxieties by reproducing the eugenic tropes of its fictional forerunners."<sup>11</sup> Refusing to defend Lovecraft simply as a "man of his time," Lovett-Graff asserts that Lovecraft the "author" often pulled from anxieties of heredity and genetics in order to create the basis of the horror in his stories. This is simply a fact that often splits Lovecraft academics in their treatment of Lovecraft's work. For instance, S.T. Joshi chose instead to focus on other important elements of Lovecraft's work, stating that his racism "may 'nevertheless be logically separable from the rest of his philosophical and even political thought' . . . [and he] wants to avoid it as a focal point for his critical approaches to Lovecraft or his work."<sup>12</sup>

Examining Lovecraft's troubling view of race and racialization as "clearly demarcated and dependable, a seemingly neutral and natural means of measuring human worth, ability, and intelligence,"<sup>13</sup> this thesis, drawing from Charles E.

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<sup>9</sup> Bennett Lovett-Graff, "Shadow over Lovecraft: Reactionary Fantasy and Immigrant Eugenics," *Extrapolation*, vol. 38, no. 3 (1997): 176.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 176–177.

<sup>12</sup> Sederholm and Weinstock, 25–26.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

Orser's theory of historical archaeology, will be exploring the manner by which Lovecraft builds his argument for biological racism, anti-immigrant and anti-miscegenation societal values. Lovecraft's monsters and aliens are often coded as people of color, and significantly as non-human, viewed through the eyes and Western perspective of the white protagonist. Drawing from scholarly works by important Lovecraft scholars such as Timothy H. Evans and Vivian Ralickas, I will demonstrate how Lovecraft's own discourse disrupts his internal narrative of a static and harmful racialized memory. Orser's modern interpretation of how archaeological certainty can be questioned on the topics of race interpretation and oppressive racialization can be aptly applied to Lovecraft's historically and racially fraught stories in order to reveal the more sinister and alarming manner of race definition during Lovecraft's lifetime. The hope, however, lies in how these narratives cannibalize themselves, leading to both the undoing of Lovecraft's eugenic nationalism and to the rise of the racialized monsters' ability to create agency in their own stories.

To this end, I will be splitting my research into two main chapters. The first chapter will look at one of Lovecraft's earlier short stories, "Under the Pyramids," and his better-known novella, *At the Mountains of Madness*. Starting with these two works, I aim to analyze the manner by which Lovecraft builds his evolutionarily decaying worlds. In "Under the Pyramids," Lovecraft sends his protagonist (Harry Houdini, for whom he ghost wrote this story) to Egypt, where he discovers the corrupted nature of the nation through one of its most sacred archeological sites: the catacombs underneath the pyramids. By turning these sacred archaeological sites into the source of Egypt's ostensible evil, and previously aligning both "good" and "bad" Egyptians with the evil in the catacombs, Lovecraft is projecting a hereditary strain of evil throughout Egypt's native citizenry.

To follow this, I will be analyzing the archaeological evidence provided by Dr. Dyer and his companion Danforth in *At the Mountains of Madness*, for whom the maddening experience of traversing the Antarctic caverns ends in his being committed to an insane asylum. Both Dyer and Danforth provide commentary on the ancient carvings within the mountain, and praise the Old Ones (an ancient race of immortal alien gods) for both their sense of artistry as well as their rampant colonization of the Earth. Dyer and Danforth glean

information from the caves about the Old Ones and their slaves, the Shoggoths, as they move forward both physically and chronologically in the caves. By the time they get to the end, Dyer comments on the newer, shoddy nature of the more recent cave artwork, and he and Danforth end up being chased from the cavern by what they believe to be a Shoggoth. They uncover the fact that the Shoggoths had risen up and killed their masters, and attempted to mimic the Old Ones through the creation of their own artistic renditions of time, space, and history. This archaeological breakthrough helps to prove not only the origin of humanity, which is a byproduct of the Old Ones' terraformation of Earth, but also how Lovecraft writes the uprising of the Shoggoths to color the Old Ones as victims of genocide, rather than an inherently oppressive and colonizing race of eugenic scientists. By looking at these two stories through Orser's theory of race and archaeology, I plan to show how this archaeological basis for Lovecraft's arguments can be undone. The information ascribed to the archeological findings in "Under the Pyramids" and *At the Mountains of Madness* is seen by Lovecraft as unflinching in its interpretation. The objective meanings have not been altered in the thousands of years they have existed, and Lovecraft's framing of the individual dig sites reflects this idea. Race through archeology, for Lovecraft, is unchanging, and reflects the evil both present and latent in the oppressed culture it represents. Orser, however, shows that through archaeology experts have the ability to recognize the racialization of oppressed groups, and that this process shows the mutability of race throughout time. By applying this theory to the Old Ones and the Shoggoths, as well as the grotesque mummies from the pyramids, we can show how Lovecraft's argument bends under its own weight.

In the second chapter, I will be looking at two more Lovecraft stories: "The Rats in the Walls" and "The Shadow Over Innsmouth." Unlike the previous two tales, where the protagonists are merely observers to the corruption of humanity but are not personally endangered and engendered by miscegenation or criminal physicalities, the protagonists in these two tales will face their own downfall through their ancestors' heredity. In "The Rats in the Walls," the protagonist Delapore moves back into his ancestral home and discovers that his progenitors were cannibals. Upon discovering an ancient slaughtering ground underneath his newly renovated home, Delapore goes insane and reverts to an atavistic state of being, chanting in a variety of languages both known and unknown. He is locked

up and hidden away, a shameful footnote for both his own bloodline as well as the society at large. As in “Under the Pyramids,” the horrific archaeological past is hidden in ancestral catacombs, but this time, the protagonist is a victim of his abhorrent heritage. He suffers and goes mad because of his genealogy, incapable of accepting the reality that he is descended from a miscegenated lineage. I will be using Orser to tease out the personal and societal racialization process from Lovecraft’s short story. In addition, Lovecraft’s story echoes the theories of such contemporaries as Oswald Spengler, who in his *Decline of the West* suggests a trajectory of human culture in which primitive cultures give way to imperial cultures and then return, with the ascendancy of their marginalized descendants, only to witness the collapse of civilization.

The final story that will be discussed is the most divisive, having been looked at from a variety of modern theoretical angles. “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” is arguably Lovecraft’s most famous work, aside from “The Call of Cthulhu,” and is easily his most discussed in academic circles. The unnamed narrator goes to the small port town of Innsmouth, engages with certain ancient artifacts and local tales, discovers that he himself is a descendent of the alien Deep Ones of Innsmouth, and is thus tainted by miscegenation. While many academics readily accept that the Deep Ones are coded specifically to read as heavily racialized, there is a trend in recent scholarship urging people to move away from that interpretation, and, instead, seeing Lovecraft as offering a vision of benign kinship. I would argue against this trend, for such a reading undercuts Lovecraft’s own written claims. In fact, I see Lovecraft racializing Innsmouth in a similar way that Orser argues that the myth of Atlantis has been racialized. In his work, Orser analyzes the depictions of the mythical city of Atlantis to show how societies racialize their mythologies in order to make certain points about their history, or the history of another culture. The Greeks coded Atlantis as a failed city-state and racialized its citizens in such a way. Heinrich Himmler, the Ahnenerbe Institute and the Nazis took Atlantis and attempted to code the Atlanteans as Aryan in order to provide a mythology for Germans in the Third Reich. Orser acknowledges that literary archaeological digs have value in the conversation about racialization of oppressed groups as well, pointing to the above examples as evidence towards that argument.

In this way, I aim to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the

archaeological evidence given by Lovecraft throughout his works, and tease out exactly how that evidence can be used against his own argument. Rather than simply dictating whether Lovecraft's stories are racist or not racist, I would argue that we can utilize theories that allow them to be both. The lively debates concerning the end of "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" is one of the more fascinating dialogues in the study of Lovecraft, and while I do not believe that I or any other scholar will ever give a definite answer as to the objective "meaning" of the ending, I would argue that there is significant historical, theoretical, and contextual evidence to show how the original aims of the short story were driven by racism and xenophobia. However, I also argue that his own discourse enacts strategies of resistance as his "alien Others," which he regards as menacing threats, ultimately disrupt or even triumph over the prevailing ideologies.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The White Man Unburdened

In my first chapter, the two stories I will be looking at are "Under the Pyramids" and *At the Mountains of Madness*. I aim to demonstrate how Lovecraft ostensibly builds his portrayals of foreign lands upon his protagonists' westernized and imperialistic expectations of immigrants and their homelands; however, the Other inevitably subverts such colonizing representations through both their presence and transgressive action. Lovecraft perceives the Other's influence as a source of cultural rotteness that rejects Western culture en masse. "Under the Pyramids" takes place in Cairo, an ancient town famous for its archaeological sites, and, most importantly to this story, the catacombs under the Pyramids of Giza. In contrast, *At the Mountains of Madness* is set in the Antarctic and shows how two scientists discover the unsettling origins of humankind. In both of these stories, Lovecraft employs the use of archaeological evidence in order to prove the inherent evil of the Other. However, I will argue that Lovecraft creates stories that are ideologically disruptive. In examining his so-called archaeological evidence, we can see how Lovecraft's representation of the Other is subverted, as their very flaws or weaknesses become their strengths.

Although “Under the Pyramids” (or “Imprisoned with the Pharaohs” depending on the edition) has not attracted as much scholarly attention as those stories that contribute to his “Cthulhu Mythos,” which tends to dominate conversations around Lovecraft’s work, the story has the distinction of being written in collaboration with the well-known illusionist Harry Houdini. The 1924 summer edition of *Weird Tales* featured the short story, starring the character of Houdini, who Lovecraft depicts as a privileged American white male, despite Houdini’s Hungarian immigrant status. Commissioned by the creator of *Weird Tales* on behalf of Houdini, “Under the Pyramids” was Lovecraft’s fantastical retelling of one of Houdini’s personal stories from his time in Egypt. Despite the fact that Lovecraft took creative liberties with the story, which was based on Houdini’s touristic adventures in Egypt, it ended up delighting Houdini, and he gave Lovecraft more ghostwriting work before the magician’s passing in 1926. The short story describes Houdini and his wife taking a trip to Egypt, where locals kidnap Houdini and toss him down a hole into the catacombs under the Pyramids of Giza. In the catacombs, deep underground, Houdini observes what appears to be the deity that inspired the mythic Sphinx sculpture. Monstrous and grotesque, the creature consumes unnamable viscera delivered to it by mummies, who are made up of various human and animal body parts. In the end, Houdini awakens from the horror, confused about whether or not it was a dream or some other terrifying phenomena. Focusing on the manner by which Lovecraft points to the archaeological horrors of the pyramids—their existence, their implications on the larger society, and their grotesque residents—I argue, drawing upon Orser’s archaeological theory and Homi Bhabha’s theory of mimicry, that despite Lovecraft’s xenophobic fears that Egypt’s citizens will ultimately corrupt Western values and ideology, these ostensibly “grotesque residents” find a way to subvert the narrative’s underlying ideology and empower themselves.

In the story, when Houdini first arrives in Cairo and is led through the main streets of the city, he regards the city as a “disappointment,” for “all that we beheld was European save the costumes and the crowds . . . the mysterious East and immemorial past seemed very far away.”<sup>14</sup> For the protagonist, what Cairo

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<sup>14</sup> H.P. Lovecraft, *The Thing on the Doorstep and Other Weird Stories* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 54.

is rumored to be and what it turns out to be are two different things: he expects to see the “mysterious East” but is greeted by an aesthetically European, Western colonized town. While Houdini is disappointed, he is also safe and secure in a city that appears to mimic Europe; his disappointment lies in his boredom with the typical “Anglo-American luxuries” offered by the town.<sup>15</sup> However, this statement also normalizes the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. When the white, European characters desire to visit the colonies for the sake of tourism, they want to see their own exoticized narrative of the East come to life in front of them.

Like Lovecraft in his own antiquarian travels, Lovecraft’s protagonist is attempting to provide a purportedly authentic view of a far-off land. In his travelogues and antiquarian writing, “Lovecraft’s interest in architecture was primarily aesthetic rather than historical, focusing on culture and landscape rather than on famous historical events or personalities.”<sup>16</sup> Lovecraft often began with a seemingly objective view of the environment, but then “the experiences that were his greatest source of pleasure transmute into sources of despair, as rottenness is uncovered at the core of tradition.”<sup>17</sup> In describing Cairo as Anglo and European, Lovecraft creates a colonized space in preparation for its inevitable fall, the teleological destruction of “all aspects indispensable to the integrity of Lovecraft’s white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant and predominantly male characters’ sense of selfhood—their traditions, morality, race, psyches, and bodies.”<sup>18</sup> The narrative then goes on to describe the people of Egypt, and sets up a dichotomy between “Europeanized” Egyptians in Cairo, and the Bedouin Muslims inhabiting the slums—a binary that will later be disrupted after Houdini enters the catacombs.

Representing a Europeanized Egyptian, Houdini’s guide is named Abdul Reis al Drogman. The narrator describes him physically as a “shaven, particularly hollow-voiced, and particularly cleanly fellow,” contrasting him with the Egyptian residents of the slums. The man’s name indicates his occupation—“*reis* is merely

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Evans, 106.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>18</sup> Vivian Ralickas, ““Cosmic Horror” and the Question of the Sublime in Lovecraft,” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 18, no. 3 (2007): 368.

a name for any person in authority, whilst ‘Drogman’ is . . . a clumsy modification of the word for a leader of tourist parties”<sup>19</sup>—and his appearance is intended to appeal to a European audience. Lovecraft describes the Muslims living in the slums unfavorably, stating that they were “offensive . . . [and] inhabited a squalid mud village . . . and pestiferously assailed every traveler.”<sup>20</sup> The binary division between the guide and the Muslims is important to Lovecraft’s storytelling, giving the reader a colonizing view of the “civilized” Egyptians in their cleanliness, their hospitality, and their deferential attitudes towards Europeans. On the surface, this type of binary does not appear to be particularly abnormal for the writing of the ‘20s in the United States; the concept of the “Noble Savage” vs. the untamed wild people is well catalogued. However, although Lovecraft initially suggests that there are acceptable and unacceptable foreigners, in the end, he regards them all as an infectious force. In his characterization, Abdul is not a fleshed-out character with his own sense of agency and desires, but a function of the plot. As a “civilized” Egyptian, he initially seems to function as a serviceable body, a tourist guide for Houdini; however, he later betrays Houdini and, at that moment, Lovecraft demonizes Abdul. Subverting Lovecraft’s own Manichean ideology, Abdul uses that persona to fight against imperialism and tyranny. After the tour, the guide Abdul and the Muslims team up and kidnap Houdini, tossing him down a hole into the subterranean catacombs of the Great Pyramids of Giza. The pyramids themselves are sacred sites housing Ancient Egypt’s deceased royalty, but in this tale, they house ancient monstrosities that Lovecraft inscribes with subhuman characteristics. In his description of the creatures, Lovecraft manipulates the reader’s sense of horror. In a majority of Lovecraft’s works, the monsters, gods or aliens of his mythos are difficult to describe, and his narrators are often hard pressed to find accurate wording for them. In “Under the Pyramids,” Houdini describes the mummies first by sound, stating that he hears “the morbid and millennial tramping of the marching things,”<sup>21</sup> and then by sight, stating that “Hippopotami should not have human hands and carry torches . . . men should

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<sup>19</sup> Lovecraft, *The Thing on the Doorstep*, 55.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

not have the heads of crocodiles.”<sup>22</sup> Lovecraft excels in his ability to walk the line between vaguely mysterious and stark descriptions of his monstrous characters, especially when they are coded with racist or xenophobic descriptions. Lovecraft rhetorically desecrates Egyptian heritage by turning Cairo’s sacred dead, in this case called “composite mummies”<sup>23</sup> into slaves for the larger alien deity of the Sphinx, or “Unknown One.” They feed the beast, and Houdini even states, “I shut my eyes again when I saw *what* objects were being thrown as offerings.”<sup>24</sup> The way that Abdul the guide—who later turns out to be “King Khephren” the leader of the “things”—and the Muslims band together against Houdini and toss him into that catacomb might imply that Houdini is similarly meant to be an offering to the deity. The Sphinx has servants both above and below ground, and Houdini stands in judgment and horror of all of them. Lovecraft depicts both the “good” and “bad” Egyptians as servants of the Sphinx and indicts the whole of Egypt as evil and reprehensible, specifically because of their ancient origins.

Racializing the whole of Egypt through an Orientalist lens, Lovecraft works to convince the reader that Houdini’s vision of Egypt is reliable. Houdini laments his knowledge, crying out, “if only I had not read so much Egyptology before coming to this land which is the fountain of all darkness and terror!”<sup>25</sup> This burden of knowledge that lies on the shoulders of the white European male is a common trope in many antiquarian travelogues written in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries. Many such journals note the existence of archetypes in the Orient, and the observations of these antiquarian writers often perpetuated those orientalist caricatures of Eastern people. In his foundational postcolonial text, *Orientalism*, Edward Said critiques Western perceptions of the East, observing that the West’s false cultural representations of Asia and the Middle East often served as a means of justifying their own imperial ambition and denying voice and agency to the citizens of those very nations. By emphasizing Houdini’s knowledge of Egypt and its culture, Lovecraft is presenting Houdini as well equipped to make a determination about the culture he has studied, and as an authority to tell his

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 68.

readers what they should think as well. Yet Houdini's orientalist representations of Egypt and its citizenry are actually an attempt to affirm an idealized Western identity against the threat of the demonized foreigner.

Lovecraft's racialized language reflects Western fears, and Orser brings up many historical examples of this ideologically inflected language. For instance, Orser notes that while "seventeenth-century Virginia planters did use the term 'Negro' to identify their enslaved chattel, they juxtaposed this term with 'Christian' and 'English'"<sup>26</sup> and "it was not uncommon for prominent English-language newspapers to publish images that portrayed the Irish as having simian features [...] when people of African descent were regularly equated with apes and monkeys."<sup>27</sup> Lovecraft describes the Egyptian people with this type of language, equating them to slaves, animals, and otherworldly beings as yet not understood by the civilized world. Utilizing the archaeological finds of Houdini, Lovecraft turns a whole civilization into a grotesque slave race of half men, half beast abominations, whose only function is to serve their cannibalistic godhead. By describing all of the represented bodies of Egypt as servants to the Sphinx, Lovecraft is "negatively essentializing" the whole of the country under this singular ontological definition, as opposed to what will here be called "positive essentialism." Orser discusses how race essentialism is defined in archaeology, and how it can debilitate a group of people, or empower them.

I argue that Lovecraft's essentialized Egypt also can be seen in this way. Orser defines racialization as

"a dialectical process of signification" that consist of assigning men and women to essentialist groups, based upon physical appearance or some other readily identifiable characteristics, that allow them to be perceived as biologically inferior or socially unequal [...]. It creates social groupings where they may not have otherwise existed and seeks to naturalize distinction as an objective feature of human existence.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Charles E. Orser Jr., *Race and Practice in Archaeological Interpretation* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 7.

<sup>27</sup> Orser, *Race and Practice in Archaeological Interpretation*, 3.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

While Orser likely does not intend “social grouping” to describe the followers of the mythical Sphinx, the definition holds. The way for the Egyptians to get out from under this cultural signification imposed upon them by European colonizers is to appropriate that signification under a different flag. In this way, I posit that Orser argues for what I will here call a “positive essentialism,” one that is caused by “racialized men and women [deciding] to accept an imposed label as a symbol of unity, group consciousness, and empowerment,”<sup>29</sup> in response to imperialistic forces. Through this lens, the citizens of Egypt create a third space and re-signify the European narrative of Egypt, defying the hegemony of their colonizers. Using the concept of positive essentialism, the Egyptians, through their subversive actions, present an empowered counter narrative of their culture, one that gives them agency under the restrictive rule of colonial European powers. King Khephran, the ruler apparent of the underworld, seeks to resist European domination by such a strategy.

King Khephran kidnaps and sacrifices white men to the heart of Egypt, working to unbind himself and his people from poverty, enslavement, and religious persecution under colonial rule. What makes this character so important is the manner by which he engages in the false “mimicry” of a colonized citizen. Homi Bhabha states that mimicry is “the [colonizer’s] desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*.”<sup>30</sup> The language that Lovecraft uses sets Abdul apart as a “mimic man,” to be utilized in the same way that other colonized subjects have been before, as “a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom [are governed] to form a corps of translators.”<sup>31</sup> These classes of people are considered, in this case, Egyptian in blood and culture “but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.”<sup>32</sup> Abdul is initially described as this kind of character—“*almost the same, but not quite*.” He signifies not only the success of the Western colonizing efforts, but also the superiority of Western epistemology. In his deception, however, Abdul, through his mimicry, demonstrates that the West is engaged

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., Preface, 1.

<sup>30</sup> Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” *October*, vol. 28 (1984): 126.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

in the real deception in its attempt to satisfy the colonizer's desire for subjection of the Other. Here, the Egyptians re-signify colonial power, becoming warriors against the West for the sake of their cultural, societal, and personal agency.

The subjugation of a culture based on colonial racism is a consistent theme in Lovecraft's writing, but drawing upon Orser and Bhabha's theories, I argue that Lovecraft's own characters expose the ideological falsity of his hypothetical Egypt, suggesting that European culture, not Egyptian culture, is the corrupting force. In "Under the Pyramids," Houdini's fearful creatures represent a culture attempting to escape the grip of the oppressor. Resisting the colonizers, both the Sphinx (with its fearful majesty) and King Khephran (with his transgressive operations of the "mimic man") challenge the colonial narrative of Egypt. Such a strategy is used to uplift all people of Egypt. Seizing their agency back from an oppressive Western force, the pyramid's citizenry engage in a fight to break their physical and rhetorical bonds of servitude to white imperialism.

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**Let Vengeance Rule, Not Pity: On the Universality of Female Rage**

*Winner of the 2019 CSUN Distinguished Thesis/Graduate Project Award—1st Place*

[ excerpt ]

*Modje Taavon*

Literature

Thesis Committee Members:

Michael Bryson (chair), Danielle Spratt, Martin Pousson

## CHAPTER ONE

### Exile

*The language I have learnt these forty years,  
My native English, now I must forgo;  
And now my tongue's use is to me no more  
Than an unstringèd viol or a harp  
Or like a cunning instrument cased up  
Or, being open, put into his hands  
That knows no touch to tune the harmony.  
Within my mouth you have enjailed my tongue,  
Doubly portcullised with my teeth and lips;  
And dull, unfeeling, barren ignorance  
Is made my jailer to attend on me.  
I am too old to fawn upon a nurse,  
Too far in years to be a pupil now.  
What is thy sentence then but speechless death,  
Which robs my tongue from breathing native breath?*

— Mowbray, *Richard II*, 1.3.154–173<sup>1</sup>

## I

### The Speechless Death

For the better part of two centuries, we have been living in exile. In this world, language is non-referential, the author is dead, and literature refers to naught but itself. In this world, the written word holds no extra-literary meaning; language is not only non-communicative, but *un*communicative. In this world, history is rendered mute, unable to catalog the individuals who have voiced—by words spoken and books written—their defiance of power, of tyranny, of oppression,

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<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, edited by Stephen Orgel and A. R. Braunmuller (New York: Pelican, 2002), 970.

of injustice, and is instead the mechanism by which we oppress, subjugate, and dominate others. In *this* world, we are banished to a life of “dull, unfeeling, barren ignorance,” doomed to wander in an isolation engendered by predominantly male French critics. These tyrants stalk the halls of the academy, disguised as the intellectual liberators who will free us from the limits of language and from the oppressive structures inherent to language. In practice, however, precisely the opposite is true. As a colleague in a graduate seminar once wrote, “[s]uch analyses almost make me want to clamp my mouth shut and never utter nor type a word out of terror that I will somehow be a contributing factor to reinforcing oppressive structures.”<sup>2</sup> In practice, the so-called *linguistic turn*<sup>3</sup> leads to self-censorship, ensuring that anyone inclined to use words as a means of registering dissent feels unable to do so. Like Shakespeare’s Mowbray, we are sentenced to a “speechless death,” for in this calcified critical tradition that unironically espouses the notion that “today’s writing has freed itself from the theme of expression,”<sup>4</sup> no book we read, no play we watch, and no song we hear refers to anything aside from itself.

In modern literary theory, the idea that language has no real referent stems from the misappropriation of the work of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, who states that “the unifying link between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, or again, as we intend by signs the whole that results from the association of a signifier with a signified, we can say it more simply: *the linguistic sign is arbitrary*.”<sup>5</sup> This arbitrariness is what disassociates the linguistic sign from any essential meaning, but it is a far cry from

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<sup>2</sup> English 638 Class Blog Post, 24 September 2017.

<sup>3</sup> That is, the fashionable trend in twentieth-century Western philosophy amongst humanities and social science professionals to use linguistics as the means by which philosophical problems would be solved. See Richard M. Rorty, *The Linguistic Turn: Essays in Philosophical Method* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 3.

<sup>4</sup> “[L]’écriture d’aujourd’hui s’est affranchie du thème de l’expression” (Michel Foucault, “Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur?” *Dits et écrits* [Paris: Gallimard, 1994], Vol 1, 792).

<sup>5</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), 67. [“Le lien unissant le signifiant au signifié est arbitraire, ou encore, puisque nous entendons par signe le total résultant de l’association d’un signifiant à un signifié, nous pouvons dire plus simplement: le signe linguistique est arbitraire” (Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* [Paris: Payot & Rivages, 1967], 100).]

Saussure's linguistic theories to suggest that language is non-referential, that it holds no extra-literary meaning.

Saussure makes a distinction between what he calls *langue* (the structure of language as a system) and what he calls *parole* (speech—i.e. how language is used). Language [*langue*] “is a system of signs in which the only essential thing is the union of meanings and sound-images, and in which both parts of the sign are psychological”<sup>6</sup> and as such, it “is not a function of the speaker; it is a product that is passively assimilated by the individual.”<sup>7</sup> Language is also “a system of signs that expresses ideas, and is therefore comparable to a system of writing, the alphabet of deaf-mutes, symbolic rites, polite formulas, military signals, etc. But it is the most important of these systems.”<sup>8</sup> Speech [*parole*], on the other hand, “is an individual act. It is willful and intellectual. Within the act, we should distinguish between: 1) the combinations by which the speaker uses the language code for expressing his own thought; and 2) the psychophysical mechanism that allows him to exteriorize those combinations.”<sup>9</sup> For Saussure, then, language and its written form are analogous to one another *as systems of signs*. Indeed, for Saussure, language—whether manifest as speech or writing—exists in the world precisely because it is intentional, tangible, physical, and material:

Language is concrete, no less so than speaking; and this is a help in our study of it. Linguistic signs, though basically psychological, are not abstractions; associations which bear the stamp of collective approval—and which added together constitute language—they are realities that have their seat in the brain. Besides, linguistic signs are tangible; it is

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 15. [“[C]’est un system de signes où il n’y a d’essentiel que l’union du sens et de l’image acoustique m, et où les deux parties du signe sont également psychiques” (Ibid., 32).]

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 14. [“La langue n’est pas une fonction du sujet parlant, elle est le produit que l’individu enregistre passivement . . .” (Ibid., 30).]

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 16. [“La langue est un system de signes exprimant des idées, et par là, comparable à l’écriture, à l’alphabet des sourds-muets, aux rites symboliques, aux formes de politesse, aux signaux militaires, etc., etc. Elle est seulement le plus important de ces systèmes” (Ibid., 33).]

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 15. [“La parole est au contraire un acte individuel de volonté et d’intelligence, dans lequel il convient de distinguer: 1) les combinaisons par lesquelles le sujet parlant utilise le code de la langue en vue d’exprimer sa pensée personnelle; 2) le mécanisme psycho-physique qui lui permet d’extérioriser ces combinaisons” (Ibid., 30–31).]

possible to reduce them to conventional written symbols, whereas it would be impossible to provide detailed photographs of acts of speech the pronunciation of even the smallest word represents an infinite number of muscular movements that could be identified and put into graphic form only with great difficulty. In language, on the contrary, there is only the sound-image, and the latter can be translated into a fixed individual image. [...] The very possibility of putting the things that relate to language into graphic form allows dictionaries and grammars to represent it accurately, for language is a storehouse of sound-images, and writing is the tangible form of those images.<sup>10</sup>

Such is not the case for the post-Saussurean critics of language in the twentieth century. Jacques Derrida imagines that speech, since Plato's *Phaedrus*,<sup>11</sup> has always taken precedence over writing, and sought to use Saussure against himself in order to overturn this supposed hierarchy:

Let us now try to go beyond these formal and architectonic considerations. Let us ask in a more intrinsic and concrete way, how language is not merely a sort of writing, "comparable to a system of

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 67. ["La langue n'est pas moins que la parole un objet de nature concrète, et c'est un grand avantage pour l'étude. Les signes linguistiques, pour être essentiellement psychiques, ne sont pas des abstractions; les associations ratifiées par le consentement collectif, et dont l'ensemble constitue la langue, sont des réalités qui ont leur siège dans le cerveau. En outre, les signes de la langue sont pour ainsi dire tangibles; l'écriture peut les fixer dans des images conventionnelles, tandis qu'il serait impossible de photographier dans tous leurs détails les actes de la parole; la phonation d'un mot, si petit soit-il, représente une infinité de mouvements musculaires extrêmement difficiles à connaître et à figurer. Dans la langue, au contraire, il n'y a plus que l'image acoustique, et celle-ci peut se traduire en une image visuelle constante. [...] C'est cette possibilité de fixer les choses relatives à la langue qui fait qu'un dictionnaire et une grammaire peuvent en être une représentation fidèle, la langue étant le dépôt des images acoustiques, et l'écriture la forme tangible de ces images" (Ibid., 100).]

<sup>11</sup> In *Phaedrus*, Plato's Socrates takes on the subject of the merits of speech over writing with the criticism that words "are as incapable of speaking in their own defense as they are of teaching the truth adequately" (Plato, "Phaedrus," *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997], 553.) Speech is, therefore, capable of representing truth, but writing is unable to do so. That he does this in writing is apparently to go without comment . . .

writing” (p. 33) [p.16]—Saussure writes curiously—but a species of writing. Or rather, since writing no longer relates to language as an extension or frontier, let us ask how language is a possibility founded on the general possibility of writing. Demonstrating this, one would give at the same time an account of that alleged “usurpation” which could not be an unhappy accident. It supposes on the contrary a common root and thus excludes the resemblance of the “image,” derivation, or representative reflexion. And thus one would bring back to its true meaning, to its primary possibility, the apparently innocent and didactic analogy which makes Saussure say: “Language is [...] comparable to a system of writing”.<sup>12</sup>

Derrida’s reformulation of language as a “general possibility of writing,” depends on a single rhetorical move: the bait-and-switch of redefinition, or what Nicholas Shackel calls the “Motte and Bailey Doctrine.”<sup>13</sup> While Saussure draws a distinction between language as a system (*langue*) and speech (*parole*) or writing, Derrida uses language (*la langue*) in place of speech to argue that because Saussure draws an analogy between language and writing, that writing is not derived from speech, but a system unto its own. To clarify, Derrida strategically conflates language as a system with speech, then uses Saussure to “prove” that writing is distinct from language and should, in fact, be privileged over language

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<sup>12</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 52. [“Essayons maintenant d’aller au-delà de ces considerations formelles et architectoniques. Demandons-nous, de façon plus intérieure et plus concrète, en quoi la langue n’est pas seulement une espèce d’écriture, « comparable à l’écriture »—dit curieusement Saussure (p. 33)—mais une espèce de l’écriture. Ou plutôt, car les rapports ne sont plus ici d’extension et de frontière, une possibilité fondée dans la possibilité générale de l’écriture. En le montrant, on rendrait compte, du même coup, de la prétendue « usurpation » qui n’a pu être un malheureux accident. Elle suppose au contraire une racine commune et exclut par là-même la ressemblance de l’« image », la dérivation ou la réflexion représentative. Et l’on reconduirait ainsi à son véritable sens, à sa première possibilité, l’analogie apparemment innocente et didactique qui fait dire à Saussure: La langue est [...] comparable à l’écriture” (Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* [Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1967], 75–76).]

<sup>13</sup> Nicholas Shackel, “The Vacuity of Postmodernist Methodology,” *Metaphilosophy* 36, no. 3 (2005): 295–320, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9973.2005.00370.x>.

(i.e. speech). What’s worse, Derrida then argues that language is that from which we are distinct and that which is distinct from reality:

Yet if reading must not simply redouble the text, it cannot legitimately transgress the text toward something other than itself, to a referent (metaphysical reality, historical, psycho-biographical, etc.) or to a signified outside text whose content could take place, could have taken place outside language, that is to say, in the sense that we give here to that word, outside of writing in general. This is why the methodological considerations that we risk here on an example are closely dependent on general propositions that we have elaborated above, as to the absence of the referent or the transcendental signified. *There is no outside-text.*<sup>14</sup>

Writing, having been granted precedence over speech, is now neither connotative, nor denotative. Essentially, the content of a book—literature—cannot exist or occur outside of language; it cannot exist in the world.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari take this position further still when they argue that language doesn’t exist in the abstract: “there is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, patois, slangs, and specialized languages.”<sup>15</sup> The rhetorical move, here, is similar to Derrida’s: Deleuze and Guattari eliminate the *concept* of language as a system (*langue*)—all that exists is a multiplicity of *parole*.

Michel Foucault, however, holds a slightly different position. For Foucault, language is rediscovered in the nineteenth century when “words ceased to intersect with representations and to provide a spontaneous grid for the knowledge of

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Bryson and Arpi Movsesian, *Love and its Critics: From the Song of Songs to Shakespeare and Milton’s Eden* (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2017), 24; 80n, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0117>.

<sup>15</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 7. [“[I]l n’y a pas de langue en soi, ni d’universalité du langage, mais un concours de dialectes, de patois, d’argots, de langues spéciales” (Gilles Deleuze et Félix Guattari, *Mille plateaux* [Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980], 14).]

things.”<sup>16</sup> In effect, Foucault argues that text—writing, books, etc.—has agency, but only the agency to refer to itself:

Once detached from representation, language has existed, right up to our own day, only in a dispersed way: [...] for those who wish to achieve a formalization, language must strip itself of its concrete content and leave nothing visible but those form of discourse that are universally valid; if one’s intent is to interpret, then words become a text to be broken down, so as to allow that other meaning hidden in them to emerge and become clearly visible; lastly, language may sometimes arise for its own sake in an act of writing that designates nothing other than itself.<sup>17</sup>

Like Derrida, Foucault’s rhetorical move is a bait-and-switch:

When the table of natural history was dissociated, the living beings within it were not dispersed, but, on the contrary, regrouped around the central enigma of life; [...] on the other hand, when the unity of general grammar—discourse—was broken up, language appeared in a multiplicity of modes of being, whose unity was probably irrecoverable.<sup>18</sup>

In order to substantiate his assertion that language exists in a “dispersed” way, Foucault draws a false equivalency between “the table of natural history” and

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<sup>16</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 2002), 331. [“[L]es mots ont cessé de s’entrecroiser avec les représentations et de quadriller spontanément la connaissance des choses” (Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses* [Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1966], 315).]

<sup>17</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 14. [“Détache de la représentation, le langage n’existe plus désormais, et jusqu’à nous encore, que sur en mode dispersé: [...] pour ceux qui veulent formaliser, le langage doit dépouiller son contenu concret et ne plus laisser apparaître que les formes universellement valables du discours; si on veut interpréter, alors les mots deviennent texte à fracturer pour qu’on puisse voir émerger en pleine lumière cet autre sens qu’ils cachent; enfin il arrive au langage du surgir pour lui-même en un acte d’écrire qui e désigne rien de plus que soi” (Deleuze et Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, 14).]

<sup>18</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 331–332. [“Quand le tableau de l’histoire naturelle fut dissocié, les êtres vivants n’ont pas été dispersés, mais regroupés au contraire autour de l’énigme de la

“general grammar” (i.e. discourse). Natural history qua natural history is not manifest in the world. Natural history is an abstract concept, an umbrella term; it is the study of flora and fauna, the environment and its observable changes across time and place. Conversely, general grammar is a manifestation of language; it is not language itself, but only a part of the system of language—i.e. *langue*. The analogy simply does not follow.

Jacques Lacan takes these absurdities to new heights, arguing that language (*le langage*) “is neither signal, nor sign, nor even a sign of the thing as an external reality. The relationship between signifier and signified is entirely enclosed in the order of language itself, which completely determines the two terms.”<sup>19</sup> What would the world look like, one wonders, if Lacan’s axiom were applied to mathematics? Numbers qua numbers, after all, do not exist; and yet, there is not one thing built in this world (especially in the realm of computer technology, and the binary code that underlies all of its basic functions) that does not owe its construction to the mathematical realities of 0.

These pronouncements on the limitations of language and writing are rooted in Maurice Blanchot’s assertion that “the work of art, the literary work—is neither finished nor unfinished: it is. What it says is exclusively this: that it is—and nothing more. Beyond that it is nothing. Whoever wants to make it express more finds nothing, finds that it expresses nothing.”<sup>20</sup> Blanchot’s statement, in turn, is rooted in Kant’s idea that “objects in themselves are not at all known to us, and that what we term external objects are nothing else but mere representations of our sensibility” which “do not exhibit things in themselves.”<sup>21</sup> Kant’s argument is itself rooted in the rhetorical arguments of the fifth-century

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vie; [...] en revanche, lorsque l’unité de la grammaire général—le discours—s’est dissipé, alors le langage est apparu selon des mondes d’être multiples, dont l’unité, sans doute, ne pouvait pas être restaurée” (Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*, 315–316.)

<sup>19</sup> Bryson and Movsesian, *Love and its Critics*, 24–25; 81n.

<sup>20</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 1. “[L]’œuvre d’art, l’œuvre littéraire—n’est ni achevée ni inachevée: elle est. Ce qu’elle dit, c’est exclusivement cela: qu’elle est—et rien de plus. En dehors de cela, elle n’est rien. Qui veut lui faire exprimer davantage, ne trouve rien, trouve qu’elle n’exprime rien” (Maurice Blanchot, “La Solitude Essentielle,” *L’Espace Littéraire* [Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1955], 12.)

<sup>21</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critick of Pure Reason*, trans. Francis Haywood (London: William Pickering, 1848), 29; 36.

BCE Sophist philosopher Gorgias of Leontini, who argued “first, that there is nothing; second, that even if there is [something], it is not apprehensible by a human being; third, that even if it is apprehensible, it is still not expressible or explainable to the next person.”<sup>22</sup>

In 2500 years, it seems little has changed. According to twentieth-century French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, while speech is able to “anchor discourse in the *circumstantial reality* which surrounds the instance of discourse,”<sup>23</sup> text is not: “when the movement of reference towards designation (showing) is intercepted by a text, words cease to efface themselves in front of things; written words become words for their own sake.”<sup>24</sup> But if (written) language has no real-world referent, if it is incapable of signification, then how is one to articulate dissent? How does one oppose, resist, refuse, refute, or otherwise reject the overwhelmingly authoritarian realities of one’s culture, of the world?

At the height of the American academy’s obsession with Francophone theory, Edward Said proposed an answer with his *The World, the Text, and the Critic*—a volume of essays written between 1969–1981 and published in 1983—offering a mercifully cogent and sharp criticism of work of such French theorists as Ricoeur, Derrida, and Foucault with extraordinary prescience:

The kinds of theory I have been discussing can quite easily become cultural dogma. Appropriated to schools or institutions, they quickly acquire the status of authority within the cultural group, guild, or affiliation family. Though of course they are to be distinguished from grosser forms of cultural dogma like racism and nationalism, they are insidious in that their original provenance—their history of adversarial, oppositional derivation—dulls the critical consciousness, convincing it that a once insurgent theory is still insurgent, lively, responsive to history.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Sextus Empiricus, *Sextus Empiricus: Against the Logicians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 15. For a detailed overview of the connection between post-Saussurian linguistic theory and Classical sophism, see Bryson and Movsesian, *Love and its Critics*, 1–35.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Ricoeur, “What is A Text?” *Mythic-Symbolic Language and Philosophical Anthropology*, ed. David M. Rasmussen (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 138. Emphasis added.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>25</sup> Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 247.

It is difficult to read this quotation and not think of the colleague whose earnest desire to be a force against oppression causes her to feel as though she must be silent in the wake of such theories. Who benefits if within the academy the theories that proclaim to be liberatory do nothing but compel us to be silent, or worse—force us to censor ourselves?

Said's response to Ricoeur is equally valuable. What Ricoeur calls "circumstantial reality," Said calls *worldliness*, which he uses to reject Ricoeur's disavowal of the concreteness of language:

[W]orldliness does not come and go, nor is it here and there in the apologetic and soupy way by which we often designate history, a euphemism in such cases for the impossibly vague notion that all things take place in history. [...] Texts have ways of existing, both theoretical and practical, that even in their most rarefied form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place and society—in short, they are in the world, and hence are worldly.<sup>26</sup>

This worldliness—the materiality of texts and literature—is precisely what is denied when critics take seriously the axiom that texts are incapable of referring to the real world. This dictum is at the root of the kind of inanities unleashed by English professors<sup>27</sup> such as "language is a parasite, as proven by Victorian-era documentaries of 'The Wild Child'" or "understanding is fascist, and logic is *inherently* sexist." Worse, still, the dictum that 'literature has no circumstantial reality' is what gives license to the kind of English professor whose response to the question of how presentism in literary analysis is not, itself, committing the academic sin of 'imposing a narrative,' is the following:

as the reader, as the spectator, you're interpreting. So, I mean, aren't we all involved in unlimited acts of interpretation? But, like, you have some freedom to interpret. We can also look at this as, okay this is a singular event, but this is also interpretation. But, we're not relying upon the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 34–35.

<sup>27</sup> The following three quotations are taken directly from seminars the author attended at this institution.

traditional conservative historian to interpret, to draw the dots together. We're showing some things and we're letting YOU interpret and create meaning but it's more democratic. It's not just one person telling you, 'oh this history book I'm writing—all two million people are going to read this in California. This is history.' NO. It's like, you're showing these events and you can interpret, and your interpretation has a lot to do with where you are.

In fact, Said anticipated this exact scenario and explicitly addresses the folly of a critic's decidedly *uncritical* view that we are all of us involved in 'unlimited acts of interpretation,' as though that is the same as democratizing the study of literature:

Recent critical theory has placed undue emphasis on the limitlessness of interpretation. It is argued that, since all reading is misreading, no one reading is better than any other, and hence all readings, potentially infinite in number, are in the final analysis equally misinterpretations. A part of this has been derived from a conception of the text as existing within a hermetic, Alexandrian textual universe, which has no connection with actuality. This is a view I do not agree with, not simply because texts in fact are in the world but also because as texts they place themselves—one of their functions as texts is to place themselves—and indeed are themselves, by soliciting the world's attention. Moreover, their manner of doing this is to place restraints upon what can be done with them interpretively.<sup>28</sup>

Said rejects the decidedly French view that language and literature are disconnected from reality and instead reminds us that as critics, we are: "responsible to a degree for articulating those voices dominated, displaced, or silenced by the textuality of texts."<sup>29</sup> Most importantly, Said offers us an answer to the question that if language is truly non-referential, then what becomes of the

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<sup>28</sup> Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 39–40.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

dictates of these theorists who use *language* to communicate that language is *uncommunicative*—namely, that

[t]exts are a system of forces, institutionalized by the reigning culture at some human cost to its various components. Most of all, criticism is worldly and in the world so long as it opposes monocentrism, a concept [...] working in conjunction with ethnocentrism, which licenses a culture to cloak itself in the particular authority of certain values over others.<sup>30</sup>

For Said, criticism is worldly only as long as it is *oppositional* to the status quo of the established intellectual hegemony, but perhaps that is optimism on Said's part. Criticism has circumstantial reality, even if it reinforces the institutionalized monocentric and ethnocentric culture of the times. Consider Derrida's unfortunate admission in the ironically titled *Monolingualism of the Other*:

One entered French literature only by losing one's accent. I think I have not lost my accent; not everything in my "French Algerian" accent is lost. [...] I would like to hope, I would very much prefer, that no publication permits any part of my "French Algerian" to appear. In the meantime, and until the contrary is proven, I do not believe that anyone can detect by reading, if I do not myself declare it, that I am a "French Algerian." I retain, no doubt, a sort of acquired reflex from the necessity of this vigilant transformation. I am not proud of it, I make no doctrine of it, but so it is: an accent—any French accent, but above all a strong southern accent—seems incompatible to me with the intellectual dignity of public speech. [...] I cannot bear or admire anything other than pure French.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ricoeur, "What is A Text?" 139.

<sup>31</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prothesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 45–46. ["On n'entrait dans la littérature française qu'en perdant son accent. Je crois n'avoir pas perdu mon accent, pas tout perdu de mon accent de « Français d'Algérie ». [...] je crois pouvoir espérer, j'aimerais tant qu'aucune publication ne laisse rien paraître de mon « français d'Algérie ». Je ne crois pas, pour l'instant et jusqu'à démonstration du contraire, qu'on puisse déceler à la lecture, et si je ne le déclare pas moi-même,

Derrida's confession is laden with eight centuries of the tyranny of the (Parisian) French notions of linguistic purity and the battle between *langue d'oïl* and *langue d'oc*, between Paris and Provence, its roots stretching all the way back to what is arguably the first genocide in the West: the Albigensian Crusade.<sup>32</sup> Derrida's prejudice against "a strong southern accent" (to say nothing of his apparent revulsion against French *Algerian*) is the intellectual consequence of papal legate Arnaud Amaury's famous words to his northern French soldiers at the massacre at Béziers: "Kill them. For the Lord knows who are his."<sup>33</sup> Monocentrism and ethnocentrism are part and parcel of the kind of theories that form the reigning orthodoxy of the current academy; for, after all, "our critical ethos is formed by a pernicious analytic of blind demarcation by which, for example, imagination is separated from thought, culture from power, history from form, texts from everything that is *hors texte* [...]"<sup>34</sup> What else but this monocentrism and ethnocentrism could be at the root of Derrida's fear of all that is not *pure French*—Parisian French? What does it mean for a theorist or philosopher who says, "I confess, I always surrender myself to language"<sup>35</sup> and then asserts that there is no outside-text, that language is without referent, that language is but hot air? Derrida becomes both Richard II and Mowbray combined—an exile, but one who will sentence *himself* to a speechless death, robbing his own tongue from breathing native breath.

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que je suis un « Français d'Algérie ». De la nécessité de cette transformation vigilante je garde sans doute une sorte de réflexe acquis. Je n'en suis pas fier, je n'en fais pas une doctrine, mais c'est ainsi: l'accent, quelque accent français que ce soit, et avant tout le fort accent méridional, me paraît incompatible avec la dignité intellectuelle d'une parole publique. [...] [J]e ne supporte ou n'admire, en français du moins, et seulement quant à la langue, que le français pur" (Jacques Derrida, *Monolinguisisme de l'autre* [Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1996], 77–78).]

<sup>32</sup> Pope Innocent III's military campaign, begun in 1209, against the so-called heretical Cathars, a sect of Christian dualists who lived in Occitania, what is now southern France. (Michael Bryson and Arpi Movsesian, *Love and its Critics*, 132–133; 223–224.)

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>34</sup> Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 169.

<sup>35</sup> Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, 47. ["Car toujours, je l'avoue, je me rends à la langue" (Derrida, *Monolinguisisme de l'autre*, 80).]

## II

### Persian Literary Worldliness: A Case-Study

Edward Said has one thing more to say about the monocentric and ethnocentric view of literature, so rampant in English departments: the criticism that Foucault “talks almost exclusively about France,”<sup>36</sup> as though the particular (even peculiar) can be the measure for the universal. What’s more, Said (citing Nicos Poulantzas) asks: “why does Foucault never discuss the resistances that always end up dominated by the system [of power] he describes?”<sup>37</sup> The reemergence of Persian as the court language of Islamic dynastic rule in medieval Iran is a consummate example of the worldliness of language and literature, the intentionality of authorship and literature, and—most importantly—has the benefit of being an event that both predates nineteenth-century France, and is far from its borders.

In the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries, three distinctly *Iranian* Islamic dynasties rose to power: the Saffarids (861 CE – 1003 CE), the Samanids (819 CE – 999 CE), and the Buyids (932 CE – 1062 CE). These empires—the Saffarids in the southeastern province of Sistan, and the Samanids and Buyids in the provinces of Khorasan and Transoxiana in eastern Iran—were the fertile ground upon which the revival of a “Persian cultural renaissance” took root.<sup>38</sup> It is here that the *sho’ubiyyah*—the Persianization of the Islamic political office, administration, *and* culture—bears fruit.<sup>39</sup>

Although the eleventh century sees a significant outpouring of literature in the Persian language, decidedly marking a cultural shift in the medieval Middle East, this period does not mark the *first* instance of a Persian presence in Islamic administrative practices: the Umayyads, who rose to power in 661 CE,

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<sup>36</sup> Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 244.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>38</sup> Alice C. Hunsberger, *Nasir Khusraw, the Ruby of Badakhshan: A Portrait of the Persian Poet, Traveller and Philosopher* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 4; G. Lazard, “The Rise of the New Persian Language,” *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol 4: The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 595–596.

<sup>39</sup> J. T. P. de Bruijn, *A History of Persian Literature, Vol 1: General Introduction to Persian Literature* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 15; Homa Katouzian, *The Persians: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 76–77.

maintained the administrative practices of the Byzantine and Sasanid empires that came before.<sup>40</sup> In fact, it is not until “almost the end of the Umayyad period that Arabic became the language of administration in border provinces like [Khorasan].”<sup>41</sup> In much the same way, the Turkic dynasties of the Ghaznavids (977 CE – 1186 CE) and the Saljuqs (1038 CE – 1194 CE) “relied heavily on Persian administrative skills and on ancient Iranian theories and practices of political legitimacy.”<sup>42</sup> As such, this period is a linguistic resurgence; the eleventh century is the seat of a crucial moment in which Arabic is displaced and Persian is revived as the official language of the intellectual and political sphere of the eastern Islamic world.

The Saffarid, Samanid, and Buyid dynasties “were formed around local feudalism revolting against the central [Abbasid] caliphate,”<sup>43</sup> and until the ninth century, Arabic was the language of court in the Abbasid court, extending to its vassal courts in Iran. With the Saffarids, Persian is given an official platform once again, especially as the language of poetry. The founder of the Saffarid dynasty, Yaqub bin Layth

had poets attached to him who, after the conquest of Herat and Pushang from their Tahirid governor, eulogised him in Arabic verses. Ya’qub could not understand these, and asked the secretary of his chancery, Muhammad b. Vasif, “Why must something be recited that I can’t understand?” So Muhammad b. Vasif composed some verses in Persian.<sup>44</sup>

According to an eleventh-century historical chronical, the *Tarikheh Sistan*, this event results in the following: “[a]fter that, everyone understood how to

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<sup>40</sup> G.R. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate AD 661–750* (London: Routledge, 2000), 63.

<sup>41</sup> Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam*, 63–64.

<sup>42</sup> Hamid Dabashi, *Shi’ism: A Religion of Protest* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 104.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>44</sup> C. E. Bosworth, “The Tahirids and the Saffarids,” *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol 4: The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 129–130.

compose poetry, but these were the first; and no one had ever composed a poem in the Persian language before, except for Abu Nuwas, who composed a comic speech in Persian between [the lines of] his own poem.”<sup>45</sup> This anecdote not only establishes Persian as a literary court language going forward, but it also has ties to the classical Islamic poetry of the eighth and ninth-centuries by way of Abu Nuwas—Haroun al-Rashid’s court poet from Khuzestan.<sup>46</sup> This, then, sets a precedent: the genesis of the vernacular Persian (or, Dari, rather)<sup>47</sup> as a language of intellectual endeavors, equal to Arabic.

Continuing this blossoming literary tradition begun by the Saffarids, the Samanids cultivated an impressive list of authors, poets, historians, and scientists who wrote in both Arabic and Persian. During the reign of Nasr bin Ahmad, “both Arabic and Persian books were produced in his capital, as well as elsewhere in the kingdom, and a library was assembled at Bukhara which won the praise of scholars including Ibn Sina, who used it later in the Samanid era.”<sup>48</sup> It is under the Samanids that Ferdowsi begins his epic *Shahnameh*; here, Iran became a veritable garden of literature and scholarship, and the Persian language its most prized bloom.

In much the same vein, the Buyids were a Shi’a Deylamite dynasty who rose to power in the tenth century. Staunchly anti-Arab, the best known of its leaders was Panah Khusraw who became known as ‘Adud al-Dawla and who ruled from Shiraz, the center of Persian culture in Iran. ‘Adud al-Dawla is the first of the Buyids to restore the title of *shahanshab* (شاهنشاه, “king of kings”)—a

<sup>45</sup> *Tarikheh Sistan*, ed. Mohammad Taqi Bahar (Tehran: Moin, 1381/2002), 214–217, <http://archive.org/stream/TarikhSistan/Ta%27rikh-i%20Sistan#page/n211/mode/2up>.

« پس از آن هر کسی طریق شعر گفتن برگرفتند، اما ابتداء اینان بودند، و کسی به زبان پارسی شعر یاد نکرده بود، الا بو نواس میان شعر خویش سخن پارسی طنز را یاد کرده بود.»

<sup>46</sup> Abu Nuwas, *Carousing with Gazelles: Homoerotic Songs of Old Baghdad*, trans. Jaafar Abu Tareb (Lincoln: iUniverse, 2005), vii.

<sup>47</sup> Persian was the vernacular of medieval Iran, but Dari Persian (which is spoken today in western Afghanistan), was the dialect of Persian in Khorasan in eastern Iran. Khorasan was the literary capital of Iran; thus, Dari became the literary language of poetry. See Gilbert Lazard, “DARĪ,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, last modified November 17, 2011, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/dari>.

<sup>48</sup> R. N. Frye, “The Samanids,” *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol 4: The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 142–143.

designation that called forth an association with the Achaemenid empire, the first *Persian* empire in Iran. This cultivation of a political association with pre-Arab Conquest Iran, while maintaining an adherence to Islam mirrors the cultivation of these *Iranian* dynasties with a literary culture that takes ownership of both language and religion: “[a]s a result, Arab influence could no longer be regarded as the sole vehicle for the spread of Islam within the confines of Persia, and the Persian language began to permeate court life and to acquire the status of a literary medium.”<sup>49</sup> The process of Persian (Dari) becoming the language of the general culture “took at least two centuries, from the [ninth] to the [eleventh], in the course of which literary Persian was progressively extended from popular poetry to poetry of an elevated style and thence to science and administration; its territory was likewise enlarged from Eastern Iran to the regions of the West.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, the Persian literature produced under the Buyids is characterized by a distinctly dissenting ideology. This can be illustrated by a brief consideration of Ferdowsi’s epic poem, *The Shahnameh*.

Born in 940 CE, Abolqasem Ferdowsi is the author of the best-known iteration of the *Shahnameh*. Of the *dehqan* class of Iran,<sup>51</sup> he was a poet at the Samanid court until their eventual downfall at the hands of the Ghaznavid Turks. Subsequently, he spent the rest of his life composing his epic poem, hoping that Sultan Mahmud Ghazna would show him favor. That did not prove to be the case, and Ferdowsi is said to have died in relative obscurity and poverty circa 1020 CE. Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh* is celebrated for its attempt to limit the use of Arabic words, and as such, it is lauded as the literary bedrock of the revival and recovery of Persian as a viable language of intellectual and scholarly productions. The *Shahnameh* is, by its very nature, a testament to the spirit of dissent, characterized by a nearly-heroic effort to reclaim, through language and literature, an authentically Iranian identity after the Arab Conquest.

To select just one theme out of the epic *Shahnameh* seems a herculean task, and yet the poem’s treatment of the ethics of dissent is manifest. Translator and scholar of Persian literature Dick Davis suggests that “[t]he nature of the good man, the good hero, is a central focus of Ferdowsi’s concern, and this suggests

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 295.

<sup>50</sup> Lazard, “The Rise of the New Persian Language,” 606.

<sup>51</sup> That is, the landed gentry. See Hamid Dabashi, *The World of Persian Literary Humanism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 63.

[a] recurrent characteristic of the poem, which is its strong ethical bias.<sup>52</sup> The dissent of certain characters—princes, warriors, and viziers—is an element of that ethical bias, and Ferdowsi’s epic can in many ways be seen as a Persian *mirror for princes*; it offers those who rule an intellectual guide to good kingship. Ferdowsi’s epic deals with a remarkable number of kings faced with a need to abdicate their thrones to their sons. “Ferdowsi frequently rewrites the topos [of ‘abdication’] as a problem of personal ethical choice”<sup>53</sup> in which the ruler’s—and, often times, *father’s*—demand for duty, honor, and loyalty is both an unethical and immoral act. Such is the case in the story of Goshtasp, Esfandiyar, and Rostam.

Goshtasp is both the patriarch of an individual family (i.e. the father of Esfandiyar) and the patriarch of an entire realm (i.e. a king of Persia), and he is the impetus for a son’s death—a son who, despite his sense of self-worth, sees no option but to comply. Esfandiyar’s death and his repeated explicit acknowledgment that his king and father is the one responsible for his death is his final act of voicing dissent:

چنین گفت پردانش اسفندیار	Thus spoke the wise Esfandiyar:
که ای مرد دانای به روزگار	That, “O, worldly wise man:
مکن خویشتن پیش من بر تبار	Do not [cast] yourself to ruin in front of me—
چنین بود بهر من از تاج و گاه	This was my fate from crown and throne.
تن کشته را خاک باشد نهال	May [my] killed body seed the earth;
تو از کشتن من بدین سان منال	May you, in killing me, profit thus.
کجا شد فریدون و هوشنگ و جم	What became of Fereydoon, Houshang, and Jamshid?
ز یاد آمده بازگردد بدم <sup>54</sup>	Having come on the wind, they returned in a breath.”

In this moment, despite Esfandiyar’s disobedience and despite his observance of the rules of obligation, there is no escaping the consequences of life lived for the sake of ideals such as honor and duty, no matter if they are nonsensical, no matter if they are immoral, and no matter if they are unethical. Here, too, then, is another voice of dissent—intentional and worldly—Ferdowsi’s own.

<sup>52</sup> Abolqasem Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*, trans. Dick Davis (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), xv.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiii.

<sup>54</sup> Abolqasem Ferdowsi, (بر اساس چاپ مسکو) متن کامل شاهنامه فردوسی: [Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh: The Complete Text (Based on the Moscow Edition)*], ed. Dr. Saeid Hamidyan (Tehran: Nashr-eh Ghatreh, 1385/2006), ۱۵۷/157.

A similar voice of dissent shines through the poetry of Naser Khosrow. Born in 1004 CE, court official, poet, philosopher, and writer Naser Khosrow was a Persian intellectual with many interests. Intensely curious and yearning for the kind of knowledge that would satisfy his unyielding hunger for wisdom and religious solace, Naser Khosrow embarked on a seven-year journey from his home in Khorasan to Cairo, and back, with many stops along the way. Before his journey, he was a high-ranking clerk—first in the Ghaznavid court, then in the Saljuq court. The Ghaznavids “became culturally Persianized to a perceptibly higher degree than other contemporary dynasties of Turkish origin such as Saljuqs and Qarakhanids. Whereas most of the Great Saljuq sultans seem to have remained illiterate, many of the Ghaznavids were highly cultured.”<sup>55</sup>

Full of poetic references to Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh*, Khosrow’s philosophical poetry demonstrates a distinctly Iranian literary ethos, an ever-present voice of dissent—against “Arab imperialism and Sunni orthodox scholasticism.”<sup>56</sup> While Khosrow is known to have produced works in both Arabic and Persian, his dedication to the Persian language and its preeminence is without question; “he is convinced of the superiority of the Persian language, its literature and its culture over others, and he rarely misses an opportunity to point it out.”<sup>57</sup> While he was a poet, scholars disagree as to whether Khosrow was a *court* poet. He seemed to have no small degree of contempt for those who would trade poetry for coin and those would trade self-respect and dignity for prosperity and flattery. The poets who did well at court were “rich and emulated . . . but since the primary objective was the satisfaction of the ruler, their usual task was flattery”<sup>58</sup> and Khosrow seems to have been especially repulsed by the sorts of poets who would waste the beauties and intricacies of the Persian language on the unworthy: “I am one who does not throw beneath the feet of swine / these precious pearls, the Dari language.”<sup>59</sup> Indeed, in “Divan 57,” Khosrow cynically counsels caution that the world is relentless in its treachery if people are content to remain in ignorance,

<sup>55</sup> C. E. Bosworth, “The Ghaznavids,” *Encyclopedia Iranica*, last modified February 9, 2012, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ghaznavids>.

<sup>56</sup> Hamid Dabashi, *The World of Persian Literary Humanism*, 79.

<sup>57</sup> Hunsberger, 43.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>59</sup> Naser Khosrow, “64.32,” دیوان ناصر خسرو [*Divan-eh Naser Khosrow*], ed. Mojtaba Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqeq (Tehran: Daneshgah-eh Tehran, 1965), ۱۴۳ / 143.

« من آنم که در پای خوگان نریزم / مر این قیمتی در لفظ دری را »

warning against turning away from, presumably, the Isma'ili path. And yet, what is most noteworthy here is the last two quoted couplets:

نبردازد به کار تو تن و جان فریبنده	May the deceitful body and soul
	not set in your work,
اگر مر علم و طاعت را تو جان و تن نبردازی	If you do not set your body and soul
	to knowledge and devotion.
همی این چرخ بی‌انجام عمرت را بینجامد	This unending wheel will
	keep your life unaccomplished;
پس اکنون گر تو کار دین نیاغازی کی آغازی؟ <sup>60</sup>	If you do not begin the work of faith,
	now, when will you begin?

Here is another voice of dissent: Naser Khosrow, exiled in Yumgan, asking the rhetorical question: *if you do not begin the work of faith, now, when will you begin?* It is not difficult to read between these lines the poet's frustration at watching the world around him follow the dictates of custom, whether they be Sunni ideology, the rejection of 'aql (wisdom), or ignorance of any stripe. Similarly, it is in the third half of the poem that Khosrow gives us another outright dismissal of the Arabic language. This is consistent with what becomes obvious from the corpus he left behind him, and translators Peter Lamborn Wilson and Gholam-Reza Aavani describe him thus:

Learned, sober, retiring, proud, bitter, ascetic, moral, intensely pious, sceptical before he believes but—once having assented with his 'Reason' or 'Intellect' to the tenets of faith—ready to sacrifice himself for his religion, ironic, outspoken, scathingly dismissive of anything or anyone he considers vulgar, debased or unintelligent—or even simply trivial or banal—he was not perhaps the most enjoyable of companions.<sup>61</sup>

In a fragment of "Divan 30," it is possible to see both the influence of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* in the lines of the poetry, but also the same notion of the ethics of

<sup>60</sup> Khosrow, *Divan*, ۱۲۸ / 128.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Lamborn Wilson and Gholam-Reza Aavani, *Nasir-i Khusraw: Forty Poems from the Divan* (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1977), 17.

dissent that characterizes the literature of this period:

شنودی که با زور و بازوی پیل	You have heard that even with power and elephantine arms,
رهی بود کاووس را روستم	Rostam was a slave to Kavus.
به دین جوی حرمت که مرد خرد	Seek respect through religion, for the wise man
به دین شد سوی مردمان محترم	Is honorable to the people through religion.
به دین کرد فخر آنکه تا روز حشر	Through religion did he glory until Resurrection Day,
بدو مفتخر شد عرب بر عجم <sup>62</sup>	The one by whom the Arabs gloried over the Iranians.

While Ferdowsi is relatively areligious by comparison, both works echo what must have been a deeply held notion that the Turks—those “by whom the Arabs gloried over Iran”—are the mechanism through which God is punishing the Iranians for their mistakes, their pettinesses, and their sins.

Thus, both Ferdowsi and Naser Khosrow are poets who engage in the age-old tradition of the dismissed, wise old fools who speak truth to power, the Cassandras whose warnings will never be heeded. By virtue of a common rage against the reality of intellectual and political life after the Islamic Conquest of Iran, and a common ethics of dissent, however, their words are remembered as the call to resistance, imbued with a worldliness and circumstantial reality that no philosopher, ancient or modern, can rightly refuse.

### III

#### The Worldliness of Female Rage

The distinct *worldliness* and *literariness* with which Ferdowsi and Naser Khosrow use language to express political dissent, resistance, and rage is a recognizable circumstantial reality across many times and many places, from the ancient Near East to the Classical world, from medieval, early modern, and nineteenth-century Europe, to twentieth-century America and the modern Middle East. Authors—regardless of gender—use their languages, their words, to create literature that serves as a powerful means through which to intervene

<sup>62</sup> Khosrow, ۶۳ / 63.

in a world that is often unjust, oppressive, and merciless in its cruel disparities. It is possible to recognize the patterns of human behavior that emerge out of analogous cultural circumstances spanning nearly 4300 years, expressed from the point of view of the marginalized: woman, enraged.

In the ancient Near East, this rage can be seen in the stories surrounding the Mesopotamian goddesses Inanna/Ištar (goddess of love, war, and sex) in the *Hymns to Inanna* from c. 2300 BCE, written by Enheduanna, the daughter of Sargon I and the first named author, when she was exiled from Ur. The denial of writing's referential function by predominantly male French critics would silence the first woman ever to sign her name to her work, thereby silencing the first record of her rage and the first known cry for revenge. This rage can be seen in the eighth-through-tenth century BCE depiction of Lilith in the satirical *Alphabet of Ben Sirach*; it can be seen in the evolution of Eve from Genesis 2–3, to the Gnostic and Islamic variations of her character, to seventeenth-century English polemicist and poet John Milton's recovery of her voice and agency in *Paradise Lost*.

In the Classical world, Greek playwrights Euripides and Aeschylus, and the Roman playwright Seneca, give voice to this female rage in their treatments of Clytemnestra, Medea, and Hecuba—each of whom is a woman wronged by the overarching powers of her respective society, and each of whom responds by strategically and thoroughly exacting revenge on those who sought to degrade or harm her. Classical drama has had a profound effect on subsequent works of literature, on drama, on popular culture, informing both the self-understanding of Heloise d'Argenteuil, and the dramatic characterizations of William Shakespeare.

In medieval Europe, Heloise d'Argenteuil, a twelfth-century intellectual and nun, gives voice to her own rage and uncompromising passionate nature in her correspondence with Peter Abelard. As Petrarchan poetry and the inheritors of such a legacy steadily stripped the female voice from poetic form,<sup>63</sup> so, too,

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<sup>63</sup> Fourteenth-century Italian poet, Francesco Petrarch was heavily influenced by the Provençal poets—both men and women—who wrote about illicit love from both perspectives, however,

Petrarch does not write of love for a woman. He writes of passion incited by an object in female form, whose embodied reality he is all too ready to transform into a living goddess. [...] As the lover asks to be released by God, it is distressingly clear that the thirty-one years

did the critics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries begin to question the authenticity of Abelard's and especially Heloise's authorship, casting doubt on their very voices. This began in 1806 with Ignaz Feßler, a Capuchin monk-turned-Protestant-turned-Professor, who first suggested that all the letters were forgeries. Feßler's argument was then picked up by J.C. Orelli in 1841 and carried further into the realm of supposed plausibility by Ludovic Lalanne in 1857. While Abelard's authorship was restored to him very early in the twentieth century, Heloise was not granted the same courtesy until 1995, when Barbara Newman examined the effects of gender bias on literary scholarship. Tracing the reception history of the *Letters of Abelard and Heloise* reveals the precise means through which literary critics and scholars use theory to distort literature in order to make a mark on the profession, at the cost of a woman's uncompromising voice and a woman's unyielding rage.

The early modern period sees a blossoming of female rage in literature. In England, William Shakespeare questions the social and cultural givens of his day through his unparalleled and complex portraits of Queen Margaret in the *Henry the Sixth* trilogy and in *Richard the Third*; of Emilia, Iago's wife and Desdemona's attendant in *Othello*; of Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*; of Lady Constance in *King John*. In his plays, Shakespeare needles his audience with the astute observations that inform his characterizations of women who are denied agency and who are denied any recourse for action. So too does Elizabeth Cary in her representation of the Judean (Idumaeen) noblewoman Salomé I in her play, *The Tragedy of Mariam*. What does it say that literary critics would deny us both Shakespeare's and Cary's ability to recognize the patterns of human behavior?

Likewise, in early modern Italy, an involuntary nun, Arcangela Tarabotti,

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of focus testified to by the [*Canzoniere*] were not spent meditating upon an individual in a relationship of mutual choice, passion, and regard. Those years were spent instead in something like worship, not of an individual, but of a paragon, an idol, or a goddess. By the end of Petrarch's less-famous collection, the *Triunfi*, the poet looks to Laura as a promise of heaven itself [...] Beautiful but unattainable, the beloved Laura of Petrarch's poems serves as a passion-drenched metaphor, a stairway to heaven, salvation, and God. She was never loved as a woman, at least not by Petrarch. She was an object, not a subject, a means, not an end. She was merely a rung on the ladder of love for the poet to climb (Bryson and Movsesian, *Love and its Critics*, 326–330).

pens a scathing indictment of the men who cloister her against her will and the patriarchal society which allows it to happen. Tarabotti's searing polemic serves as an ideal parallel to Niccolò Machiavelli's descriptions of the raging Caterina Sforza. Known as the "Tigress of Forlì," the militant and insurrectionary Caterina was a force of nature, and to the men responsible for her husband's murder, she said, "let vengeance rule, not pity. I shall let the dogs tear you to pieces."<sup>64</sup>

Nineteenth-century England offers us the worldliness of female rage in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* juxtaposed with Virginia Woolf's twentieth-century criticism that "if one reads them over and marks that [...] indignation, one sees that she will never get her genius expressed whole and entire [...] She will write in a rage where she should write calmly."<sup>65</sup> In yet another instance of scholarly dereliction of the responsibilities of a critic, Woolf stamps out, rather than articulates, "those voices dominated, displaced, or silenced by the textuality of texts."<sup>66</sup>

The circumstantial reality of literature is especially urgent in twentieth-century America in the works of Billie Holiday, Nina Simone, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Sandra Cisneros. The lyrics, poetry, and prose of these decidedly angry women is particularly poignant when read through the sociopolitical context of their historical moment, but also of ours. Written in 1937, "Strange Fruit" is a poem by Abel Meeropol, but set to music and made famous by Billie Holiday. It was written as a response to a photograph of a lynching in Indiana, and as such it is a fervent protest against the *reality* of racism. Likewise, Nina Simone wrote "Mississippi Goddam" in response to the murder of a civil rights activist in Mississippi. Both songs have their roots in events that are *extra-literary* in the most unfortunate sense. A little more than twenty years later, Gloria Anzaldúa asks, "how do you tame a wild tongue, train it to be quiet, how do you bridle and saddle it? How do you make it lie down?"<sup>67</sup> Anzaldúa carves a space for Chicano English, a language she knows is manifest in the world, much like Billie Holiday and Nina Simone sing words to show the impossible cruelty and prejudice that is

<sup>64</sup> Antonia Fraser, *Warrior Queens* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 199.

<sup>65</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 113.

<sup>66</sup> Ricoeur, "What is A Text?" 139.

<sup>67</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 53.

manifest in the world. Should we deny historical accuracy for the sophistry and solipsism of the academy?

The worldliness of female rage is especially evident in the works of three Middle Eastern authors: Egyptian Nawal El Saadawi, Syrian Nizar Qabbani, and Iranian Forough Farrokhzad. Each of these writers create works that are inherently tied to their every-day lives. Author, activist, and medical professional, El Saadawi writes the novel, *Woman at Point Zero*, about a prostitute named Firdaus who is on death row for the murder of her pimp, and who, on the eve of her execution, decides to share her story with a prison psychologist. Diplomat, journalist, and poet, Qabbani writes erotic and political poetry, often assuming a feminine voice—something not permitted in the incredibly traditional and formulaic rules of Arabic poetry. His *Diary of an Indifferent Woman* (1968) is told from the point of view of an Arab woman who gives voice to her unending frustrations, joys, powerlessness, and rage. Farrokhzad writes confessional poetry; her life, her thoughts, and her society color the stanzas and the imagery she chooses in each poem.

Despite the insistence of so many comfortable and privileged academic critics, literature is not an articulation of limitation; the individual threads that weave together to make a text can be pulled through, across time, across language, across place. These threads can be characters, narratives, or the observations and commentaries on the social realities they contain, captured, crafted, and presented by an author, and in being so, they are worldly. Literary works speak to one another; authors speak to one another; and literature is found at the point of union between an author's desire to evoke something in an audience—whether that audience is a reader, a theatre-goer, or both—and an audience's willing reception. The parallels between these authors are just as crucial as the points at which they depart. Many of these authors have nothing in common—neither land, nor language, nor time—and yet it is possible to extract the same threads running through each of their texts. It is possible to hear the need for revenge echo across the ages, across deserts, across languages. It is possible to unravel the knots that human beings are tied into because of indignity, because of rage, because of arbitrary circumstance, because of betrayal. These works are *about* something—they give voice to lived experiences, social and cultural observations, imaginations that were not afraid to follow the thought to its logical conclusion.

Insisting that such a thing is impossible—because language refers to naught but itself, after all—is nothing short of a violent gag-order.

It's time the order is lifted.

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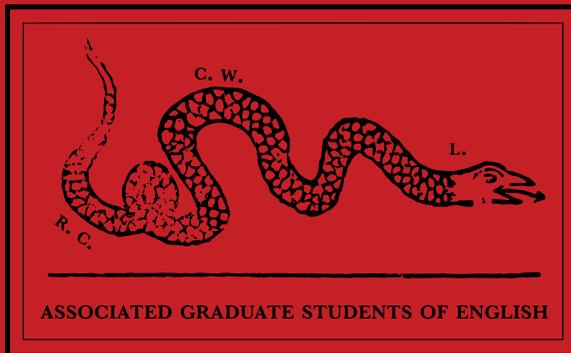
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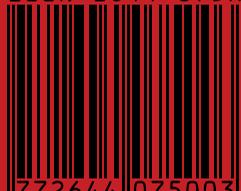
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