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Mission Statement

Literature and film continually reimagine an ever-changing world, and through our research we discover our relationships to those art forms and the cultures they manifest. Publishing continuously for the duration of each semester, *Wide Angle* serves as a conduit for the expression and critique of that imagination. A joint publication between English majors and faculty, the journal embodies the interdisciplinary nature of the Department of English at Samford University. It provides a venue for undergraduate research, an opportunity for English majors to gain experience in the business of editing and publishing, and a forum for all students, faculty and staff to publish their best work. As a wide-angle lens captures a broad field of vision, this journal expands its focus to include critical and creative works, namely academic essays, book and film reviews, and commentaries, as well as original poetry, short fiction and non-fiction, short films and screenplays.

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Essay

Stephanie Carnell

Who Wrote It?**Quantum Mechanics and Character Authorship in *Alif the Unseen***

Scientists often speak in terms of upheaval freely, even going so far as to establish certain time periods as eras of scientific revolution. Each *coup d'état* is distinct and uniquely agitates the status quo. The new ideas of the time breed in the minds of the people and work their way into every aspect of culture as individuals try to work out what these concepts mean for the universe. Quantum mechanics has proven no exception to this trend. The ideas of particle-wave duality, indeterminacy, and entanglement have threaded themselves into literature. The science has even spawned its own genre: quantum fiction, a term coined by Vanna Bonta in the title of her novel, *Flight: A Quantum Fiction Novel*. In an interview, Bonta argues, “Quantum fiction is any story that witnesses life and the human experience on a subatomic level. It involves quantum theory, bringing it forward as a possible explanation behind the concept of life imitating art, and art imitating life, in that all of us are—to some degree—the authors of our lives, in how we interact with reality” (par. 1). Quantum ideas are particularly prominent in G. Willow Wilson’s *Alif the Unseen*, a recent fantasy novel with strong themes of perception, duality, and uncertainty. Additionally, Bonta adds that quantum fiction inherently has elements of character authorship that arise from the scientific concepts of quantum mechanics. Because *Alif the Unseen* can be classified as quantum fiction, it has the distinctive theme of character authorship.

One of the key, and most incredible, aspects of quantum mechanics is the idea of perception and its role in experimental procedure. Schrodinger breaks down this concept of perception with his famous thought experiment, which applies the probabilistic nature of quantum mechanics to the macro-level. The notion is this: an observer has a box in which some radioactive material is placed, so that if the material decays, a poison is released, killing whatever is within the box (Gribbin 2). The observer then places a cat into the same box. Quantum mechanics suggests that, since results are probability based, whether the material decays or not cannot be determined as real unless it is observed. By extension, the cat is neither alive nor dead until the observer opens the box to examine the outcome. According to Gribbin, this idea implies that “nothing is real unless it is observed” (3).

That statement, however, raises further questions, including who or what qualifies as an observer, what “reality” is, and whether this “reality” is cohesive and shared. This complication of reality, which Bonta asserts is a key piece of quantum fiction, is apparent in *Alif the Unseen*. When Farukhuaz visits Alif in prison, he accuses her of not being real, simply because he created her and only he saw her; she cryptically replies, “I am very real. . . . And I am also inside your head” (253). Applying the terminology of perception to the situation, Alif becomes the observer who witnesses the strange phenomenon of Farukhuaz. His observation then makes her real. But what does it mean for her to be real and yet a projection of Alif’s imagination? Is there some spectrum of reality in which some things are more real than others, as Vikram implies when he states, “There is danger in being seen as too real” (109)? In her book *Fiction in the Quantum Universe*, Susan Strehle identifies this hesitation between realities as Heisenberg’s distinction between the actual and the real (7). According to Heisenberg, “at the subatomic level . . . reality is not ‘real,’ but is active, dynamic, ‘actual’” (Strehle 7). Actuality includes all the things that are

possible, and reality becomes what we observe, to whatever degree we observe it. And so, we see that Alif's simple action of perceiving Farukhuaz does have the haunting implications—created reality and spectrums of realness—of the observation paradox of the new physics.

And just as Alif's observations change the outcome of reality, so, too, do the observations of other characters. The worry of perception hangs over the book, beginning with the fear of online detection for the anonymous hackers of the City. For example, the true action of the book occurs right after Alif realizes that he is being monitored (71). The Hand has begun observing him directly, and so Alif is propelled into motion to hide himself from the Hand's probing. Later instances include the excursion into the University's library and the escape from the prison (142, 286).

Taking the idea of the observer a step further, quantum mechanics also suggests that, to some degree, the goal behind an experiment influences the results of the experiment. If a physicist sets up an experiment to show that light is a particle, his results will demonstrate that light is a particle (Gribbin 120). Similar effects follow for an experiment showing light to be a wave. In essence, the observer sees what he wills in the same way that a human can see the world of the djinn only if he or she is trying to do so (Gribbin 106). Furthermore, Alif sees the lake and the man in the desert because he is mentally searching for Dina in the Empty Quarter (299). An even more telling example of expected perception occurs when Alif's concentration wavers when he and Vikram are in Vikram's tent: "Alif looked up at him and found he had trouble focusing. When he tried to make out Vikram's features his thoughts shimmered, anesthetized as though he was half-awake and remembering a dream. For one disorienting moment he was convinced he had been talking to himself" (113). Here, Vikram's appearance is never described as flickering out of sight. Instead, Alif's thoughts "shimmered." It is because of

Alif's faulty sight and his tired mind that he momentarily cannot see Vikram. Focus and an expectation to see are vital for the reality of the world of the djinni.

Because of perception's conspicuous role in *Alif the Unseen*, its effect on character authorship is prominent. Alif "writes" Farukhuaz into existence by seeing her, creating her by his mind alone. Spies of the Hand force Alif to make certain choices by following him and forcing a sense of hyperawareness on him. The convert and Alif see differing versions of Vikram based on what they expect to see: a human parading as a vampire and a djinn, respectively. These characters direct the action of the novel by their observations and, in turn, direct the twists of their own fates through their powers of perception.

In addition to the complicated role of perception in the natural world, quantum mechanics also involves the synthesis of contrasting binaries. Physics in the time before Albert Einstein had a continually evolving theory of light, vacillating between ideas of light as a particle and light as a wave as each new experiment seemed to invalidate the one before it. Light as a wave explained the interference pattern that resulted from light passing through small holes, but light as a particle accounted for the discrete units of radiation as an atom decayed (Gribbin 16-17, 41). It was not until Einstein suggested in 1906 that light functioned as both a particle and a wave, or as a quanta, that an accurate description of light was achieved. Previous to Einstein's suggestion, waves and particles were separate concepts used to represent vastly different natural phenomena, so it was revolutionary, to say the least, that both ideas were needed in respect to light.

There are further instances of such duality in *Alif the Unseen* in regards to identity. One such example demonstrates a duality in identity and occurs in pairs of characters, such as Alif and Dina. Alif begins the novel as a rather amoral individual. Wilson describes him as "not an ideologue; as far as he was concerned, anyone who could pay for his protection was entitled to

it” (15). He does not particularly care what other people think of his faithless perspective, and he is instead content to seek only what he wants for himself. Dina, on the other hand, appears staunchly religious. She condemns fantasy novels because they misrepresent things under false names, and she is nervous about going places alone with Alif because of what it might mean for her virtue (11, 67).

However, as the novel progresses, the distinction between Dina’s and Alif’s opinions becomes unclear. For instance, when Alif is taken under Dina’s hijab, he seals her fate in matters of marriage because Dina’s “exasperating sense of decorum would not permit her to take any other partner now that she had shown him her face” (250). He now feels obligated to uphold her traditions and return to her, even though he does not understand her beliefs or necessarily put stock in them. He ends up yielding to her religious ideals. Dina, in turn, voices increasingly secular ideas as Alif spends more time with her. She defends music as a natural product of the world, even though women who sport a niqab generally believe otherwise (79). She also argues against burning the *Alf Yeom*, merely on the principle that burning books is not something “people with an ounce of a brain” do (354). Dina is thus revealed to have several atypical opinions compared to the convictions of devout Arab women.

And so, taken together, Alif and Dina represent opposing yet entangled binaries, making them stronger as characters and better authors of their future. Alif can choose to respect Dina’s staunch adherence to the rules of the niqab instead of disregarding her as a religious zealot, and Dina can advocate the preservation of knowledge as much as Alif can as a purveyor of shared information. An even better example occurs as Alif writes the code with Tin Sari to attack the Hand (395). He asks Dina to pray for his computer program, and she acquiesces. Because of

their duality, Alif and Dina have the ability to adapt to their situation and choose how they respond to different elements in the plot.

In respect to duality, Intisar and the Hand are the contrasting pair to Alif and Dina's binary. At the beginning of the novel, the reader receives conflicting conceptions of Intisar and the Hand just as they do with Dina and Alif. Intisar seems somewhat sympathetic to those of the City who are not as privileged as she is, as she involves herself in the online chat rooms that people of her lineage generally avoid (26). At the very least, Intisar appears open to discussion, even if she defends the emir from time to time. By contrast, the Hand is established as a force of tyranny and fear from the beginning, as the conflict between him and the hackers violently moves from the digital stratosphere to the real world (17). Intisar and the Hand appear to have such a gulf between them that they seem as disparate as Alif and Dina do, and so the reader mentally constructs them as a duality.

However, as the novel progresses, Wilson reveals that the two are not, in fact, a binary. They do not have opposing ideas that work together and flow between the two individuals; Intisar and the Hand have similar beliefs that manifest differently to create a false binary. The two of them are both driven by selfish desires. Intisar gave up her relationship with Alif because she could not imagine living his lifestyle and spending "the rest of her days in a two-room apartment in Baqara District, doing . . . [her] . . . own laundry" (214). She wants the elevation and status that come with a well-planned spouse. Her marriage to the Hand will yield her the power over herself and her household that she desires but cannot acquire from Alif. The Hand, meanwhile, wants all the power that he can claim for himself using the *Alf Yeom*. He wants to defeat Alif and take what is his as a show of his own might.

Since Intisar and the Hand are propelled by their separate but parallel quests for power, their binary disintegrates. They cannot react to situations in a fluid, hybrid manner as Alif and Dina do because they are locked into one half of a duality. Intisar is too proud to accept help from Alif at the end as the revolution continues to rage around them. The Hand cannot combat Alif's attacks on his firewall, and he refuses to understand that the *Alf Yeom* is too unstable to be the foundation for code. Intisar and the Hand lack the true duality that Alif and Dina share, so they end the novel as broken, unreal characters who have had little impact on their own destinies.

Taking the concept of hybridity to an even smaller scale, we can see the necessity of duality within just one person in the novel. Nearly every character in the book is a hybrid of some sort, in everything from race to social ideologies. One example of this is that NewQuarter01 involves himself in the online world while simultaneously remaining aristocratic. He realizes that the company he keeps in the nobility is vile and tells Alif that their behavior “[m]akes you want to break things,” which is exactly why he involved himself in hacking in the first place (277). Yet, despite devaluing the aristocrat, he still acts like one occasionally. He is upset when he discovers that the protesters have smashed his hand-painted, one-hundred-dirham plates, even if the revolution is something he desired in the first place (384).

On the contrary, the Hand cannot function as a single character of binaries as the other hybrid characters do. His one apparent duality—the fact that he is both involved in computers and an aristocrat—is broken down as quickly as his false binary with Intisar. He admits that programming “was never an intuitive process” (258). He worked hard to put on the facade of programmer in an effort to gain power, which is more aligned with his aristocratic side. While programming is an improbable method for him to attempt, the end he seeks is too firmly in self-gain and desire for power to create a true binary of the upper- and lower-class mindsets within

him. This places him firmly on the “wrong side,” as NewQuarter01 puts it, while NewQuarter01 himself has the ability to choose on which side he is to be (277).

Another concept that is central to the physics of quantum mechanics is the idea of uncertainty. Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle describes a particle’s momentum and position, and, by the mathematics involved, implies that “we can never be certain just what . . . [the position] . . . and . . . [momentum] are” (Gribbin 119). The two properties of the particle are related in such a way that the multiplication is noncommutative, and, as a result, the error in measuring either property will always be nonzero. As the uncertainty in one aspect decreases, the uncertainty in the other increases. One can be very sure of the position or very sure of the speed, but not confident in both simultaneously.

This uncertainty in quantum mechanics, of course, correlates to Vanna Bonta’s reality, which is “uncertainly known” in quantum fiction (par. 2). Ambiguity is rampant in *Alif the Unseen*, but the most explicit example occurs in the themes of time and place. Momentum is the relationship between mass and velocity, and the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle indirectly relates the time of a particle to its place. The pacing of the story in *Alif the Unseen* is specific for the majority of the novel, so the reader has an acceptably accurate sense of the “speed” at which the events are happening. The novel begins in September, and days are marked regularly afterward (8, 31, 40). As a result, there should be a loss in the precision of place, which can be found in the very first chapter. Wilson informs the reader that the novel takes place in the City, which is located somewhere in the Persian Gulf (8). The exact position of the story is unclear while the “time” or “speed” of the novel is more specifically measured. We see a similar instance of this idea on a smaller scale when Alif is imprisoned in the State security prison. He is in one prison cell in one building for an extended time, which, while not perfectly known to the reader,

is a more specific location than the other abstract places described in other passages throughout the book. And so, as Alif's place is more exact, he loses his sense of time, as evidenced by the following passage: "A beard grew on his face. He tried to guess the number of days of his confinement by the length of the hair, but it proved impossible. . . . It simply grew, and at one point he woke to discover a full fist-length under his chin" (261).

These instances of ambiguity in space and time correlate directly with Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, but additional vagueness in details in other parts of the book occur to strengthen the quantum fiction genre classification. Further examples include the ambiguous endings to the stories in the novel. Despite Farukhuaz's insistences, her nurse continually argues that the tales she relates have no particular meaning: "a story is a story, and one may glean from it what one likes" (118). Indeed, even the novel itself has an inconclusive end. What political power will take over is unknown, and Dina's and Alif's personal ends are unspecified. The reader is left to assume what they wish from the book's conclusion.

The ambiguity of the novel further strengthens a character's ability to control his or her future. According to Patricia Warrick, one implication of quantum mechanics is that "all laws are creations of the human mind" (300). Ambiguity, then, leaves room for these laws to be written. Alif can direct his time as he needs or "write" it as he sees fit. For example, he begins to distract himself while in prison, and, in doing so, he constructs his own time to cope with the uncertainty. He starts speaking to himself to while away the hours and begins to mark the time in intervals of how long it takes for his voice to become hoarse. Alif can successfully construct his world and keep himself from losing his mind entirely.

The themes of perception, duality, and uncertainty in *Alif the Unseen* add up to a theme of character authorship that is developed throughout the novel. However, the concept of

character authorship is also symbolically represented in the novel as the *Alf Yeom*. The first clue to this relationship is that the *Alf Yeom* is actually written by a character in the novel. The act of writing the tome is given a whole chapter at the beginning of the book, when the reader just as easily could have assumed human authorship from subsequent details. The book also has all the elements of quantum fiction itself. It is altered by those who perceive it, as in the case of the last story with Alif and the Hand. Alif's specific copy of the *Alf Yeom* is a hybrid of many types, such as the binary of human and djinn authors or the duality of the living and dead material from which the book was constructed. And finally, the meaning of the work is entirely uncertain, as Vikram admits it is "full of meanings that are hidden" (107). The actions Alif can take are reflected in the novel, which creates an interesting concept of reality. Our lives and the reality we experience become a book we narrate to ourselves, full of plot twists we cause and turns we find just by looking for them.

Alif the Unseen is clearly a work of quantum fiction in regards to its themes of perception, duality, and uncertainty, as well as its strong elements of character authorship, of which the latter are echoed one last time on the last page of the novel. Alif realizes that he has been changed by "the story of himself," and when Dina asks what was contained in the last pages of the *Alf Yeom*, he replies, "Nothing we couldn't have written together" (431). Quantum mechanics and the newly created genre of quantum fiction both suggest that his final statement is true. The story is not anything that is impossible to create by the pair of them because it is a story that they have already had a hand in writing.

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Essay

Elizabeth Gardner

**The Marginalization of Margaret:
Isolation in Wordsworth's "The Ruined Cottage"**

Wordsworth's "The Ruined Cottage" is an illustration of the way in which the Industrial Revolution impacted the lives of formerly self-sufficient peasants within the Cottage Industry. In the poem, Wordsworth's poetic secondary narrator, Armytage, describes the life of Margaret, specifically explaining the tragedies that befall her in the wake of her husband's disappearance. This disappearance is representative of the lack of employment for those who worked in the Cottage Industry, which came about as a result of increased production by factories during the Industrial Revolution. This progression of events also serves to isolate Margaret, further pushing her towards a tragic end. Margaret's life is, in actuality, the lives of many, of those who suffer at the hands of progress. With the character of Margaret, Wordsworth creates a symbol that represents an entire group of people: those who suffered due to the Industrial Revolution. Through symbol-Margaret, "The Ruined Cottage" becomes a lyric illustration of what happens to an individual who is ostracized from a community, an illustration that reveals a distinct tension between the poetic goal of community building and the deliberately detached observer, Armytage.

At the beginning of the poem, Armytage portrays Margaret and her husband as hard-working individuals, happy in spite of their relative poverty. The family consists of Margaret, with her "gentle looks"; her husband Robert, "an industrious man, / Sober and steady"; and their "two pretty babes" (99, 120-121, 131). Margaret's husband was, apparently, untiring in his work.

He would be “up and busy at his loom . . . Ere the last star had vanished,” meaning he would begin his work before the sun had risen (122-125). And “[t]hey who pass’d / At evening . . . Might hear his busy spade, which he would ply / After his daily work till the day-light / Was gone” (125-129). Margaret’s husband was an idealized peasant, happily working at the loom, in the fields, and in his own garden. Nevertheless, though idealized, the husband’s industrious nature is indicative of how those working within the Cottage Industry were able to survive. It was only through hard work and labor that those in the peasant class could hope to make a profit. While the life of Margaret’s family is not exactly leisurely, they are described as living “in peace and comfort” (131).

However, in the lines that follow, Wordsworth, through his secondary narrator Armytage, describes how tenuous in nature is the contentment of the impoverished class. “Two blighting seasons” and a “plague of war” are all it takes to see “many rich / Sunk down as in a dream among the poor, / And of the poor did many cease to be” (134, 136, 141-143). Wordsworth cites poor harvests in combination with England’s ongoing war with France as the cause of the population’s troubles. Yet, it is implied that ongoing industrialization also contributes to the declining state of affairs in the countryside, as the narrator states,

Twas now
 A time of trouble; shoals of artisans
 Were from their daily labour turned away
 To hang for bread on parish charity,
 They and their wives and their children. (153-157)

The use of the term “artisans” directly relates to the formerly working peasants that made up the Cottage Industry. And its usage is deliberate; Wordsworth could have chosen any number of

terms (“peasants,” “laborers,” “men,” etc.), but instead he uses “artisans” with its Cottage Industry connotation. So, those “artisans” seek the assistance of the church in “shoals,” in masses, because they have all been driven out of employment due to economic changes caused by the Industrial Revolution. There are further images in the poem of this work vacuum created by industrialization. Descriptions of Robert while unemployed are distinctly at odds with his previous “industrious” state: “at his door he stood / And whistled many a snatch of merry tunes / that had no mirth in them . . . poverty brought on a petted mood / And sore temper” (162-164). While working from pre-dawn to post-dusk may not seem idyllic, the alternative—idleness—is too much for Robert to bear cheerfully. Another intentionally poignant image appears later in the poem; when Armytage visits Margaret after Robert’s disappearance, the poetic narrator describes seeing “the idle loom / Still in its place. [Robert’s] Sunday garments hung / Upon the self-same nail, his very staff / Stood undisturbed behind the door” (431-434). If Robert represents the work created by the Cottage Industry, then the snapshots of the objects that signal his absence are emblematic of the unsustainability of “hearth work” in the face of an increasingly capitalistic and factory-based economy.

With the absence of her husband and continuing unemployment, Margaret’s life descends into a state of neglect, disarray, and solitude. This deterioration is illustrated through a series of visits on the part of Armytage to Margaret’s cottage. While Margaret attempts to endure hardship when her husband, representative of the Cottage Industry, is still present, she “went struggling on through those calamitous years / with chearful hope” (147-148). But, after her husband and income disappear, Margaret’s condition gradually worsens. In the first vignette, Armytage finds her “with a face of grief,” but leaves her “busy with her garden tools” (254, 283). Margaret is trying to survive, but the struggle begins to wear on her ability to cope. The next time the

narrator visits, the cottage and garden, which are extensions of Margaret's state, "seemed very desolate," and Margaret herself "was pale and thin" and "her body was subdued" (328, 339, 380). In the final descriptions of the impoverished Margaret, "poverty and grief / Were now come nearer to her" and "her heart was still more sad" (413-414, 470). The cottage had "sunk to decay" in the absence of the industrious Robert, and with the two children lost—to apprenticeship and death—Margaret is "reckless and alone" (477, 481). Margaret's life is, by this point, defined by her isolation. Though the narrator describes visitors, they are like him: transient. Armytage values Margaret for the hospitality she offers to visitors and because she exists as a potential story for his poetic sensibility, but never does he or anyone else take a vested interest in Margaret's welfare. There are visitors, but they do not function as helpers. Margaret's solitude suggests that during the Industrial Revolution, those individuals who did not identify with the industrialized, capitalistic collective were forced out into the fringes of society and forgotten. With no support, Margaret, and others like her, suffered.

Margaret is most certainly not alone in the depression of her circumstances, despite being depicted as a solitary figure. First, she is but one among the aforementioned "shoals of artisans." Also, Armytage calls his story of Margaret a "common tale" (231). Furthermore, Wordsworth has written other poems concerning similar sets of circumstances. His work "Michael: A Pastoral Poem" is a "history / Homely and rude," in which pastoral peasant life is pitted against the progressive, industrialized power structure ("Michael" 34-35). In the end, after urbanity has destroyed his son, all that remains of Michael's life are "the remains / Of the unfinished Sheepfold," much in the same way that Margaret is survived only by "a ruined house, four naked walls / That stared upon each other" ("Michael" 480-48, "Cottage" 131-32). Wordsworth is

clearly concerned with the effect of industrialization on the pastoral or, at least, an idealization of the pastoral.

The poem's structure also validates a reading of Margaret and her circumstances as representative of something greater than herself. As a frame story, with the primary first-person narrator writing about Armytage's tale, the reader is twice removed from the central figure, Margaret. This separation inhibits the reader from establishing an emotional connection with Margaret. In addition, Armytage, the secondary narrator, never describes Margaret's thoughts or feelings, only his own poetic, and therefore possibly embellished, observations. Margaret is not a person but a character. Armytage, or perhaps Wordsworth, refuses to allow Margaret to be seen as human because her story is merely a means to an end. Margaret's tragedy is consciously constructed in order to elicit a specific response in the reader. Allowing for personalization of Margaret would create the possibility for too much variation in response. Margaret's characterization is sterilized into merely a symbol. In the end, Margaret could be anyone; therefore, she is everyone. Thus, Margaret symbolizes all the peasants who suffered during the urbanization of England.

In addition, the frame structure also attempts to inform the reader of how to view the world. The two narrators represent two methods of observation. The first-person narrator sees "a ruined cottage, four naked walls / That stared upon each other" flanked by "a plot / Of garden-ground, now wild . . . a cheerless spot" (31-32, 54-55, 60). The first-person narrator sees the world as it is; he takes a pragmatic perspective. Armytage, on the other hand, offers a different approach:

I see around me here

Things which you cannot see [. . .]

The Poets in their elegies and songs
Lamenting the departed call the groves,
They call upon the hills and streams to mourn,
And senseless rocks, nor idly; for they speak
In these their invocations with a voice
Obedient to the strong creative power
Of human passion. (67-68, 73-79)

Armytage is a poet who views the world around him as the constant source of inspiration for his stories; even a “senseless rock” might become an evocative image for mourning. Where the first-person narrator views “a well / Half-choked [with willow flowers and weeds],” Armytage sees next to the well “the useless fragment of a wooden bowl; / It moved my very heart” (62-63, 91-92). Since Armytage’s narrative is maintained throughout the majority of the poem, the implication is that his poetic perspective is the proper way to view the world.

However, the poem also presents a critique of this worldview when one considers Armytage’s relationship with Margaret. Both Armytage and Margaret are individuals who exist outside the community. But if one considers their relative positions in the social strata, Margaret’s poverty and isolation have forced her beneath the community, while Armytage rests in the privileged upper space of the observer. In this way, individuality in the poem is both preferred and punished. The implied critique of the poem is that the poetic sensibility alienates Armytage from a possible community with Margaret. Throughout all his visits to the cottage, he never once helps Margaret. One must question, then, how a poet can claim to understand a world in which he refuses to place himself. The Poet sees pain in nature and in objects but does not empathize with an individual who feels this pain.

It is interesting to note that Wordsworth, in his “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*,” attaches a sort of morality to the reading of poetry but does not infuse within his poet-narrator Armytage any sense of community ethic. In the “Preface,” Wordsworth explains the settings of his poems:

Low and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated. (295)

According to this passage, Wordsworth writes pastorals such as “The Ruined Cottage” and “Michael” because it is in this context that virtues, “passions of the heart,” are able to flourish. An accompanying article to the “Preface” explains the morality of Wordsworth’s argument: “[Wordsworth] attributed to imaginative literature [i.e., poetry] the primary role of keeping the human beings who live in such [industrialized] societies emotionally alive and morally sensitive. Literature, that is, could keep human beings essentially human” (Greenblatt 293). Wordsworth believes poetry can break down the barriers of industrialization-induced isolation by generating emotional sensitivity in readers; however, the irony is, of course, that Armytage, the poet-narrator of “The Ruined Cottage,” enforces Margaret’s isolation, rather than attempting to counteract her solitude. The flaw of the Wordsworthian poetic enterprise is that it requires the poet to observe without engaging, thus creating the sorts of tragedies the poem itself is supposed to prevent. Armytage tells Margaret’s story to the first-person narrator in order to make *him* more emotionally sensitive to the surrounding world, but by objectifying Margaret, Armytage reveals his own unyieldingly disconnected response to her plight. As was previously mentioned, the

poem's beginning presents two methods for observing the world and attempts to assert the poet-narrator's perspective as more favorable. However, the tension between Armytage's purpose, which is to engender empathy, and his position, that of the detached observer, undermines this assertion and suggests that the first-person narrator's practical observations are, in fact, more moral than Armytage's poeticizing of the scene.

In his poem "The Ruined Cottage," Wordsworth depicts the solitary deterioration of Margaret, a peasant who suffers in the absence of her husband and his Cottage Industry-based income. This lack of industry is due, in part, to the encroachment of industrialization on the lives and trades of England's lowest class. The Industrial Revolution harmed, rather than benefitted, the poor by appropriating their market and diminishing their necessity in the growing capitalistic economy. The poem's frame and removed tone imply that Margaret is symbolic, representing all such affected peasants. Robert, her husband, leaves, exemplifying the way in which Cottage Industry work was no longer a viable or sustainable source of income for the numerous peasants that relied on its profits. The poem's titular "ruined cottage" is symbolic of the once-thriving but now (at the time of the first narrator) dead grassroots economy once created by the Cottage Industry. In this way, Wordsworth has written a sustained metaphor illustrating how the peasant class—Margaret—suffered in the margins while society moved on to an urbanized capitalistic culture. The poem also functions to reveal the tension between a poet's objective, to inspire community among men, and the poet's role as removed spectator.

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Essay

Adam Quinn

Mapping Conflict and Communal Space in Ciaran Carson's *Belfast Confetti*

Ciaran Carson's 1989 poetry collection *Belfast Confetti* can be read as an exploration of the way space is arranged inside the city of Belfast. From street names and neighborhoods to the patrol routes of surveillance helicopters, the map is Carson's primary tool to chart the arrangement of space in poetry. Both literal and imaginative, these maps mark the boundaries between different types of space in the city. As boundaries are created, space becomes political; each boundary is defined by the power that controls it. Conflict over the control of space creates a rift between space defined by violence and space defined by peace. The first I call conflict space and the second I call communal space. Carson represents each type of space through the mapping practices of group memory and storytelling. Once these maps of Belfast have been created, they serve as instruments of either social liberation or social control. In the poems of *Belfast Confetti*, Carson uses mapping as a way to create and to control the space of the city through the division of Belfast's streets and neighborhoods into either conflict or communal space.

Given Belfast's central role in the Troubles, critics naturally focus on conflict space as an organizing principle in Carson's poetry.¹ For Carson, however, conflict space is more than

¹ The Northern Irish Troubles began in 1969 with the Battle of the Bogside and ended in 1998 with the Good Friday Agreement. Conflict in Northern Ireland occurred primarily between Nationalist Catholic forces, who believed that Northern Ireland should become part of the Republic of Ireland, and Unionist Protestant forces, who believed that Northern Ireland should remain part of the United Kingdom. Today, although significant progress has been made in the peace process, fundamental social divisions still exist between Catholic and Protestant communities. For a history of the Northern Irish Troubles, see *Making Sense of the Troubles: The Story of Conflict in Northern Ireland* by David McKittrick and David McVea.

territory occupied by the British military or by Nationalist and Unionist paramilitaries. It is space that has been mapped, at least in the public imagination, as space associated with violence or terror. However, to cast Carson as a poet concerned only with conflict space is to simplify the way he imagines the structure of space in Belfast. There is a marked difference in the way Carson writes about conflict space and the way he writes about peaceful or communal space. Alex Houen, writing about the poetry of Carson in his book *Terrorism and Modern Literature*, observes that “Belfast itself is a tale of at least two cities, then. On the one hand streets and situations frequently explode into diagrams of their own potential; on the other hand, security forces use virtual mapping to contain the possibility of violence” (263). Houen’s division of space in Belfast between “potential” and “the possibility of violence” follows Carson’s method of understanding this division through maps—in this case the difference between the “potential” for communal conflict resolution and the “virtual mapping” carried out by security forces. As the characters of *Belfast Confetti* map and re-map the city, the political implications of each type of mapping become clear.

Because space is defined by the way it is perceived, even conflict space must be defined by communities and not by the soldiers who occupy them. If the power of conflict space exists in the public imagination, communal space is space that has been reclaimed from violent narratives to communal narratives. Communal mapping, then, is the act of labeling space with a communal identity. In the article “Mapping Junkspace: Ciaran Carson’s Urban Cartographies,” Neil Alexander argues that “maps function for Carson paradoxically both as forms of imposition to be resisted and as the means by which such resistance can be erected” (511). Just as mapping can be used as a means of social control, it can also be used as a means of communal empowerment.

Mapping as a tool is ideologically neutral: it is those who decide how maps are drawn who hold the power.

Carson's experience of communal space is intimately linked to the act of storytelling. Storytelling becomes a new narrative framework for the practice of mapping. Storytelling as a mechanism implies two things about Carson's mapping process. First, it is an intrinsically experiential way of navigating space. Stories refer to spaces as past experiences, connecting space to meaning. Second, storytelling is a communal exercise of mapmaking. Telling stories requires at least two participants: a speaker and a listener. For Carson, these participants are often multiplied to include interruptions, gossip, and conflicting narratives. Finally, storytelling is also the realm of Carson-as-poet. When storytelling is done through writing in the poems of *Belfast Confetti*, it is always connected to Carson's experience of writing poetry. To some degree, Carson views himself as a storyteller negotiating the functions and politics of space in Belfast.

The Fall Road Club from the prose poem "Schoolboys and Idlers of Pompeii" is a clear example of the ways space is perceived differently in Belfast. The Falls Road Club is a group of Belfast natives living in Adelaide, Australia, that meet "on the first Thursday of every month in the Woolongong Bar" (Carson 53). They drink "expensively-imported Red Heart Guinness" (53) and tell stories about the places they grew up. The stories they tell identify space first as conflict space and then as communal space. Each type of space is defined according to the way they perceive it; storytelling becomes a mechanism for identification. The first story Carson records is the story "of the policeman who was shot dead outside the National Bank at the corner of Balaklava Street in 1922" (53). Although the National Bank at the corner of Balaklava Street would not show up as conflict space on any physical map of the city, it is still identified as the

location of a violent murder in their memories. As The Falls Road Club pieces together a map of the city from their collective memories, Balaklava Street is clearly marked as conflict space.

Although The Falls Road Club remembers the policeman who was shot on Balaklava Street, “the story does not concern the policeman; rather, it is about the tin can which was heard that night rolling down Balaklava Street into Raglan Street” (53). Even in space that is marked as conflict space, communal memory can create new narratives to redefine space. The tin can is only heard “whenever there was trouble in the offing” (53). It becomes a kind of warning system subverting the very foundation of conflict space: violence. The Falls Road Club uses this elaborate narrative to reimagine how they define the space of Balaklava Street. Neil Alexander comments on this type of experiential mapping when he writes, “Carson eschews a legible image of Belfast that would render its complex social life as a passive and inert ‘text’ in favor of a more dynamic, street-level engagement with its contingent and multiple specificities, the shifting coordinates of time and place that compose its fractious history” (52). Unlike texts, stories are allowed and even expected to change and grow over time. These narratives are also acts of mapping. The tin can has a specific path: it rolls “down Balaklava Street into Raglan Street” (Carson 53), transforming these streets from conflict to communal space. The tin can’s path both deconstructs the power of conflict space and opens a new route for communal space to exist.

Here the multiple nature of storytelling enters the poem to introduce alternate stories about Balaklava Street and the tin can ghost. “Someone else” from the Falls Road Club “produces a week-old copy of The Irish News which gives another slant to the story: the tin can has not been heard since the streets concerned were demolished” (53). Because of its multiple dimensions, communal mapping can be endlessly organic. It can adapt to the constant construction and destruction of the city in a way conflict space cannot, “since even ghosts must

have somewhere to live” (53). The exercise of mapping has become communal as different members of the Falls Road Club contribute to the story. “Someone else again,” Carson writes, “ventures the notion that the ghost is only a by-product of the elaborate version of hide-and-seek known as kick-the-tin” (53). Here the tin can ghost is the sound of playground games, completely redefining space from the location of a violent murder to a definitively communal space. In the hands of the Falls Road Club, as for Carson, storytelling is more than a form of entertainment: it is a weapon to reclaim conflict space and recast it as communal space.

Navigating the differences between conflict and communal space, however, can become more complicated. During what would normally be a casual bike ride through the streets of Belfast, the speaker of Carson’s prose poem “Question Time” is forced to confront questions about his identity and political affiliations as a direct consequence of spatial definitions. When the speaker of “Question Time” is stopped while going between Unionist space and Nationalist space, his captors ask questions such as “where are you from?” and “where do you live now?” to piece together his identity (62). They ask for his house number, the names of streets next to his house, and who his next-door neighbors used to be. “I am this map which they examine,” the speaker claims, “a map which is this moment, this interrogation, my replies” (63). The speaker proves his territorial identity using a map that exists only in the minds of those who grew up on the Falls Road. Writing about this confrontation in “Question Time,” Temple Cone comments, “Navigating the literal as well as the discursive terrain of a city where violence can result from spatial, social, or political trespass makes accurate maps all the more necessary” (68). In this specific case, Carson’s safety hinges on his ability to re-create an imaginative map. The map he creates then becomes his identity, deciding whether or not he belongs to the larger Falls Road Catholic community.

Conflict space in Carson's Belfast is always overlaid with a territorial narrative. Mapmaking as an act of imposing territory is an extension of authority onto the space of the city. As rigidly defined spaces, when territories come into conflict with each other, violence usually results. Cupar Street in Belfast is one of these places where territories conflict. Carson writes "Cupar Street was one of those areas where the Falls and Shankill joined together as unhappy Siamese twins, one sporadically and mechanically beating each other around the head" (59). In "Question Time," both the Falls and the Shankill Roads are territories. They have been clearly defined by those in power and are concrete expressions of communal authorities. Territory as a political structure extends all the way down to the simple understanding of children. Carson remembers an incident from his childhood when he and a group of boys made the same excursion into the Protestant Shankill Road. They were stopped by another group of Protestant boys who told them to choose between two flags: the Union Jack and the Nationalist Tricolor. "If we chose the Union Jack," Carson writes, "we were guilty of cowardice and treason [. . .] if we chose the tricolour, we would get a hiding. So we ran the gauntlet, escaping with a few bruises into the unspoken force-field of the Catholic end of the street" (60). The power of territory is reinforced by the physical boundary the childhood Carson imagines between Catholic and Protestant space. Even in spaces where there is not a physical boundary such as a peace wall dividing territory in conflict, an imagined boundary corresponding to the imagined map protects Carson and his identity.

However, Carson also represents communal space as another layer of meaning that exists beneath the territorial narratives of conflict space. If conflict space is created by political power structures, then communal space is deterritorialized by the power of communal mapping. The space that makes up communal space cannot be physically represented by maps but is instead

constructed in the imagination of the community. Its meaning exists in space before that space is ever forced into a territorial narrative. As such, wherever conflict space exists, communal space will always exist simultaneously underneath the violent narratives of conflict space. Carson references this type of spatial understanding in the prose poem “Question Time” when he writes, “I know this place like the back of my hand—except who really knows how many hairs there are, how many freckles?” (57). Because communal space exists in a plane of reality visible beneath all mapmaking activity, it can be read as the foundation on which any spatial narrative is built.

Ironically, both conflict and communal space are defined by communities. In order for conflict space to have political power, it must be given power by the local community. As soon as that community redefines space as communal space, conflict space loses its power. Carson’s “Question Time” is subversive because the creation of communal space by the speaker and his kidnappers undermines the authority of conflict space and brokers a way to conflict resolution. When Carson claims, “I am this map which they examine” (63), he is claiming to be mapping communal space. As the speaker answers the questions he is asked, he is piecing together a communal map of the Falls Road that does not exist on any physical territorial maps but exists only in the communal imaginations of those who belong to the Catholic community. As soon as the communal map has been put together, conflict space ceases to be the authoritative version of space, and the conflict between the speaker and his kidnappers is resolved.

The distinction between conflict and communal space directly relates to the use of mapping as a form of social control. If the reader understands conflict space to be an intentional assigning of meaning to space, mapping suddenly becomes an exercise of power. Neal Alexander writes, “a map is not simply a visual representation of space but can also be construed

as a diagram and instrument of power” (505). As urban space is mapped, the maintenance of power is dependent on the reliability of maps. Knowledge of place is equated with control of that place. The questions the speaker’s kidnappers ask in “Question Time” prove that they have an intimate knowledge of the area around the Falls Road and are, therefore, able to control who belongs and who does not belong in that area based on their corresponding knowledge of place.

The level of control violent entities can exert on a territory hinges on their ability to represent space accurately. Maps themselves, however, are necessarily simplistic representations of objective reality. Mapping Belfast is an exercise in reductionism. The city as it actually exists cannot be transposed onto a piece of paper just as Belfast as urban space cannot be fully known. As Carson has it, “Maps cannot describe everything” (67). Maps are static, while the city is vibrant; maps take an aerial perspective, while the city is experienced from street-level. They show information but cannot tell the stories that make information relevant. Carson points out that as soon as a map is complete, it is already out of date. With a list of maps showing buildings that no longer exist or were never even built, Carson decides that only “the city is a map of the city” (69). In this way, communal space acts as a subversive rejoinder to the territorial narratives of conflict space.

Conflict and communal spaces are defined by the ways they are perceived by the characters and speakers of Carson’s poems. The definition of each type of space also acts as an identifier for those who control space: those who control conflict space are labeled “violent” while those who control communal space are labeled “peaceful.” The maps of Belfast Confetti—historical, military, and imaginative—together represent a reflection on the nature and power of mapping. Within this reflection, the poems of *Belfast Confetti* are themselves a different type of map that sets up interpretive paths for their readers to follow. Because these interpretive paths

are multiple, the meaning of a map as well as the meaning of a poem can always be questioned. This ability to question the power of maps, and by extension the power of conflict and communal space, undermines the ability of violence to define the nature of space. As a result, poems and maps become analogous forms of representation; just as both poems and maps are the products of an imaginative act, poems and maps can always be dismantled or changed by imaginative acts. For Carson, the ones with the ability to imagine are the ones with the ability to subvert power structures; those who tell stories have more influence than those who chart maps; in Carson's Belfast, poets have power.

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Commentary

Adam Quinn

BACHE Visiting Writers Series: Joan McBreen and the Sound of Poetry

Poetry readings, at least in the popular imagination, are typically construed as exercises in the intentional fallacy. Audiences come to poetry readings expecting the poet to explain what he or she *really meant* or to ask about the poet's *inspiration*. These audiences believe that listening to a poet read his or her own work will somehow allow them to “crack the code” to discover the poem's one true meaning. However, in a literary landscape in which the author is not only dead but has also gone cold and been buried, the poet has no greater voice in interpreting a poem than the reader. In this way, the fascination with hearing a poet read his or her own work is somewhat archaic—more appropriate to an age of oral poetry sung by bards in mead halls than the quiet lecture halls of universities. When Samford students and faculty gathered to hear Irish poet Joan McBreen read selections from her poetry earlier this fall, however, McBreen changed what could have been a simple poetry reading into an exploration of the relationship between poetry and music.

Poetry, as literary critics have often noted, has an inherent musical quality. When poetry is read out loud, it takes on a rhythm and cadence similar to that of a song. As the poet emphasizes and deemphasizes words, speeds up over certain passages and slows down over others, and adjusts the pitch of his or her voice to give the words of the poem an emotional immediacy, the audience—listening in contrasting silence—has an experience similar to that of a concert. After all, there is a reason poetry readings harken back to an age of bards and mead halls: poetry and music were originally combined. At least in the Western poetic tradition, poetry

began as verses sung over musical accompaniment with a live audience. The two were so closely linked that the modern practice of reading poetry without music would seem strange to our original poets and boring to their original audiences. McBreen is interested in a new type of poetry reading: one that incorporates the power of music to create something beyond the limits of either poetry or music alone.

During the reading, McBreen intermittently played recordings of traditional Irish music to complement her poetry. She would read a few poems, pause, play a recording of a song, and then continue reading once the song was over. The music, the audience gradually discovered, was just as much a part of the reading as the poetry. To end the reading, McBreen sat down as part of the audience while she played recordings of several traditional Irish songs, making the music the final focus of the reading. This combination of music and poetry is only a part of McBreen's larger project to explore the relationship between language and sound. In 2004 she released a CD compilation titled *The Long Light on the Land*, which featured McBreen reading poetry over traditional Irish and classical music. Once again, the poetry and the music are given equal weight in creating the experience of the CD. With this collection, McBreen is participating in a tradition that is both new and old: she is taking advantage of modern technology to release her poetry as audio instead of text at the same time that she is returning to an age of oral poetry.

For McBreen, music and poetry fulfill the same roles. Both music and poetry have the ability to cross cultural, linguistic, and temporal boundaries. The sound of a song or a poem remains beautiful whether it is heard in Sligo, Ireland, or in Birmingham, Alabama; in Irish or in English; yesterday or today. Music and poetry both have the ability to preserve traditional Irish heritage while representing the current Irish experience; they inform and complement each other. As a result, the most accurate symbol of McBreen's poetry may be the young musician playing

an old song. The song can be hundreds or even thousands of years old, but each young musician's interpretation of the song will always remain new. In this way, the young musician not only preserves the traditional music but also revives it and makes it relevant for a contemporary audience.

It is this role that McBreen occupies in the current state of Irish poetry. A prominent anthologist, McBreen works to collect the poetry of younger poets in volumes such as *The Watchful Heart: A New Generation of Irish Poets* and *The White Page / An Bhileog Bhan: Twentieth-Century Irish Women Poets*. At the same time, McBreen cites older poets who were deeply engaged in reviving traditional Irish forms such as William Butler Yeats, Louis MacNeice, and the recently deceased Seamus Heaney as primary influences. Just as her reading attempted to bridge two closely related forms, music and poetry, McBreen's work can be understood to bridge time frames as well: past, present, and future. Tapping into a longstanding poetic tradition in Ireland while recasting it in her own voice, McBreen's career stands as a model for this and the next generation of Irish poets.

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Commentary

Julie Steward

Remembering Seamus Heaney

I was twenty-three years old, about to drive to my best friend's wedding. I had the new Indigo Girls cassette to play in my Camaro on the road from Dallas to Austin. "Closer to Fine" had just hit the airwaves, and I would speed down I-35 with the windows down, singing loudly along, off-key. With my bridesmaid dress slung over my shoulder, I kissed my mother goodbye on the cheek. She looked out the kitchen window for just a second: "In your twenties, you go to weddings. At my age, you start going to funerals." She took a beat, lightened the mood: "But it's all good. We love you. Have a ball."

And so I did.

I remember the drive and how the Indigo Girls spoke to my experience as a beginning graduate student: "*I spent four years prostrate to the higher mind, got my paper / and I was free*" (Indigo Girls 1990). I remember thinking that it would take a lot more than four years for me to "get my paper and be free." I remember the wedding: white cake with raspberry swirl. And I remember my mother's words because I am the age now that she was then, and lately I'm seeing more death than I care to. Last year we lost Adrienne Rich. Two months ago we lost Seamus Heaney. Needless to say, I didn't attend their funerals.

But yeah, I attended their funerals.

Here memory gets hazy. Grad school was a sea of poststructuralist criticism, Ramen™ noodles, and fear. At some point in all of that, I recall how Heaney's lines brought me up for air, "not waving but drowning" (Smith 12) as I was:

Yesterday rocks sang when we tapped
 Stalactites in the cave's old, dripping dark—
 Our love calls tiny as a tuning fork. ("Summer Home" 44-46)

If you don't know him, how do I begin to tell you who he was? According to the Poetry Foundation:

Seamus Heaney is widely recognized as one of the major poets of the 20th century. A native of Northern Ireland, Heaney was raised in County Derry, and later lived for many years in Dublin. He was the author of over 20 volumes of poetry and criticism, and edited several widely used anthologies. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995. . . . He died in 2013. ("Seamus Heaney")

According to the *New York Times*, "At its best, Mr. Heaney's work had both a meditative lyricism and an airy velocity. His lines could embody a dark, marshy melancholy, but as often as not they also communicated the wild onrushing joy of being alive" (Fox).

According to my best friend from graduate school, upon hearing of his death: "He was guide, apostle, guardian, seer." She wrote this on her Facebook™ wall. She was right.

How do we mark these occasions, after all? Do we gather our children at the breakfast table when we hear that one of the great ones has died? I interrupted my kids from their routine that humid August morning: "Boys, come in here for a second. I need to talk to you." I was ready

to read them a poem. I wanted to stop the day, deliberately, for just a second. This, of course, freaked them out. They knit their brows. “Um, are we in trouble?”

Not so smooth, Mom. Not so smooth.

You want smooth? This is smooth: “Come to me quick, I am upstairs shaking. / My all of you birchwood in lightning” (Heaney, “Glanmore Sonnet VIII” 13-14). So is this: “What do I say if they wheel out their dead? / I’m cauterized, a black stump of bone (“Stump” 1-5). Heaney makes the big themes, love and death, so utterly fresh and beautiful that they come back to life in this new Dark Age in which we live, this era defined not by too little information, but too much, these times oversaturated with texts and the one-hundred-forty-character tweet. Critics have praised him as Ireland’s greatest poet since Yeats, as a wordsmith committed to the breadth of civic responsibility and to the intimacy of personal memory. I touch on these themes when teaching him, but I will confess that one of my favorite lectures to give has to do with why the semicolon is the most romantic mark of punctuation. The entire lesson revolves around the last two lines of Heaney’s “Glanmore Sonnet X”: “Covenants of flesh; our separateness; / The respite on our dewy dreaming faces” (“Glanmore Sonnet X” 13-14). To paraphrase those lines would be, in the words of New Critic Cleanth Brooks, a “heresy.” Suffice it to say, the semicolon is conventionally used to form a bond between two closely related independent clauses. In other words, when you’re trying to woo your lover back, use a semicolon, not a period. Get it?

But I digress. Weddings, grad school, and grammar rules. I can’t find the right way to talk about Heaney’s death. I want to say something wise and prescient as Heaney did with his last words, minutes before he died: “Noli timere” (“Don’t be afraid.”). I want to say something

precise like my friend Melinda did when I told her I was writing this memorial, and I accidentally misquoted one of his lines: “What do I say if they wheel out the dead?”

“THEIR dead. Not THE dead. It makes all the difference,” she corrected. “The dead” is an anonymous aggregation, a statistic. “Their dead” is intimate, is kith and kin. “Their dead” honors Heaney’s keen eye for detail and his sympathy.

But I digress.

The following story risks trivializing the topic, but one way to speak of poetry is to speak of its power in our lives, however that manifests. Poems live off the page. They celebrate weddings; they memorialize funerals. But they also join us for breakfast and run carpool with us on random Tuesday afternoons. “It is difficult / to get the news from poems,” as William Carlos Williams wrote, “yet men die miserably everyday / for lack / of what is found there” (307-13). So it came to pass that when I got my first job, which comes with my first professional e-mail account, I wanted to choose the right quotation to place under my signature line. I knew exactly where to turn: “I ate the day / Deliberately, that its tang / Might quicken me all into verb, pure verb” (Heaney, “Oysters” 23-25). The passion in these lines, the energy, the utter sense of being alive, has always compelled me. There are some poets one studies from a cool academic distance, and Heaney has certainly merited critical interest from the sharpest of intellects. There are other poets who also call to the heart. We carry them with us like a cherished memory or a talisman. As an English professor, I am, perhaps, expected to provide analytical reflection at a time like now, but I do not yet have the distance. Poet Dan Paterson said it best: “[his death] seems to have left a breach in the language itself” (Higgins). Little wonder our holiest of ceremonies often call for a moment of silence.

November 11, 2013. The Great Hall at Cooper Union. Over one thousand people gathered for a memorial reading for Seamus Heaney. I was one of them. Poets such as Eavan Boland, Edward Hirsch, Jane Hirschfield, and Yusef Komunyakaa gathered to read their favorite Heaney poems. Even singer/songwriter Paul Simon joined in the commemoration and was, in my opinion, the best reader in the group. Perhaps this isn't surprising. After all, he is a musician and a performer. Like Paul Simon, Seamus Heaney loved music. You can hear the musicality in his poetry, but he also loved Irish music. Again, not surprising.

Interspersed between the readings of poetry, Irish pipers played Heaney's favorite music. I won't say that songs such as "Aisling Gheal" punctuated the poetry. Rather, they flowed as distinct works of art in concert with verse. Plaintive, melodic, haunting, they "put us on notice of the magnitude of a simple moment," to borrow what Jane Hirschfield said of Heaney's writing that night. Poetry and music washed over us, calling back our own memories of the poet, his work, of history, love and loss. The evening closed with a recording of Heaney reading "The Given Note." We heard his voice one last time. Then there was the moment of silence.

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Review

Chris Metress

Spicer, Andrew, and Helen Hanson. *A Companion to Film Noir*. London, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012. Xx. 542 pp. \$195.00 (cloth).

The history of film noir criticism is marked by the publication of a series of seminal critical collections. Beginning with E. Ann Kaplan's *Women in Film Noir* (1978) and Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward's *Film Noir: An Encyclopedic Reference to an American Style* (1979), and including such works as Silver and James Ursini's inaugural *Film Noir Reader* (1996) and Joan Copjec's *Shades of Noir* (1993), these collections have helped to define and expand the field of noir studies. Andrew Spicer and Helen Hanson's *A Companion to Film Noir* more than just adds to this rich legacy. The twenty-eight essays in this collection represent a landmark in noir criticism. Written by some of the most accomplished veterans in the field, as well as many new and promising voices, these essays are both deeply engaged with previously contested critical territory and aggressively turned toward undiscovered and untilled terrain.

As Spicer writes in his aptly titled introduction, "The Problem of Film Noir," the genre is both a "success story" and "a murder mystery, a problem to be investigated and solved" (12). The essays in this collection reject Marc Vernet's 1993 assertion that "film noir is a factitious invention of film criticism sustaining itself by 'complacent repetition,' 'an affair of heirs disinclined to look too closely at their inheritance'" (12). Instead, these essays subject the genre to a critical scrutiny that is not only part of the ongoing debate about the status of film noir but also "part of the inexhaustible project that is central to the mutating nature of film studies itself"

(12). To achieve this, Spicer and Hanson divide their collection into seven sections, with each section moving the collection loosely from essays that consolidate and build upon earlier work to essays that explore “new geographies.”

The opening section addresses, as it must, the eternal question, “What is Film Noir?” Because the field itself was defined into existence by a critical essay—Raymond Borde and Étienne Chaumeton’s *Panorama du film noir américain* (1955)—defining film noir has always been a meta-critical act. The four essays in this section problematize the whole notion of film noir as a genre, seeking instead to define it as a “movement” (Robert Porfirio) (17), a “heterogeneous” and “unbounded” discourse (Mark Bould) (35), a “*terrain vague*” of liminal and interstitial spaces that resist the epistemological stabilities of a genre (Henrik Gustafsson) (56), and “an invention” that emerged simultaneously with the rise of cinephilia (Corey K. Creekmur) (71). This problematizing impulse (What is film noir? Not what the tradition so far says it is.) also defines the collection’s second section, “Hidden, Hybrid, and Transmedia Histories and Influences.” Here, Wheeler Winston Dixon suggests that pre-Code films (i.e., films made prior to the era of the Production Code Administration) not only “provide a template for the classic noirs of the 1940s and beyond,” but also that “one could easily argue that many pre-Code films are actually more *noirish* than noir” (92), while Alastair Phillips argues that our preconceptions about the linear influence of “pre-determined cinematic tropes derived from Continental sources” (95) on film noir must be replaced by “lateral history of ‘interference’” (108) in which European and American influences shape each other. Similarly, Peter Hutchins urges us to see noir and horror as contested and reciprocal genres that “occasionally become entwined” and resist any sharp delineation of “antecedence and influence” (122), while R. Barton Palmer and William Marling explore, respectively, the genre’s fluid relationships with the

semi-documentary and crime fiction. In the section's final essay, one of the most suggestive in the collection, Tom Royall speculates on the dialectic between film noir and American painting and photography, suggesting that "together with the voyeuristic elements to be found in the work of John Sloan, Edward Hopper, and Weegee [Arthur Fellig], and reflected especially in the work of Hitchcock," we can detect a "shared world of fear and anxiety, paranoia and prurience, threaded through the painting, photography, literature, and cinema" (171) of the era.

Section three on the "Social, Industrial, and Commercial Contexts" of noir opens with Brian Neve's reconsideration of the genre's leftist politics, revisiting Thom Andersen's notion of "film gris" and expanding our appreciation of how writers and directors "used the crime drama to express, consciously or unconsciously, . . . their critical perspective on postwar America" (182). David Wilt follows with the most extensive analysis we have of film noir screenwriters, turning much-needed attention in this direction and challenging the field's tight focus on directorial authorship and literary influences. Essays by Geoff Mayer, John Berra, and Mary Beth Haralovich then shift our focus to the industrial and institutional practices that shaped the packaging and marketing of the genre, with each essay breaking new ground and, in the best spirit of this volume, preparing the way for further critical exploration.

With sections four and five, the collection takes a turn. As Spicer notes in his introduction, the essays that follow "move away from an essentializing perspective that seeks to define noir through the delineation of a set of core characteristics towards one that acknowledges difference, variation, and range" (9). Essays by Patrick Keating and Helen Hanson rethink our understanding of how lighting and sound operate in the genre, and David Butler does the same with the range and diversity of music in film noir, with Donna Peabody contributing a multi-layered analysis of acting and performance in noir films (something largely ignored until now).

Together, these essays argue for a genre defined by a diversity of shifting approaches and techniques, and this destabilizing approach carries over into Christophe Gelly's exploration of the genre's unstable modernist subjectivities, Yvonne Tasker's analysis of how neo-noir rearticulates the femme fatale of traditional feminist criticism, and Gaylyn Studlar's new take on the familiar noir subject of "tough-guy masculinity." These essays, in turn, are complemented by Dan Flory's account of "Ethnicity and Race in American Film Noir" and Murray Pomerance's study of the "urban scene" in three classic noirs. Both essays take on previously engaged territory in noir studies—race and the city—but do so by contesting traditional approaches so that new patterns of ambivalence and difference can emerge. What Pomerance says of the city may be said of what several critics in this section discover about their subjects: the closer we look, the more we find ourselves in "a rhythmical production of discontinuity" (417).

The collection closes with five essays committed to foregrounding new forms, or "new geographies," of film noir. In "Radio Noir," Jesse Schlotterbeck argues persuasively for a cross-fertilization between radio and film noir from 1942 onwards, and Steven Sanders contributes a thorough account of how themes and stylistic patterns found in exemplary noir films turn up in television genres as diverse as police procedurals, crime thrillers, and science fiction series. In "*It Rhymes with Lust: The Twisted History of Noir Comics*," James Lyons sets out the first extensive survey of noir comics. Noting that there "is nothing in the medium of comics to compare to the canon of 'classic' film noir that emerged as a result of the extensive critical scrutiny of Nino Frank onwards" (459-60)," Lyons's essay takes an important first step towards defining a canon of such works, thereby seeding what will undoubtedly become fruitful ground for further critical discussion. Finally, in two essays with an international focus—one by Nikki J.Y. Lee and Julian Stranger on South Korean crime thrillers, the other by Lalitha Gopalan on

“Bombay Noir”—the collection concludes by taking noir global. Both essays are richly illustrated, and they not only introduce readers to two new traditions but do so in a way that encourages critics to seek out new sites for noir and new possibilities for neglected lateral histories of influence.

Benefiting from a field that has been energized by creative tension and dissensus for more than six decades, *A Companion to Film Noir* is perhaps the best introduction we have to past achievements of and future possibilities for film noir studies. Embedding the reader in the field’s most important and longstanding questions while simultaneously pointing the way to new considerations for the field, this collection is a revisionist work in the best sense of the term, not only sharpening the way we see what has always been before us but also turning our eyes toward that which has previously escaped our sight. This is a collection that will be studied, cited, and, as with all of the most influential film noir criticism, contested for many years to come.

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Short Story

Taylor Burgess

MFA

“I’ve considered returning to school,” Anna said, slowly folding and refolding her napkin. Decades of creasing the neat squares of paper at meals—a tic, constant since her childhood—yet she could not align the corners to her absolute satisfaction, and could not achieve the symmetrical order her mind, with years, increasingly craved. “Though I regret a significant number of years have passed me by. The fates”—a sniff—“have still not yet aligned in my favor, I’m afraid.” She flicked her wrist, approximating drama.

“Huh,” the waitress said. “I’d thought about taking some time off, too, but this one professor said my writing was good, really good, and so, the teaching fellowship—only partial, but still—and well, then, here I am! Working for the rest.” She bounced on her heels and tossed out a hand, clipping the glass of water perched near the edge of Anna’s table. The glass seemed momentarily suspended in air, but shattered on the tiled stone floor.

“Oh my god!” the waitress said. Her heels bounced faster and she rummaged through her apron pockets. Anna looked on. “Shit, I’m so sorry,” the waitress said. “Let me find a towel. A towel—Ben, where do we keep towels?”

The waitress rushed to the staircase leading to the balcony, grasped a chair, pivoted behind the cake display.

Anna leaned her head back, closing her eyes in the shaft of afternoon sunlight. She sensed the dust made visible and golden, hovering over her eyelids, and she listened to the chatter of customers and the sifting of the wind through the sieve of tree branches.

But there was something; there was a doubt. A twisting maggot of an idea, imperceptible and unfamiliar, a log forking the current of her intuition, spawning eddies and foam. A bearer of disorder, of change. It wriggled on the back of Anna's skull, prompting actions not improbable, but unpleasant, requiring labor and strain. It possessed a flavor that seemed alien under the scrutiny of the sunlight that continued to wash the surface and the depths of her face.

"I'm so sorry," the waitress said, rushing toward the table, balancing a new glass and a towel. Anna sat up. "Now," said the waitress. She bent to one knee and with one hand swiped the towel twice across the floor, sopping half—less than half—of the water. Bits of glass remained, sliding on a slick film over stone. "What can I." She carefully set down the sweating glass. "I." She clicked a pen several times. "Get for you?" She smiled and shrugged to relaxation.

Anna drew a thin, rectangular pair of glasses from her leather purse, squinting as she donned them. She scanned the menu three times from top to bottom. "The vegetable pita seems acceptable. No mayonnaise, and do not salt the potato chips."

The waitress scrawled on the yellow pad, concentrating, now alternating the stress of her stance from heel to heel. Her hairline, pulled taut with a tight band, was beaded with sweat. Anna studied over the top of her glasses. A wave of empathy, unexpected, broke against the dam of Anna's usual indifference, built from experience and boredom. Habitually unable to express understanding through her body, through gestures, she spoke: "The spill is not a cause for concern or stress, dear. Not at all."

Shards of glass swam on the film of water still clinging to shoes. The sharp points flashed in the sunlight. The waitress caught them in her periphery, holding the end of a pen stroke until it bled blue. She looked up. "Oh," she said. "Well. Ben'll be by to clean it up soon."

For an hour, Anna picked at her food—heavy on mayonnaise. She fell in and out of the café, sometimes feeling mingled, melded with the sun and the people and tiled stone and rustling trees, but often studying from behind the aloof lens of her glasses. The meal paid for, she walked toward the rusted screen door, thin wrinkled nose up-tilted slightly to avoid meeting reflexive glances from other café customers. A limp slowed her; a slight fitful shaking starting in her left kneecap, lancing up her thigh. She willed it down, tightened in, refused to consider causes. She pushed the door with a hand, sun and breeze breaking on the screen.

Several motorcyclists started their engines, kicking off onto the highway that spiraled up and around the forested mountainside. Pastel flowers and grass, spread with clover, surrounded a small post office, planted near the highway. Nearby: a one-room realty office, ice cream “shoppe” and wooden hotel offering “The Best View In The Carolinas—since 1903.” Anna, mind blank with vegetable pita, sat in an empty chair outside the café window. She watched the log-lined balcony on the hotel’s second floor and tried to locate her room—a task more difficult than she felt it should be. Counting from the end was unhelpful: she had forgotten her room number. But what did she need quantitative abilities for, anyhow? Of what use were they to her? Remembering sequenced numbers? She imagined the smell of the flowers.

The wheezing, uneven slam of the door, and a greasy tangle of hair stood outside the café: a lurching, boy-smooth frame, wearing a moth-eaten black shirt printed with the red mark of a politically radical hardcore-punk band. Anna gazed off toward the slope of the highway, the slouching figure hazy in her periphery.

“Rude! Just—so, so rude, you—boy,” a voice from inside said. Anna continued to stare straight ahead, propping her bony chin on a fist. To her left, she sensed a plump, colorful shape ease the door open with a hip, holding what seemed a fat toddler in blue on the other. “I expect

an apology, to her! To me,” the shape said, convicting inflection lost while adjusting the slipping toddler. In response, the slouching figure pulled its bangs sharply horizontal. They immediately fell back, lank.

The distant sound of motorcycle engines drew Anna’s attention away from the hazy shape as it tapped a foot. Anna heard the slap of the sandal clearly; she only saw the suggestion of blurred movement. “That girl did nothing, to you! Her second glass dropped today, she said. Not even an hour ago—the girl! You don’t have her job, a waitress’s job. You don’t have any job,” the round shape said. “She doesn’t deserve your—your—disrespect! Maybe you’ll just go back in there with a broom and basket and clean it up all yourself if you won’t listen to your mother—that’s right, your mother—right now.” She gasped for air. “Go on! Go! Back inside!” The shape swung the door open with a free hand, beckoning wildly. The rusted springs popped and groaned.

“Tyrant,” whispered the figure.

“What was that?”

“Tyrant, tyrant, fucking fascist tyrant—man! Fuck!”

The shape put down the toddler and grabbed the figure’s arm, dragging both across the café’s front. All three spilled directly into Anna’s view.

“You—you never speak to me, use that tone with me, do you understand?” Anna saw the woman shiver, sweat blooming around the collar of her vibrant sweatshirt. The boy stared at the ground and yanked his arm from her grasp. “Rather talk back to you than Dad, at least. Fucking hell,” he said.

The woman changed instantly. Her rigid back became unstable, melting in a wave of sobs. The toddler sat on the ground, all round eyes drinking the scene.

“I. I can’t. Deal—do—I don’t know what!” she said. “I don’t know what words! I have. I’ve run out.”

The boy, eyes still screened by thin greasy strips, looked over the woman’s heaving shoulder. Anna watched; the boy caught Anna’s eye; the woman vaguely struck his shoulder.

“Why—aren’t you listening?” said the woman. “If—if—if you listened, you’d talk! Talk to me! Say words back. Like normal things. Normal people!”

The shouting had attracted onlookers. The situation was a tad excessive, thought Anna, a tad absurd and unbalanced. Those eating at outside tables paid close attention through feigned conversation.

Though his body remained still, the dough of the boy’s cheeks began to flush a soft red. The woman’s sobbing and lurching played out beneath his chin.

He reached for the door. A precise, composed movement: the woman did not notice. The springs expanded and contracted, screeching and protesting the sudden force. After a moment, Anna heard the faint noise of glass scraping across stone tiles; she inferred inevitable teenage compliance in an attempt to relieve parental distress, to just stop the upset. Beneath that pseudo-rebellious façade was always a need to please, to make peace, to straighten out the tangled interpersonal threads and tie a clean knot. The reason—or one of many reasons—she never had or even wanted children herself: they always yield in the end. Do they ever become independent? She had, but was most certainly the exception. Food scraps in a trash bag finally muffled the jangling of pieces of glass, the situation obviously resolved as Anna expected.

The motorcycle hum grew louder, again drawing Anna’s gaze to the highway. Several bikes rounded a curve, coming to a stop in the front of the wooden hotel. The bikers dismounted

stiffly, removing sunglasses and helmets. Across the road, Anna could not hear their leather loosen and crackle with warmth.

The woman's sobs, diminished but piercing, pulled Anna back. The toddler sat by her shaking leg, now flailing a chubby hand, grasping at her ankle. The fat, incontinent little creatures always left Anna mildly repulsed. She believed her absolute personal avoidance of domestic affairs lent her singular objective insight into situations such as these. She spoke, intending to articulate something, something helpful but fundamentally critical: "Excuse—"

The woman jerked. Swollen eyes narrowed at Anna, who, finding the thought had fled, closed thin lips and stayed behind her glasses.

Continuing to grasp at limbs, the toddler made a sucking noise. The woman pulled the child close and straightened her sweatshirt. She paused, noticing her son's absence, and with a quick glance at Anna—motionless in the chair—she pulled the screen door wide, trailing the repetitious toddler, now smacking lips with saliva.

Instantly, the highway absorbed the disturbance into folds of asphalt, wise from the wear of tires and periodic paint jobs. The hotel was unperturbed, now smudging the flat blue with a meandering line of chimney smoke. The calm set a convex sheen on Anna's glasses. The world returned to natural order, she thought. Reverse entropy. Status quo. She had lived through the 70s, through the 80s, the 90s—on a social or political or simply human scale, this was the pattern of existence. Feminism, waves one through three? Absorbed. Returns of higher education? Diminished. Iran-Contra, Kuwait occupation, 9/11? Controlled. Her marriage? Neatly concluded, finances settled, mind and emotions at rest—all years ago. And here she was. A tightrope walker, expert in poise.

A faint buzz sounded from her purse. Anna retrieved the phone and blinked at the small display. “1 New Message—Marcus L.” Tapping a button, she read: “Anna. Where you again? Story due 15 Mar. Get me something.” She glanced at the date in the corner of the display: 2.10.12. She dropped the phone back into the purse.

The subsequent days and weeks were calm, still, dull. Anna avoided all stressful work, or work at all, instead skimming insipid fashion magazines that she loathed with a trace of detached curiosity. She read the opening pages of a thick novel and put it aside, forgotten. She steadily retracted from the concrete world of perception, preferring the abstract milieu of her own head. Even the maggot of an idea became less distinct than a metaphor, visually hazy, regressing to an inexact piece of Anna’s mind, broadened with disinterest in all around her. Whatever the indeterminate, squirming doubt was—she still could not say—she smothered it with detachment, with six and a half hours of sleep, strict posture, pursed lips. She had installed herself in the hotel, in a high room, sometimes venturing with a cup of coffee to the balcony, where she gazed down at the café and itinerant bikers from a gap of solid air—distant as a television screen—that licked her face.

One evening, the screen edged over the railing and into the room, stirring the drapes that swept the wood floor. Massed gray clouds hung over the highway bend, eating the smoke still snaking from the hotel chimney.

Anna lay flat on the bed, one foot resting on the ankle of the other. She balanced the bowl of a glass of red wine with her fingertips. Several identical glasses littered the dresser, holding various drinks in varying states of consumption. She waited, anticipating *soupe à l'oignon* and a light salad to arrive—they said fifteen minutes, surely no longer—at her door.

Room service sustained Anna. A luxury she could now afford, it offered a multicultural selection that Anna paid little mind after first impressions. *Papet vaudois*, *Zürich Geschnetzeltes*, *Rösti*—all arrived expertly prepared, complete with pressed white napkins and spotless silverware. Origin of ingredients, method of preparation were irrelevant as she selected complementary alcohol and flashed her card at the innocuous delivery girls.

But today's girl was now late, and Anna grew restless. Curling to a sitting position, she frowned at the razor-thin laptop to her left, a device that could be opened with a single finger, leaving a hand free to spin rich whirlpools of Pinot noir around a crystal glass. Anna, shrewd, opened a document, and her eyes snapped from glowing line to glowing line. With fluid flicks of her wrist, she scrolled through pages of text, traveling the document at a pace that allowed glancing comprehension of paragraphs and organization. The finer, qualitative details of the piece rolled through and beyond her. When a last flick caused the bottom of the document to bounce in protest, she blindly placed the glass on the carpet and drew both hands to the keyboard. She wrote:

Ellie,

Satisfactory. Topic appropriate—however, I am currently vacationing in the Appalachian mountains, not the Catskills. Change details to reflect, so story is consistent. Style is becoming more consistent—continue consultations with Nicole & Damien, and study archive (Natalie should have opened access for you) to ensure pieces are comparable to my early successes.

However, recall: you are a ghostwriter. Your words are not your own—they must be mine. Despite improvements, text still bears personal traces. Expunge them. Arousing suspicion is

unacceptable, and may come at a higher cost to yourself than you have perhaps heretofore considered.

With revisions, kindly send the draft to me. Only to me (anna@pacificweekly.com). Do not send to Marcus. Would perplex him considerably, and put your work—and, more significantly, mine—in peril. If I approve of your work, I will contact Marcus. I, Anna Schatz, am the glossy magazine travel writer. You simply place the words in sequence.

Pleased to have you in my employment.

A. Schatz

Anna's finger hesitated, hovering over the return key.

The room phone rang. Anna pressed the key. Suspicious, she reached behind and lifted the receiver as if inspecting a dead animal.

“Yes?”

“Hello? Hey? Anna?”

“Trenton?”

“Anna, listen, Dad—”

“Trenton, may I ask why you dialed the landline?” Over her glasses, Anna eyed the cellphone half enclosed in a fold of comforter. She paused. “Trenton, may I ask where you even obtained this number?” She resolved to have a harsh word with the front desk clerk.

“Anna, listen. Yesterday Dad was under the truck again, himself, to try and work on it, but you, when you were here last, you told him not to, right?—when was the last time you were here, Anna?—but he stood up and couldn't sit down again, something in the lumbar, they said—”

“Trenton. Dear. From where are you calling?”

“The coke machine, or, pay phone’s near there in the hospital—”

Anna let the receiver tumble from her hand. Another comforter fold swallowed it, facedown. Anna removed her glasses and massaged a lens with a thumb and forefinger. The muffled voice rattled on: “—and, so if you could, when you get here, just cut me one for, I don’t know, five hundred; I’m still at home, Anna, if you didn’t know, but the job hunt is, well, is coming; but just cut me one for five hundred; they’ve got Dad under a lot of the time, now, and normally he cuts it on the first for me, and—”

The bedside table holding the telephone base was flat against the wall beneath a rustic painting of a fiddle. Anna sat up and, after flexing both shoulders in a perpendicular twist, pulled the table out, carefully preserving its congruous positioning with wall and painting. Satisfied, she leaned over the phone base and pulled the line free from the wall.

The voice seemed to silence itself naturally: to Anna, mid-sentence or mid-word was punctuation enough. Stray scraps of sound, once in sentence series, now dispersed. She discarded a cobweb from her finger into the wicker wastebasket and in looking up saw the balcony.

First the balcony, then a sodden smudge of green and brown curves cast against a grey wash, tungsten and cobalt winking into being against the darkness sliding over the vista. Washes of sloppy pigment on a damp canvas. There was a focusing, a sharpening: the indistinct vision tightened Anna, by contrast, into etched clarity. She was an element in the composition, a grouping of swift pencil strokes, a subsumed speck in a larger piece concerned with something—or everything—outside of herself. Or perhaps with nothing at all. Perhaps, she thought, the lights and splotches of dark and ambiguous ridgelines are nothing at all. Floating dirt and heat appearing attached, fused, under control, but only through artifice. Only through her glasses.

Turning back to the bedside table, she replaced the glasses. With the provided pen she wrote on the pad:

-book flight- back to PDX?

-Ellie-?

A knock on the brass door-knocker.

“Oh,” Anna whispered, “that.” Hastily she repositioned the table and strode to unlatch the door.

The young girl seemed harried—familiar. “Let’s see, the French soup, and.” Recognizing Anna, she smiled with teeth. “I won’t drop anything this time. They gave me a cart, see?” She wheeled the silver-embroidered vehicle into the room, forcing Anna to sidestep.

The girl unfolded a table taken from the cart’s second shelf. Anna stood, gossamer wrinkles taut on her temples.

“I see you work two food-service positions?”

“What?” The observation glazed the girl’s face, uncomprehending. Then, slowly: “Oh, I picked up this one yesterday. First full night on the job!” She balanced the quivering bowl with few fingers, pushing away steam with a breath.

Anna walked to the bathroom and the sink. With no particular intent she turned on the faucet and turned it off again. What was the tendency to act with no intent? Anna, confident in rigid resolve, assumed this behavior only afflicted baser types.

Silverware chinked against the reflective table. Stepping back around the screen concealing the bathroom, Anna said: “And how are your studies? Progressing, I hope?”

The girl shook a napkin free from a roll, with more force than seemed necessary to Anna. “Well, thank you for asking. The semester ended two weeks ago.” Pausing to lift the wine glass from the carpet, her cheeriness seemed to fade behind the hair that fell across her cheeks and chin. Anna prodded:

“I assume, then, you will be returning in the fall?”

The force of the bottle’s opening startled the girl, though the corkscrew held the cork safe. “You see—there was a workshop, a final workshop for whatever we had. Or’d been working on, I guess. The professor, he kept telling us about the rhythm of images, the ‘ineffable current of evocation flowing between objects’—and so I tried that in mine. I really tried. But. Oh, you probably don’t want—”

“No, dear. I only do not want the Gamaret. Pinot noir is more my preference.”

The wine tumbled for a second longer before the girl, round eyes fixed on Anna, understood. “Oh, shit, I’m so sorry—I’ll come back up with that.” Uncertain, she grasped the glass by the stem, and, thinking, placed it back on the table. Rushing to the door and forgetting the cart in her haste, she reversed suddenly. “Oh, and I’m not going back there, since you asked. I wanted something else, I think: something to feed into my writing. But all I got were lectures on ineffable currents and what—some debt?” Her expression began to show worry: a fear of circumlocution and abrupt endings. “I’d rather work. But.” She closed the door on her thought. Anna could hear uneven footsteps, dampened by hardwood walls, fading down the hall.

A silence.

Reflective, Anna turned to the balcony. Distant lights now flickered sharp above the valley of the mountain rising behind the café. The wind, preceding the firm clouds now massed over the highway, nudged the tops of small firs and hemlocks.

Anna stood for several minutes, looking out and over as the balcony drapes began to ripple in the draft. The veinous wrinkles expanded, contracted. Motions and currents beneath the placid surface.

Anna moved suddenly; grabbing pen and pad, she emended the note:

-book flight- back to PDX? or to Trent & father?

-Ellie-? (buy a book? flowers? wine? Perhaps a raise?)

Tossing the pen, Anna stepped into her flats, wrapped a shawl around her shoulders, and stepped out onto the balcony. She squinted up into the shifting air. The black-gray mass flashed once in warning, and with an echo of an echo began to let down rain.

Water plastered salt-and-pepper locks to her forehead and glasses. She observed the rain feeding into the grass and weeds and firs and mountain and lights and stretch of highway. A flash. The thunderhead rasped and groaned like a free-jazz trombonist—cataracts, stoop, wisecracks—slouching up to the duct-taped microphone in the sky. He blew a chain of notes. Free-metric. Chromatic and in between. Anna took the chaotic tones in her gut, let the sound, formless, crack in fractured arcs around her head. A flash—then another, and another, some erratic moment later.

Poetry

Audrey Ward

Introvert

Rabbit-startled
She found another
Peeking into her
As she peeked out

Poetry

Kiani Yiu

“Earth”

is
not alive
until you pick it
from its tree
earth
is
not alive
because
its roots are
 roaming free

Earth
is
but a
temporal wish
that living
cannot trust
the trees
and roots
will rot and burn
and turn earth
 into dust.

From the Editor's Desk

Taylor Burgess

A Genre in Discord: The Ubiquity of the Campus Novel

For the sake of pedagogical simplicity, it is tempting to squeeze novelists into restrictive genres that ostensibly contain a particular writer's every work. We like to lock Graham Greene into stolid British moralism, pin Edith Wharton as the dry chronicler of the upper class, and memorialize John Kennedy Toole as the great martyred American humorist. The problem with these categories is that for every grim *Brighton Rock*, you have a light and meandering *Travels with my Aunt*, the comedic black sheep among the rest of Greene's output (but, to me, his best work). Similarly, Wharton's brief, bleak *Ethan Frome* is set in an impoverished Massachusetts hamlet, far from the high society of *The House of Mirth*. And though only two published Toole novels exist, most critical and commercial attention went to the picaresque *A Confederacy of Dunces*, leaving the American gothic (and inferior) *The Neon Bible* neglected.

Clearly, authors often break from their usual subject matter in ways that are completely unpredictable and, sometimes, wholly opposite from what we expect of them. However, even more interesting are genre explorations that, though quite different from much of a writer's other work, are completely predictable. There are several very specific types of novels that seem to appear inexplicably—usually as a one-off—in the works of a surprising number of major twentieth- and twenty-first-century writers, so frequently that they begin to seem like a rite of passage or tacitly accepted cliché.

Chief among these is the “campus novel,” a narrative that takes place in or around a university and features one or more professors, usually in the humanities, as main characters. These academics are often professionally decorated but farcically inept in their personal lives, often leading to affairs with students or staff, defamation, and, in extreme cases, insanity or murder. Campus novels can come from writers as polarized in style and content as Bret Easton Ellis (*The Rules of Attraction*, which has more students than professors but plenty of depravity) and Mary McCarthy (*The Groves of Academe*, considered one of the first in the genre). I am left puzzled by the near-universal appeal of this genre in a critical era that eschews zeitgeist in favor of Lyotardian micronarratives. What about classrooms and research and violations of the student-teacher relationship is so inspiring to so many modern novelists?

The most pragmatic reason for this attraction is rooted in the maxim “write what you know.” With rise of MFAs, English departments, and labyrinthian literary theory in the twentieth century, many novelists have seized the opportunity and retreated into the ivory tower, where they can still manage to pay the rent in a technology-addled and paper-averse society. Because of this, fiction produced by professors has come under increased fire for self-congratulation and lack of trenchant cultural commentary. After all, what is more unappealing than an academic writing about the difficulty of being an academic in a world that cares increasingly less about academics?

Certain campus novelists seem to share this distaste and use the university setting to expose the idiocy of exploring such topics at all. For example, substantial sections of Jonathan Franzen’s *The Corrections* center on sexually frustrated professor Chip Berglund, who teaches a “Consuming Narratives” course at an elite liberal arts school and is himself writing an inept send-up of academia, “The Academy Purple.” Franzen pushes Chip into an MDMA-fueled affair

with a student and, then, in case the reader was unsure what fate such pretentious intellectuals deserve, puts Chip in the center of a violent Lithuanian government scam.¹ For Franzen, universities are what many writers, himself included, know, but they are only useful literarily as harsh indictments of themselves.

Other campus novelists do not indict but praise their subject and setting. In Saul Bellow's *Ravelstein*, the titular character is "at ease with large statements, big issues, and famous men, with decades, eras, centuries. He was, however, just as familiar with entertainers like Mel Brooks" (11). He is a complex academic, but one who maintains warm contact with former students who "now held positions of importance on national newspapers. Quite a number served in the State Department. Some lectured in the War College or worked on the staff of the National Security Adviser" (10). His books also have crossover popular success. In short, Bellow describes a professor for whom none of the negative stereotypes apply. *Ravelstein* is the rare campus novel that presents the successful academic as aspirational; Bellow, who taught at many colleges, including Yale, Princeton, Bard College, and New York University, seems content with fiction's university residence.

But the ubiquity of campus novels stems from more than just writers' personal circumstances. There is something enduringly appealing in the flawed professor archetype: a man or woman at the world's intellectual peak—but an impotent loser elsewhere. If there is such a thing as the human condition, this disparity typifies it. Howard Belsey, the protagonist of Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*, embodies personal paradox. A native of England teaching at an American university and waging a crusade against Rembrandt and all representational art, Howard begins an affair with a poetry instructor and, later, the daughter of his academic rival. This, of course,

¹ MDMA is the drug known as "ecstasy."

enrages his Jamaican wife, Kiki. On the novel's last page, Smith diverges from Franzen's authorial sadism and allows Howard a chance for redemption: "He looked out into the audience once more and saw Kiki only. He smiled at her. She smiled. She looked away, but she smiled" (443). Through Howard and the Ivy League setting, Smith suggests that even the cleverest of us can shatter our lives. But, we can also pick up the pieces.

Howard's final upswing completes a commentary on the consequences of irresponsibility and makes for a tidy narrative, but it does not account for the arbitrary misfortune that befalls those who behave as they should. Philip Roth's literary alter-ego Nathan Zuckerman tells the story of Coleman Silk, a dean of faculty and former classics professor, in *The Human Stain*: "Nothing lasts, and yet nothing passes, either. And nothing passes just because nothing lasts" (52). Coleman loses his job when several students mishear an offhand comment as racist (ironically, Coleman is himself African-American but light-skinned enough to pass as Caucasian), and he later dies in a car accident when his mistress's ex-husband, who is insane and suffering from PTSD, drives Coleman off the road. Nothing is stable and "nothing lasts," even in the secure and prosperous life of a hard-working academic. By Roth's extension, this is all of humankind's lot.

Absurdity and disaster, then, clearly exist outside campus gates, and often impinge on the stability the university represents. Yet while Smith and Roth accept this reality, they do not seem to believe that academia itself can be a source of disorder. Other campus novelists, however, do, and they mine the genre for its postmodern possibilities. Don DeLillo's *White Noise* begins with the "long shining line" of student cars, arriving for a semester's start, filled with "boots and shoes, stationery and books" and "the controlled substances, the birth control pills and devices" (3). In the novel, DeLillo is consumed with the meaningless minutiae of university life,

culminating in protagonist and narrator Jack Gladney, who is the creator of an inane academic field, “Hitler studies.” This absurdity eventually seeps into the outside world. The college city is swallowed by a chemical “airborne toxic event,” and Jack hunts and shoots a man who has been selling his wife drugs that curb the fear of death. Postmodern society is in ludicrous shambles, but the fragmentation begins in the university.

The fragmentation stays in the university in Vladimir Nabokov’s dizzying *Pale Fire*. Though still a campus novel, Nabokov’s structure is unusual (but extraordinary), containing a 999-line fictional poem surrounded by a foreword, commentary, and index written by mentally unstable academic Charles Kinbote, who believes himself a fugitive member of Eastern European royalty. These delusions are only revealed through Kinbote’s baffling misreading of the poem in the commentary, where lines as simple as “one foot upon a mountain” (107) prompt Kinbote to eight-page digressions on the topography of his native country and his thrilling flight from an assassin that is probably a figment of his imagination. Much is not clear, including the cause of Kinbote’s madness, but Nabokov at least suggests that convoluted academic criticism can facilitate absurdity if not outright insanity.

In some respects, *Pale Fire* is the ultimate campus novel, as it not only takes place at a university and concerns the lives of professors but also takes the form of the critical work many of those professors produce. But to embrace that view would be to propose that what Nabokov saw in the campus novel—lunacy, irresolvable questions, puzzles—is what all writers truly see at the genre’s core, and I do not believe that is true. While Nabokov and DeLillo use the campus novel as a means to investigate these distinctly postmodern topics, the genre, as any enduring genre must be, is highly pliable. Smith, as I mentioned before, uses the same fundamental narrative structure and ends in almost exactly the opposite place: regained sanity, answers to

interpersonal questions, and narrative closure. Bellow goes even further, lauding a character's integrity—a major departure from the tragically unhinged Kinbote. Perhaps, then, the more interesting question is not why the campus novel is appealing to so diverse a group of contemporary writers, but why we are still so determined to group them all in the same genre. Postmodernity allows writers to appropriate the structures they wish for the purposes they wish. Perhaps we should simply acknowledge that freedom and check our instinct for relentless categorization. The university is, after all, a place of intellectual and creative liberation—the genre's appeal may be as plain as that.

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From the Editor's Desk

Megan Burr

“A Truth Universally Acknowledged”

As Jane Austen famously wrote, “It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife” (Austen 1). Were truer words ever spoken? Yes, obviously, but one cannot deny that Jane Austen’s iconic novel *Pride and Prejudice* contains truths that are indeed universal. After all, how else could the English department have teamed up to celebrate the two-hundredth anniversary so successfully? Even after a week of reading the book, dancing the reel, and viewing the 2005 Joe Wright adaptation, I still did not quite feel that my week was “Austen-y” enough. So, to cap off the week of festivities, my roommate and I went to see *Austenland*, a film about a woman so obsessed with all things Austen (and particularly Mr. Darcy) that she flies to England to participate in Austen LARPing (Live Action Role Playing). Though the film was less than exemplary, it made me think about the lasting influence *Pride and Prejudice* has had on popular culture. Although we as a department worked as hard as possible to provide an immersive Austenian experience for Samford students, we only scratched the surface of the novel’s influence. There is a truly ridiculous number of *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations out there, and it seems only fitting to spend some time on how this “truth universally acknowledged” is acknowledged universally.

How do we begin this adventure into Austenian adaptations? Consider, for a moment, Seth Grahame-Smith’s 2009 novel, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. The title is fairly self-explanatory: Grahame-Smith uses Austen’s novel as a base and adds zombies to the mix. The

“truth universally acknowledged” in this adaptation is fittingly altered to “A zombie in possession of brains must be in want of more brains” (Grahame-Smith 1). Elizabeth Bennet and her sisters are now trained pseudo-samurai fighting for survival—as well as for a husband. Though it may sound ridiculous at first, the novel has widespread appeal, which might be because of its more “modern” take on the original text. In addition to much-longed-for revenge against the less-loved characters, Grahame-Smith’s new context allows for an openness of language impossible in the original text. The novel (sometimes called *P&P&Z*) started the new “Quirk Classic” trend, including such gems as *Android Karenina* and *Alice in Zombieland*, and it boasts a graphic novel, a sequel, and a prequel, though Grahame-Smith penned neither of the latter.

If you enjoy sassy dialogue but bloody, gratuitous violence is not your speed, then why not consider *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*? This 2012-2013 creation took *Pride and Prejudice* and converted it into a modern day web series performed primarily by “Lizzie” Bennet herself as a final project for grad school. In this adaptation, the “truth” is plastered on a t-shirt gifted to Lizzie by her marriage-obsessed mother. Lizzie takes the audience through the plot of the novel by way of dramatic reenactments of most of the novel’s key moments—Mrs. Bennet, for instance, is never seen on camera, but is instead acted out as an often-hysterical Southern belle. Because of this format, the viewer is even more inclined to believe Lizzie’s side of the story than in more typical adaptations. While the viewer sees Lizzie in virtually every episode, Darcy does not appear on-camera until episode sixty, affectionately referred to as “Darcy Day” by fans of the series. By this point, the viewers’ only impression of Darcy is entirely constructed by Lizzie’s impressions of him, and seeing how the character actually behaves is more than a little surprising.

Also, in the vlog series and its many in-world spinoffs and transmedia opportunities (including Facebook™, Twitter™, and Tumblr™), fans were able to see and interact with their beloved characters in a whole new way, particularly concerning Lydia Bennet and Georgiana “Gigi” Darcy. What were once one-dimensional, largely unknown characters became “real” people the audience rooted for and mourned with as the series progressed. The series also emphasized the family aspect. Although Darcy is, of course, a large part of it, the web series homed in more on the family dynamic than any other adaptation I have experienced. With these aspects in mind, it comes as no surprise that the web series won an Emmy for Outstanding Creative Achievement in Interactive media.

The 2008 British miniseries *Lost in Austen* bears similarities to both *Austenland* and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. The series takes place partially in the modern day, and it features a woman obsessed with *Pride and Prejudice*, but this woman lives out the Mr. Darcy fantasy in its entirety: she literally trades places with Elizabeth Bennet. The Austenite, in trying to assimilate, actually destroys the narrative and causes chaos that she can fix only with the help of, to everyone’s surprise, George Wickham. Though the mini-series sounds like less than highbrow fare, both critics and consumers received it gladly. Perhaps the reception of the mini-series indicates just how much some would like to integrate themselves into Austen’s world.

The problem with exploring adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* in approximately one thousand words is that, much like *Pride and Prejudice* week, I have run out of time before I could even begin. Even though I have looked into several, there are dozens upon dozens more adaptations of the book, and more are being put into production even as you read this. Books, films, web series, and even online games have been created from the base of this book, but why is this? Possibly, as in *Lost in Austen* and *Austenland*, people who read Austen’s work are

compelled to find ways to continue living in it, whatever the medium available. Maybe it is because all of these Austenites desire a fiery romance that will certainly end in felicitous marriage, regardless of the obstacles. Mayhap the reader/viewer yearns for the strong familial bonds present in her work. Perhaps it is because Austen's world, with its universally acknowledged truths, is more attractive than a world filled with ambiguity. Whatever the reason, I have no doubt that *Pride and Prejudice* and its many variations will continue to delight future viewers for another two hundred years, no matter what the format.

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From the Editor's Desk

Alyssa Duck

Gendered Semiotics of the Everyday:

Barthes's Vestimentary System and Elizabeth Bishop's "Exchanging Hats"

W*ide Angle* readers, I pose to you a question of vital importance to my social identity: how do you know I'm a woman? Were you clued in by the feminine name? Dress and lipstick? –Perhaps, even, the propensity to sit with legs shaved “until they gleam/ like petrified mammoth-tusk (Rich 51-2),” modestly crossed?¹ The fact of well-kept fingernails, artificially dark? The presence of pink?

None of these, of course, is inherent in biological womanhood. So my question still stands: how do you know?

We're semioticians, you and I. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler postulates that gender “ought not to be conceived as a noun or a substantial thing or a static cultural marker,” but rather as a system of categorical semiotic indicators. The daily performance of these semiotic indicators reaffirms an individual in his or her identity as either male or female (Butler 152). Butler explains that individual gender identity is the product of the structural and social *inculcation* of antipodal sets of gendered traits and preferences that systematically correlate to polar categories of sex, noting that “if gender is something that one becomes—but can never be—then gender is itself a kind of becoming or activity” (Butler 152). Gender, then, according to Butler, is achieved uniquely through an individual's performance of normative gender practices. The performative

¹ From lines 51-52 of Adrienne Rich's poem “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law,” which you should read immediately.

nature of gender maintenance highlights the semiotic nature of the systems that support normative gender identity as it deconstructs the viability of these systems. Butler aptly appropriates Nietzsche's moral claim that "there is no 'being' behind doing [...] the deed is everything" (qtd. in Butler 34), noting its congruity with semiotic gender performance: "In an application that Nietzsche himself would not have anticipated or condoned, we might state as corollary: There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 34). These "expressions"—the "deed" of gender identity—serve as constitutive signs the performance of which announces conformity to a socially normative gender identity.

The most marked set of these performed gendered "expressions" is that of the fashion system. In *The Language of Fashion*, Roland Barthes famously posited fashion as a semiotic system, a "structure whose individual elements never have any value and which are signifiers only in as much as they are linked by a group of collective norms" ("Language" 7). According to Barthes, vestimentary codes are created by "the appropriation by society of a form, or a use, through rules of manufacture, [...] not the variations in its utilitarian or decorative quantum" ("Language" 7). The fashion system is composed of and defined by "normative links which justify, oblige, prohibit, tolerate, in a word control the arrangement of garments on a concrete wearer who is identified in their social and historical place: it is a *value*" ("Language" 7). In other words, the semiotic "signifiers" of the fashion system serve the unique social function of categorizing individuals according to their adherence to the represented socially normative "signified."

Within the context of gender, this vestimentary component of the "axiological order" serves to categorize individuals into discrete gendered categories: the vestimentary "signifiers"

serve as the semiotic indication of an individual's "signified" genital composition ("Language" 7). Barthes emphasizes that like all semiotic systems, the semantic connections within the fashion system are ultimately arbitrary. The relevance of the vestimentary "sign" is a function of the relationship between the identity of the sign's wearer and the content of the normative signified unit: according to Barthes, "the sign has succeeded when it is functional; we cannot give it an abstract definition" ("Diseases" 48). In the construction and performance of individual gender identity, therefore, the fashion system is functional only so far as individual participants adhere to the socially normative vestimentary codes that correlate to their assigned gender categorization. Barthes notes that dress is "in fact nothing more than the signifier of a main signified, which is the manner or the degree of the wearer's participation [...], essentially the degree of integration of the wearer in relation to the society in which they live" ("Fashion" 13). In the context of gender, the relation between the individual and the specifically gendered nature of his or her vestimentary signs mirrors that individual's acceptance or rejection of normative gender regulations.

Emphasizing the arbitrary nature of vestimentary semiotics, Barthes notes, "the capacity of a system to go wrong is as important as its capacity to work" ("Fashion" 80). Indeed, in the context of gender, it is primarily through instances of this system "going wrong" that the constructed nature of the fashion system—and the binary gender system on which it rests—is exposed. The specifically gendered nature of the fashion system binds it intimately to the performative maintenance of individual gender identity, and an individual's disruption of or noncompliance with normative vestimentary codes reflects his or her more fundamental disruption of or noncompliance with socially constructed norms of gender identity. Butler notes in *Gender Trouble* that "when the disorganization and disaggregation of the field of bodies

disrupt the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence, it seems that the expressive model loses its descriptive force. That regulatory ideal is then exposed as a norm and a fiction that disguises itself as a developmental law regulating the sexual field that it purports to describe” (Butler 185). Butler proposes that “the strange, the incoherent, that which falls ‘outside,’ gives us a way of understanding the taken-for-granted world of sexual categorization as a constructed one, indeed, as one that might well be constructed differently” (Butler 149). These alternative constructions of gender organization that disrupt the semiotic gender binary serve to destabilize the field of gender and to complicate socially normative constructions of gender identity.

In Elizabeth Bishop’s “Exchanging Hats,” these destabilizing alternative gender constructions take the form of a series of experimental drag performances that expose both the ultimately performative nature of vestimentary gender affirmation and the ominous inflexibility of socially normative gender codes. In “Exchanging Hats,” a border-crossing “hyphenation” of identity is effected through the complication and inversion of the hat as a gendered vestimentary sign. The poem opens with the speaker’s introduction of the gender-twisting “unfunny uncles” who “insist / on trying on a lady’s hat” (“Exchanging Hats” 1-2). The poetic speaker immediately situates the uncles’ gender parody on both the immediate social level of the “joke” and the more profound ontological level of the shared “slight transvestite twist” (“Exchanging Hats” 3-4). Although farcically performed by the “unfunny uncles,” the male appropriation of the feminine hat unwittingly exposes the performative nature of the hat in its solidification of gender signification. In “Exchanging Hats,” the repeated, incorrectly gendered appropriation of symbolically invested hats serves to destabilize the field of gender by highlighting the ultimately performative nature of the signified gender beneath the gendered hat itself, exposing gender as an ultimately malleable and social construction. In Butlerian terms, this gender parody “reveals

that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin” (Butler 188).

Despite the destabilization of normative gender characterization inherent in this parodic gender performance, the poem emphasizes the inflexibility and the concrete social consequences of the binary gender system. As semiotic indicators of gender status, the hats that circulate throughout the poem serve to enforce and reflect binary systems of gendered power. Although the “unfunny uncles” who open the poem engage in performative gender parody, their gender play consists of “trying on,” not wholly integrating, a “lady’s hat” (“Exchanging Hats” 2). By refusing to appropriate fully the feminine signifier, the unfunny uncles successfully engage in gender play without abdicating the hegemonic authority inherent in their signified masculinity. For these males, socially privileged by their gender, gender parody enacts the solidification of the binary gender hierarchy at the same time that it allows them to temporarily embody the semiotics of the socially subordinate. Despite the uncles’ donning of the feminine signifier, these men both retain and utilize their masculine privilege: the men “insist” on their appropriation of the feminine signifier, achieving this appropriation by commandeering not only a “ladies” hat, but a “*lady’s* hat”: that of a female individual (“Exchanging Hats” 1-2, emphasis mine). Despite the apparent destabilization of the gender binary inherent in this gender parody, the unfunny uncles continue to position themselves as authoritative agents in active command over the poem’s passive female. The uncles’ performative donning of the female hat semiotically transforms them into the female; their actions, however, equally semiotically invested, anchor them firmly in male performance. The performance of both socially normative male and female gender identities destabilizes the binary structure of gender at the same time that it reinforces the dominance of the performed male role. When engaged in gender parody, therefore, the uncles

seem to inhabit a semiotically neutral space in which gender identity is recognized as a performative structure, yet arbitrarily maintained as the fundamental factor in the gendered power hierarchy.

In contrast to the incongruously cosmic immensity of the uncle, the “Aunt” who appears in line twenty-nine is honed and diminutive. The qualification of the aunt’s description of “slim” with the adjective “exemplary” suggests that even this thinness is semiotic in nature. The aunt outwardly manifests socially normative femininity through this “exemplary” thinness: unlike the unfunny uncle, whose signifier encourages him to a grander occupation of space than necessary, the aunt evidences her compliance with social mandates that the female diminish her occupation of both physical and symbolic space by her “slim” stature (“Exchanging Hats” 29). The speaker’s presentation of the aunt’s “exemplary” slimness is followed, however, by the presentation of the aunt’s socially non-normative “avernal eyes” (“Exchanging Hats” 29-30). This suggestion of the aunt’s inner deviance despite her outward compliance with social gender norms is reflected in the metrical deviance of the line. While the praise of the aunt (in line twenty-nine) as “exemplary and slim” follows the loose trochaic tetrameter established in the preceding stanza, emphasizing the slimness of the aunt by its omission of the expected final stressed syllable, the presentation of her infernality (in line thirty) consists of a parallel metrical deviance. Nevertheless, the speaker emphasizes that this deviance, however apparent, is both physically concealed by the “vast, shady, turned-down brim” of the aunt’s hat and symbolically stifled by the feminine social subordination of which it is a vestimentary signifier (“Exchanging Hats” 32). The aunt’s deviant “avernal eyes” are contained underneath the brim of the feminine signifier just as the symbolic feminine “I” contained inside is policed by socially normative power structures.

Significantly, it is this deviant “I” whose gaze closes the poem. While the unfunny uncle of the penultimate stanza may possess hegemonic privilege in his vestimentary signifier, the aunt of the final stanza possesses in hers the much more transformative element of the watchful, deviant human spirit. The speaker’s mention of the “slow changes” the aunt witnesses from underneath the “vast, shady, turned-down brim” of her hat enigmatically suggests the transformative potentiality of the aunt’s gaze: the vestimentary signifier in fact inverts its professed function of gender performativity by becoming a masquerade tool used to conceal deviant feminine motives behind the appearance of socially normative passivity (“Exchanging Hats” 30-31). In effect, the poem’s final line reappropriates the gendered vestimentary drag performance by suggesting that considering the aunt’s inner deviance, her feminine vestimentary signifier is itself a performative “tool” by which she conceals her deviance: through the vestimentary signifier, the aunt engages in the “drag” of social normativity. The equalization of socially normative gender performance and drag reinforces the poem’s emphasis on the ultimately arbitrary nature of fashion codes as a semiotic system. Vestimentary gender performance here reaches its apex of plasticity: it is proven to be a malleable language useful not only to the maintenance but also the deconstruction of semiotic codes of social identity. This malleability reinforces the ultimately performative nature of the semiotic system, echoing Barthes’ proclamation that “there is no ‘proof’ of [the language of fashion] other than its readability, its immediate understanding” (Barthes 100). Likewise, there is no “proof” of individual social gendered identity other than that which is projected as a function of this “readability.” This dependence of the vestimentary sign on its readability in the determination of individual gender identity ultimately solidifies its performative nature. In the solidification and maintenance of gender identity, the performance inherent in the donning of a “miter” does

significantly “matter”: just as the “shadow of a man is only as big as his hat,” it seems that the gender identity of an individual is only as stable as his or her fashion choices (“Exchanging Hats” 24, “Man-Moth” 3).

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From the Editor's Desk

Katie Little

Will the Real Jane Austen Please Stand Up?

Since we are celebrating the two-hundredth anniversary of Austen's most beloved novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, this year, now is an ideal time to evaluate Austen's writing and legacy. She has an undeniably vast and fervent fan base—just ask the costumed masses at the annual Jane Austen Festival in Bath, England. However, for every passionate devotee, there is an equally resistant or dismissive detractor of Austen's work. I don't think either camp sees a full picture of Austen's literary project. This commentary seeks to defend Austen from her critics—as well as her fans—in an attempt to present a fuller picture of Austen as a writer.

Austen's style is both a *mélange* of and a divergence from the novel styles of the previous century. Similar to Henry Fielding and Frances Burney, she satirizes the vicious and the self-important members of society, but she does so with much more subtlety than the picaresque style of these predecessors. She adopts the moralizing goal of the sentimental conduct novel, punishing vice and rewarding virtue, but adds a degree of rationalism and specifies the type of morality that her heroines should develop. Burney and Fielding's villains and cads look and act as though they are vicious. Consequently, in their works, conduct generally suffices as a signifier of goodness. However, for Austen, conduct is often deceptive and masks a person's true character. Mr. Wickham acts and speaks the part of the hero until his wickedness becomes apparent from his elopement and from Mr. Darcy's testimony. Conversely, Mr. Darcy appears to be the villain and a prude because his conduct is reserved. Elizabeth's primary lesson in *Pride*

and Prejudice is not to judge based on first impressions (which was the novel's original title), since they lead her judgment astray. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Willoughby also uses his immaculate appearance and conduct to mask his true colors. Many of Austen's heroines are derided for suspecting a lack of moral fiber in these men. Elinor is considered unfeeling for not rejoicing in Marianne's relationship with Willoughby. Fanny Price is chastised for misplaced arrogance in not accepting Henry Crawford's offer of marriage. Superficiality is, in Austen's view, the root of many evils. It is what allows Willoughby, Wickham, and the other Austen rakes to get away with their evildoing. It is what fills the minds of Lydia and Maria, fuels their irrationality, and leads them to throw themselves at undeserving men. Through these vapid or vicious characters, Austen promotes depth and quality of character over acceptable conduct and pleasant appearances.

Contemporary scholarship often dismisses Austen as a novelist solely concerned with the domestic sphere, one who ignores the way eighteenth-century English society oppressed women. Her novels do take place within the parameters of the domestic and societal concerns of England's gentry. However, she uses this closed system as a setting for developing admirable female heroes. Unlike her picaresque or sensationalist predecessors, Austen's lessons lie in her subtleties. At first appearances, a reader might think her novels are about women learning to behave properly. After a closer look, her novels reveal heroines who learn to be substantive, moral, educated women—the third of these attributes being the most noteworthy. Austen is not oblivious to the feminist movement. Instead, she works feminism into her heroines' thoughts and actions. Anne of *Persuasion*, Elizabeth of *Pride and Prejudice*, Elinor of *Sense and Sensibility*, and Fanny of *Mansfield Park*, are all rational women of strong moral fiber. Why? They are educated. However, the type of education they receive is important as well. Maria and Julia, born

into a wealthy, aristocratic family, have all of the resources necessary for an education. Despite “all their promising talents and early information, they [are] entirely deficient in the less common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity, and humility. In everything but disposition” (Austen 17-18). Though they know many things, they do not know the right things. Austen’s admirable heroines are educated not only in facts, figures, and accomplishments but also in how to reason and how to be virtuous. This didactic storytelling brings to life Mary Wollstonecraft’s arguments in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Wollstonecraft claims that “women are not allowed to have sufficient strength of mind to acquire what really deserves the name of virtue” (84). That which deserves the name of virtue, she argues, is virtue that follows from the exercise of reason—exemplified by the interiority of Austen’s moral heroines. Soldiers and silly women in Georgian England “practice the minor virtues with punctilious politeness . . . and acquire manners before morals” (89)—the moral superficiality that is evident in Austen’s vicious characters (e.g. Mr. Wickham, a lieutenant; Lydia; Maria).

In some respects, Austen even anticipates a feminist proposition articulated over a century later by Virginia Woolf. Woolf claims that, “a woman must have money and a room of her own to write fiction” (6). So women cannot be expected to be academically or creatively fruitful if they do not have the physical and emotional space necessary to develop their reason and creativity. Austen lays down the groundwork for this argument in her heroines with active minds. Fanny Price is often considered the weakest of Austen’s heroines because of her meekness and reserve. However, what she lacks in social confidence, she makes up for in moral resolve. She refuses to compromise her principles for what is considered rightful conduct. From whence does this docile, submissive heroine garner this resolve? From her education, her provisions, and from having a room of her own. She is given the same type of education as her

wayward cousins, Maria and Julia; however, she is excluded from their frivolity and finds comfort and solace in her cousin, Edmund's rational discourse and in reading. Additionally, she is able to retreat to "a room of her own," where she can read and reflect—a luxury rarely afforded women. This detail shows the reader that Austen considered privacy and introspection important for reason and morality. I have often heard Austen criticized for re-creating the same world over and over in each of her novels. This may, in fact, stand as a feminist perspective of its own: she declares by her limited worldview that her powers as a dependent woman are limited. However, she uses her pen and her domestic perspective to critique her society through stories of silly and sensible characters alike.

The attention Austen gives to virtue and depth of character is often overlooked by both critics and fans, who tend to focus on the surface-level aspects of Austen's world (i.e. Regency Era clothes, manners, tastes, etc.). I will freely admit that I have bought into this "fan-girl" side of Austen. I have, in fact, made the pilgrimage to Bath to witness the "official" Jane Austen Festival while studying in England and greatly enjoyed all of the festivities. However, I think Austen would be amused to see the display of anachronistic bonnets and pageantry in which people parade around in her honor every year. Austen saw value in being culturally relevant—using the social conventions available, such as balls, to meet people and hopefully develop meaningful relationships elsewhere. However, the characters that spend too much time concerned with ribbons, bonnets, and gowns are unable to see beyond that superficial life and develop a thoughtful, moral life. There is certainly irony in the fact that much of Austen's contemporary appeal lies in the fashions of the Regency Period, when Austen explicitly satirizes characters who are overly concerned with appearances. Audiences of Austen film adaptations want to see passionate romances or elegant costumes and settings—pleasing aspects, but they do

not lead us to be more thoughtful or virtuous. The setting of the period and the characters' relationships are important elements of Austen's stories, but I would argue that she would want us to look past the surface, search deeper into her texts and emulate the rational, moral life her heroines illustrate.

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From the Editor's Desk

Ryan Plemmons

Toward a Definition of Poetry

During one of our *Wide Angle* staff meetings a few weeks ago, we were discussing poetry and some wildly different approaches to the medium when the subject turned to prose poetry. Some of us didn't know what to do with it. How can something be prosaic *and* poetic? Isn't that a contradiction of terms? These questions played in my mind long after the meeting ended and led me to ask a deceptively simple question: what is poetry? Many scholars and poets have tried their hands at defining poetry, but any hope of lasting success is as unlikely as successfully digging for water in the desert with a spoon. And yet, people generally know when they encounter something poetic. There's simply something different about experiencing poetry. Personally, I feel that I know what poetry *is*, but to define it using constricting and often unnecessary words seems a daunting task. I think poetry is so tied to our affections that the wordless emotional byproducts of a poem are often totally subjective, rendering a precise definition of poetry improbable.

But here I am, writing, using language in an attempt to define poetry. I realize that I've contradicted myself here. "Very well, then, I contradict myself" (1324), yawps Whitman, and I feel that the genre itself echoes that chorus. Poems are often rigidly structured and constrained by meter and length, and, even when invoking free verse, every line break, every phrase, every word, every punctuation should be chosen carefully. Poems must be constructed with care. The paradox is that the best poems use language as a restructuring tool, ostensibly changing the way their readers understand language. By that, I mean that great poetry often finds new uses for

language. The structure, while meticulously created, co-mingles with words and changes traditional conceptions of language. A great poem will take its readers to a place where accepted meanings of words no longer apply. A poem is a place where “madness” becomes “divinest sense” (Dickinson 1), where eating an oyster transforms a person into “all verb, pure verb” (Heaney 25). The linguistic experience of a poem primarily disorients readers or listeners and becomes negation. Not “negative” in the sense of bad or wrong. Instead, I mean that our linguistic expectations get subverted and negated in the moment of reading or hearing a poem. Traditional language no longer applies when interacting with a poem, and this twisting and warping changes the expectation of what language “should” do. It opens up the mind to new possibilities for experiencing and creating language.

I think such experiences can happen anywhere, and I think we in academia often try to limit what and where poetry occurs. We rightfully laud writers such as Shakespeare, Dickinson, Whitman, Heaney, and others who fashioned themselves as poets. While I think studying these writers has been invaluable to growing as a critical thinker and reader, I also think that if we open ourselves up to the negative experiences with language I just mentioned, then our conception of poetry would be much more inclusive. I came to this realization on the same day as our aforementioned conversation on prose poetry.

That evening, a couple of my roommates and I went to a local coffee shop to hear a duo who were recently featured on an NPR segment. None of us had heard their music, but there are worse ways to spend a lazy Friday evening. But, as the band approached the stage, they did something unexpected. They got out a cardboard box and proceeded to pass out booklets to all of us. Flipping through the booklets, it was apparent that they were full of the band’s lyrics. Before each song, they would announce the title of the song and the corresponding page number in the

book, and they encouraged us to read along, revealing that they saw music as both a visual and auditory experience. Maybe the most interesting thing about these books was the layout of each lyric. The words were not divided into typical delineations of verse and chorus. Instead, the structure of each lyric was, well, poetic: stanzas of thought, carefully determined lineation, alliteration, assonance, metaphor, and dissonance. All of those things close readers look for in a poem were here, in this coffee shop, by people who, when asked after the concert, did not identify themselves as poets.

The songs themselves became a kind of negative experience, a subversion of my poetic expectations. Often, one of the singers would say the song number and go off on a tangent, explaining how the song came into being, but as soon as I heard which song they were doing, I would immediately open my booklet and consume the poem/song. Before a note was played or a lyric sung, I formulated in my head an expectation of how the song should sound. The tempo, the tones, and the harmonies—they played themselves out in my head before the song began. And when the song started, my expectations were almost always subverted. My mistake was in underestimating the poetic nature of these pieces, by reading these poems only through my conventional understandings of language. Because I was used to reading a poem or hearing a poem spoken, my mind was ill prepared to encounter a poem through song. And yet, I knew that I had encountered poetry. The concert took me to a negative linguistic space, where I had to reevaluate not only the lyrics, but also the way they were presented and ostensibly interpreted.

Soon after the concert, I realized that the prevailing conceptions of poetry are too narrow, and people probably miss potential encounters with linguistic subversion every day because they have tried to categorize poems, forcing them to be the words written and spoken by “real” poets. I think that instead of coming to an ironclad definition of poetry, we should define poetry by its

affective power. When we hear something or read something that forces us to redefine the very language we use, that is poetry. It doesn't matter if it comes in the form of Shakespeare's sonnets or a homeless man's ramblings or a concert in a coffee shop. Poetry *is* that encounter with the negative. It can happen anywhere if we keep our eyes (and ears) open.

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