

# THE ASHEN THE EGG

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# THE ASHEN EGG

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**Deadline:** Submissions must be received in CH 135 no later than May 31, and must be accompanied by the nomination form to be considered.

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The Wanderer and the Fixed Foot:  
A Look at Adrienne Rich's Response to John  
Donne's "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning"

*Ashley Coulter*

Three hundred and thirty-seven years stand between two poems of the same name. In 1633, John Donne's "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" was first published, two years following his death; in 1970, Adrienne Rich's "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" was published in response to what had, over three centuries, become Donne's renowned love poem. Yet, time was not the only evolution since the publication of Donne's valediction. Responding to the highly conventional notions of love, Rich calls the bluff of "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" by shedding light on Donne's unjust treatment of women. Representative of his time, Donne's portrayal of woman as a static, inferior, and dependent figure reflects the notion of women as inferior. Thus, Adrienne Rich, in responding to Donne's valediction, revises this oppressive notion in light of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's new ideas of gender, aiming to free women from its constraint by creating an entirely separate identity for women.

Typical of the time, Donne presented love in a highly idealized fashion. Hence, "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" has an underlying theme of love's boundlessness. In telling his lover to refrain from grieving his absence, to "make no noise" (5) and to show "no tear-floods" (6), Donne romanticizes love's ability to defy long distances; grieving is unnecessary because even when far apart, he says, they remain together. Better yet, the love that Donne and his lover share cannot be subjected to normal conventions of the world: not only does it defy long distances, but it defies physicality and time as well. The love between Donne and his lover is so sacred that it cannot be de-

finned by bodily attractions or physical things: the lovers “care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss” (20). Love has amalgamated their souls as “one” (21) and therefore, they stand above the natural laws of the world. Donne portrays their connection as one that, even when presented with a long distance between the two lovers, their souls “endure not yet / A breach, but an expansion” (23). This unity extends into the well-known conceit of the compass. Donne represents each lover as a foot of a compass; they move with one another and while one foot “doth roam” (30), the other “leans, and hearkens after it” (31). Love’s inseparable quality and its ability to defy worldly conventions in “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” is representative of Donne’s highly idealized notion of love.

Rich’s response to Donne’s idealism, in her own “A Valediction Forbidding Mourning,” begins with a bold inversion. As Rich believes this inseparable quality of Donne’s love is both outdated and detrimental to women, she seeks to revise such a notion. In responding to the conceit of the compass, Rich’s “A Valediction” begins “My swirling wants. Your frozen lips” (1). Immediately, Rich inverts the conceit. In Donne’s “A Valediction,” he represented himself, the man, as the foot that roams: “me, who must, / Like th’ other foot, obliquely run” (33-34). Therefore, this leaves the woman to be the foot which “leans” (31) toward the roaming foot and “hearkens after it” (31). In the inverted conceit, Rich depicts herself, the woman, as the “swirling” (1) or wandering foot, while her lover, the man, is depicted as the “frozen” (1) or fixed foot. This inversion serves as a modern revision to the conceit of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

In the remaining lines of the first stanza, Rich presents the original conceit as a fallacy. Donne portrays the woman as a “fixed foot” (27) that “makes no show / To move, but doth, if th’ other do” (27-28). Woman is thus viewed as a static figure, unmoving, and moreover, dependent upon the roaming foot, or the man. As Rich’s poem continues, she admits the personal offense she takes from Donne’s claim that woman is a dependent and reliant figure. This reading clarifies that when the speaker says “the grammar turned and attacked [me],” (2) it’s Donne’s grammar she is referring to. In this, the poem reveals the harm that Donne’s idealized love can cause. With the title of the poem as reference, the reader can assume that Rich, when speaking of themes being written, is speaking of Donne’s themes and writing

respectively. Hence, Rich marks Donne’s “Themes, written under duress” (3), as nothing but “emptiness” (4). That is to say, Donne’s notions of highly idealized love, branding woman as a static and dependent figure, is forced upon her, without her acceptance, and furthermore, those ideas are empty and unfounded.

After identifying the fallacy of Donne’s idealized love and his portrait of woman as a “fix’d foot,” Rich, in the second stanza, deems his notions detrimental on a broader scale. On behalf of women, Rich addresses Donne directly and in an assertive tone, telling him “I want you to see this before I leave” (6). Speaking to Donne’s fallacious notions of women, Rich blames Donne for being a contributing agent of such fallacies. The continuation of Donne’s fallacious notions has, over time, “slowed the healing of wounds” (5) for not only Rich, but women everywhere. Over time, these notions have set up ungraspable notions of love and suppressed women by expecting them to be static and dependent on men. Rich points to the “experience of repetition” (7) of these fallacies as an essential “death” (7) for woman’s independence. And though she is writing this poem as a revision, Rich identifies her “criticism” (8) as a “failure...to locate the pain” (8). No matter her words, no poem can really envelop all the damage done by such oppressive notions. In this, Rich expresses that the harm intended by Donne’s fallacies far outweighs the retraction she can accomplish by merely one valediction.

In lines nine through eleven, Rich identifies the modern-day result of Donne’s notion of woman as a static, dependent, and inferior figure. Blood stands as a prevalent symbol for menstruation and thus, womanhood. Yet, these repeated notions of inferiority being fed to women have led to their oppression; thus their “bleeding,” or femininity, should be “under control” (10). The control could certainly be said to be inflicted by society, aptly represented by the message of control being displayed on a very public poster inside a bus. Consequently, the oppression of women through fallacious notions of dependency and inferiority has caused the women of Rich’s time to become false themselves, or less real. Perhaps the continuance of such notions has led women to succumb to these notions themselves, in turn causing them to believe that they are indeed static, unmoving, and dependent. Rich dissents from this notion, thus deeming herself

“A red plant in a cemetery of plastic wreaths” (11)—a real woman among the fake, a free woman among the oppressed.

After correcting Donne’s conceit, pointing to its fallacious nature, and proving that it is harmful to women, Rich sets out in the conclusion of the poem to take back her own freedom on behalf of women everywhere. In order to accomplish this, she places herself in opposition to Donne. Imagining what Donne’s defense might be to her accusations, Rich expects Donne to defensively point to the poem as merely “a dialect called metaphor” (12) and therefore something that should not be taken literally. Rich defies Donne’s metaphorical language by presenting “unglossed” images: “hair, glacier, flashlight” (13). As Rich breaks loose from Donne’s hold, or his projected notions of womanhood, she does away with his metaphors in light of their harmful nature. Therefore, she presents images (“hair, glacier, flashlight”) in a most literal sense, calling them “unglossed,” and thus defying the metaphorical nature of Donne. In referencing Donne’s conceit of the compass, Rich rewrites her own version, saying that when she takes a trip, it means forever. This idea of leaving forever, of cutting the ties to all previous attachments, gives instant freedom to women. No longer is the woman bound down like a fixed foot, but she has taken the place of the roamer, and feels no obligation to ever return—the ultimate declamation of her independence and separate identity. The last line of the poem is a moment of triumph for Rich’s independence. In breaking free from Donne’s notion of what a woman should be, she now is able to live life “in her own way” (18). Moreover, she is able to take a poem she felt needed updating, and perhaps resented for its underlying message, and essentially rewrite it to suit her “own,” individual ideas, and further representative of the idea of the new gender ideas of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In challenging John Donne’s portrayal of women in “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning,” Rich has not only identified his fallacious mistake, but has written her own “A Valediction Forbidding Mourning” that upholds the notions of freedom and independence for women. In doing so, her revisions have made one small victory in combating notions of unrealistic, inseparable love and of women as static, dependent figures “hearkening” after men. Rich attempts to break the vicious cycle of these fallacious notions that have been reinforced since the

time of John Donne. Ironically, while Donne’s “A Valediction” forbids mourning in celebration of the unification of two souls, Rich’s “A Valediction” forbids mourning in celebration of woman’s separate identity entirely.

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## Barker Reveals Major Social Upheaval in *Regeneration's* Minor Female Characters

Tracy Jo Ingram

Prevalent throughout Pat Barker's novel *Regeneration* are issues reflecting insecurities and uncertainties regarding changes in gender roles and concepts of sexual identity that emerged during the First World War in the United Kingdom. As men abandoned their positions in the factories to fight on the front lines, the entrance of women into the workforce became a primary means for a gendered paradigm shift. Although the novel largely explores the issues of masculine identity and sexuality as a focus, Barker still encapsulates the issues and societal pressures working women faced during the Great War in just a handful of short scenes with a small batch of minor female characters. With fewer than thirty pages dedicated to the *Munitionettes* (as were called the female weapon/ammunition factory workers), the author captures the historical emergence and significance of women in the industrial workforce with characters Sarah, Betty, and Lizzie, and illuminates for readers many aspects of the sociological undertaking Britain experienced as a result of this. While specifically examining the issues of gender, lower-class work, and the attitudes related to both during WWI in Great Britain, this paper will investigate the expected feminine roles for women, how the factory working-woman populace met or failed these expectations, and how the working female characters in the novel illuminate the documented reality.

Before the start of the war in July 1914, fewer than five million women were in the work force ("Women (UK)" 498). By the end of the war in 1918, 6.2 million women were employed in various positions throughout the United Kingdom. Women, who were previously most likely to be domestic servants if employed,

were now able to be clerks, dairy workers, motor-van and tram drivers, ticket-collectors, and what will be a focus throughout this paper, shell-makers--*The Munitionettes* ("Women (UK)" 498). The sectors to gain the greatest increase in the number of women workers were transportation, agriculture (farming), and industry, which gained three-quarters of a million female employees, but it was the "factory workers and domestic servants [that] made up the largest proportion of women workers in the country" (Nicholson 123). The munitions industry, in particular, included 819,000 women in July 1917, but by the end of the war the figure had risen to nearly a million ("Women in the War" 1270). Within a matter of just a couple of years, women had become a small, but integral part of the war labor force.

Though the total increase of women in the workforce was only 25% throughout the four war years, the shift in gender roles that occurred was unprecedented ("Women (UK)" 498). The entire concept of female employment had begun to shift into mainstream consciousness, pushing the boundaries of traditional sex roles with the realization that women could function outside of the home, an issue never previously confronted by the British populace. Though the Edwardian Era had less constricted ideas about the essence of female sexuality than the Victorian Era, the idea of a lady breadwinner was still baffling as it recognized a woman's autonomy of the self for which Great Britain was unprepared. For the first time, married women laborers faced the challenge of meeting the traditional feminine expectations of wife/mother and the demands of a masculine role—primary income earners. While these married workers constituted the majority of the female labor force and faced sex-specific demands, none faced gendered expectations more gruelingly than single female laborers ("Women (UK)" 498). Nicholson, author of *Singled Out*, writes that unmarried working women "bore the brunt of much abuse" (109) and that the war "had left them particularly vulnerable" (124).

To elaborate, because female workers were gaining financial autonomy, working women came to be seen as a threat to the natural structured order of British society. Single females, who were not responsible for paying debts or feeding mouths, were therefore cruelly regarded as "superfluous," their earnings used only possibly used for "selfish indulgences" (109). In the novel,

munitions worker Sarah recalls that before the war she was only “earning ten bob,” but now in the factory she was “well paid” at “fifty bob a week” working “twelve hour shifts, six days a week” (Barker 89). While it was true that the war allowed Sarah the opportunity to earn an extra forty shillings a week, the reality was that that women, particularly single women, still hardly made a fraction of what men made. Indeed, the average Munitionette made only half of what a male worker made for doing the same labor in twelve hour shifts (“Women in the War” 1270). Females were employed two for the price of one male, a decision unfairly standardized by the factory management itself, and still yet, were forced to face the criticism for their employment, “their precarious independence, their latch-keys, their thirty bob a week, and never enough to eat” (Nicholson 125). As the previous quote implies, female workers weren’t quite afforded the luxury that most would like to have believed.

In fact, the plight of the single working woman became a serious issue for several reasons, including the poor health linked to factory conditions, the ramifications associated with an independent sex life, and the perceived threat to male power and job security. Each of these issues stood contrary to the traditional British expectation for young ladies: marriage. As it became clear that the violation of this expectation was not an issue that would disappear during the war (nor after the war) due to so many men away to combat or left dead, it became a source of public lamentation in media outlets.

Journalist Leonora Eyles wrote of unmarried career women that they were “certain to suffer from nasty disorders of the unused reproductive organs” (qtd in Nicholson 118). It was as if one “surrendered motherhood in favour of a job at [her own] peril” (118). The male author of *Lysistrata* (1927), Anthony Ludivici, in his “lament for the unmarried,” claimed that there was no possible way for working girls, “withered and broken” by long years of labor, to be anything other than “tragic figures” (qtd in Nicholson 118). These sorts of responses were seen as “in defense” of career women; most media responses directly told women that their goal should marriage.

Just months after the war ended, *Woman’s Weekly* contributor Rosalie Neish reminded women just exactly what her role was if she wanted to attract a man for the only “Finale!” a woman should want for herself: “The Wedding March . . . and that little

grey home in the West--matrimonial heaven” (qtd in Nicholson 74). She should let him see she was “a home-maker and a home-lover,” “be careful about her appearance,” and “above all, be cheerful and gay and sunny-tempered” (Neish qtd in Nicholson 74). Similarly, journalist Charles Darwin in his article “The Girl I’d Hate to Marry!”, printed in *Women’s Life* in 1920, begged to be preserved from a girl “earning their own living” with the “insane crazed” notions of “independence” and “equal rights” (qtd in Nicholson 75). Women were presented with the idea that to be “ambitious” was to get married, but the reality was that gendered expectations for single women were bound solely to the idea of marriage.

In the novel, Sarah’s mother appears to closely align herself with the same criticisms as the aforementioned public voices, reminding Sarah that she has “no sympathy” for her and that if she’d had married rather than taking the job, she could have “made sure of the pension” (Barker 91). Barker writes Sarah’s mother as the voice of critical dissent, providing readers with the impression of not only the voice of older generations, but proving that not all women, like the majority of the male populace, supported other women in their working endeavors. As Nicholson addresses, most British people agreed: “Right up until the Second World War, it seemed plain... that marriage was still the better option for a woman than trying to support herself” (122). For the single working woman, her bachelor way of life was consistently looked down upon as inelegant and unladylike. Doubtless this was because single working womanhood stood as a threat to what Nicholson describes as “Womanliness”: the customary order of remaining subtle and reserved, getting married, bearing children, and rearing them to be proper British citizens (75). Women were the unpinning of a smoothly running society, and if they were out their place and competing for male power, then naturally, society was less secure.

As would follow, it is obvious that the traditional expectations of femininity demanded that women were healthy for marriage and motherhood. Contrarily, the reality for factory workers were incredibly poor health conditions. “Great Britain, Women, Social Impact of World War One” from the *Women and War: A Historical Encyclopedia from Antiquity to the Present* describes the Munitionettes as having “tough” work, and in

conditions that were “frequently unhealthy” (235). *The Encyclopedia of World War I*, in its entry on “Women in War,” refer to their work as “extremely hazardous” (90). *Singled Out* author Nicholson repeatedly refers to munitions work as “unutterably hard” (123). The harsh conditions of factory work made women unmarriedable, both for their perceived independence and the illnesses they procured.

Consistent with such historical accounts, Barker manages to make clear in just a few scenes how hazardous working conditions truly were in the factories. Repeatedly referencing the women’s skin as being “yellow” (87, 110, 111, 129, 201), “bright yellow” (194), and “anaemic” (194), readers gather that the “very demanding work... where masks were worn,” where women “looked like machines, whose sole function was to make other machines,” was taxing both mentally and physically (201). At what would be several months into her position, Sarah describes “the munitions factory at night looked like hell” (199). Barker also describes the women as “subdued, with that clogged, dull look” (200), who were constantly “dragging themselves to their feet” to get back to the line (111). Though the author does not explicitly touch on the desperation of women’s health conditions, including what Nicholson describes as women “who dared not visit the doctor in case they lost their jobs,” Barker does illustrate the diseased and monotonous environment in which factory women worked, as well as its effect on their psyches (126). Later, when Sarah’s mother remarks on how her appearance would most likely keep her from marriage (201), Barker also draws in how the physical manifestations of such labor may keep women from their expected roles.

Aside from poor working conditions, unmarried women were, for the first time, also moving out of their parent’s homes to live closer to their factory workplaces. Because of this, the result was a greater sense of “confidence, as well as permissiveness, especially because the men they met might be killed shortly afterwards. The “new woman” was therefore a blend of independence and sexual freedom” (“Great Britain, Women, Social Impact of World War One” 236). Barker portrays this aspect of women’s working life many times over.

The first instance of independence depicted, though not of a single female, is in Chapter 10 when Sarah’s co-worker Lizzie finds out her abusive husband is returning on leave from the

war front. Rather than celebrating his return, Lizzie mourns: “I don’t want him back on leave. I don’t want him back when it’s over. As far as I’m concerned the Kaiser can keep him” (110). Upon revealing that she wishes him dead, she exclaims that if he were to die, she’d get herself new false teeth and “have a bloody good time,” and even goes so far as to say that the day the war began was the day “peace broke out” (110). In this scene Barker exhibits the sense of independence Lizzie gained by virtue of finally being able to experience womanly solitude while not confronted by the confinements and demands of a stressful marriage.

Other, perhaps more obvious depictions of the “new woman” are through characters Betty and Sarah. Barker handles the issue of sexual freedom with particular delicacy, exploring the double binds women were placed in during this time period, especially with concern to the issue of abortion. Betty, who did enjoy her sexual freedom, is portrayed as “desperate” with fear trying to cover for a pregnancy with a self-induced abortion in the hopes of not be caught in the trap of the town’s public eye (202). Lizzie, who shares the story with the other girls, explains the multiple means by which Betty tried to abort the fetus, finally offering the detail of a “straightened wire coat hanger” that she “shoves in [to] her bladder” (202). Betty begs to not be sent to the hospital knowing she’ll be found out. The doctor, upon her arrival, expresses that she should “be ashamed of [her]self,” that the fetus in her uterus “is not just an inconvenience... [but rather] a human being” (202). In these few short paragraphs, Barker highlights multiple facets about the British attitudes towards the concept of a female sex life: the shame a woman must feel for her own sexual freedom (particularly an unmarried woman), the secret means with which a woman was expected to handle the “ramifications” of her sexual independence, and the standard British outlook as represented by the doctor’s comments.

Sarah’s mother, Ada, also warns her daughter to be weary of sexual freedom. Sarah, as is consistent with historical working females, no longer lives at home. As such, Ada cautions Sarah to not have sex with her boyfriend Billy unless she is able to “cope with the consequences” (193). She assumes that Sarah puts no “value on” herself if she’s having sex, and that she’s “never gunna get engaged until [she] learns to keep [her] knees

together" (194). Once again, Barker uses Ada to express the foremost expected role for British women—marriage—and more specifically, chastity until marriage. Each of these scenarios are regarded as perceived threats to the stability of gender roles and to a nation intimidated by its evolvment. Barker subtly highlights each condition within minor scenes that capture the relevant concerns in an understated but concrete manner.

Finally, one last issue the author addresses is the fear that by virtue of women having jobs, men who came home from the war presumably would not, as one would expect, "responded with anger at the apparent threat to their jobs" ("Great Britain, Women, Social Impact of World War One" 236). When first meeting Sarah and her friends, Billy Prior, Sarah's to-be-boyfriend, observes that women "seemed to have changed so much during the war, to have expanded in all kinds of ways, whereas men over the same period had shrunk into smaller and smaller space" (90). Though later Billy will decide otherwise, he initially interacts with Sarah on the basis of that women "owed him something, all of them, and she should pay" (128). Billy accurately acknowledges the expansion of a woman's dimension, and, equally as accurately, expresses his fear of this development. Kirk, author of "Recovered Perspectives: Gender, Class, and Memory in Pat Barker's Writing," agrees that Billy Prior provides "Barker with further spaces to explore issues of gender, class, and memory" (607). Though Billy's reservations are a little more esoterically reasoned, on a basic level, Barker genuinely captures the fear many men had: that their space was no longer valuable as woman's roles expanded.

The answer to each of these threats was marriage and marriage only; it kept women in their place at home. Though the novel never outright says this (aside for a few insinuations by Sarah's mother), Barker still massively encapsulates many of the issues pertaining to this gendered paradigm shift. Subtly, the novel accurately solidifies a working woman's sense of independence, both sexually and financially; correctly portrays issues of women living away from home for the first time, and deals with the ensuing issues of sexuality; records concerns of factory health; and addresses masculine threats to gendered evolvment.

All of these incredible important facts and issues Barker brings up in just a few scenes. And although she doesn't cover

women in other working roles or approach the women's movement, she still manages to significantly give context to women's issues and societal gender shifts during WWI in a novel largely *not* about that. She never explicitly bludgeons the reader with these concepts, but subtly reveals the discomfort that British society was faced with when women infiltrated the labor force. Kirk asserts that Barker "attempts to challenge representations of working-class women in fiction" (611), and it is without a doubt true that she not only accomplishes this, but that with four simple characters in a handful of simple scenes, Barker also covers the sociological undertaking of a country uprooted by war and by an upheaval in gender roles.

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## The Ecology of Jeeter Lester: The Land and *Tobacco Road*

*Meghan Kennedy*

Erskine Caldwell's 1932 novel *Tobacco Road* was groundbreaking at the time of its publication and remains a unique portrayal of life in the Depression-era South. Much of the criticism devoted to Caldwell's iconic work fixates on the social commentary offered by the Lesters. In a critique published in 1939 in *The Southern Poor White from Lubberland to Tobacco Road*, Caldwell is praised for portraying "the frank and full representation of the sordid elements in these people, (2) the emphasis upon sex, especially in comedy, (3) the exploration of stupid poor-white minds, (4) the tragic concept of the poor-white, and (5) the complete studies of poor-white men to match those of women" (McIlwane 219). Though the phrasing of these ideas is clearly dated, much critique of the book is based upon these same social and cultural concepts. The ecology of the land is typically mentioned in passing as little more than a testament to Jeeter Lester's depravity, but each of the social issues raised by Jeeter may be traced back to the ecology of the South as it is portrayed in the novel. His faults—his selfishness, ignorance, laziness, obsession with the land, disregard for property and the lives of others—and the allegory of Southern poor whites that they represent can be traced back to the agrarian history of the South. By linking Jeeter's flaws with his inability to leave the land and his inability to cultivate it, Caldwell allows for a defense of Jeeter Lester, ties the ecology of the South to its social flaws in an intimate way, and offers commentary on agricultural alternatives for Georgia.

Jeeter's most obvious fault is his incredible selfishness. Though the novel is littered with despicable acts, one of the most horrifying is Jeeter's refusal to move to Augusta even though it

would drastically improve his family's living conditions. Because of his adamant commitment to living out his days on the land, Jeeter consciously refuses a job in a cotton mill that would feed his starving wife, mother, son, and daughter. Nine of his seventeen children have already left home for better lives in cities or abandoned the South entirely. His wife repeatedly calls him a selfish fool for remaining so rooted to the land to the detriment of his family. But Jeeter's ties to the land are not inherently selfish; there is nothing wrong with the land's "powerful hold" (16) unless there is something drastically wrong with its ecology. In fact, another farmer voices the opinion that staying on the land is admirable, saying, "It looks to me like his children ought to have stayed at home and helped him run a farm" (179). There is nothing selfish about Jeeter's attachment itself—the flaw is in the land. When Captain John finds that he has wrung the land dry with his system of farming, he abandons ship. He leaves his former workers and tenants in the wreckage, knowing that their lives will ultimately be as ruined as the land. Captain John deems educating them about land stewardship and "the newer and more economical methods of modern agriculture" fruitless, though it is something that "would have enabled Jeeter, and scores of others who had become dependent . . . to raise crops for food, and crops to be sold at a profit" (63). Thus the reader can easily consider Jeeter selfish for clinging to the land, but his "inherited love of the land" is only a flaw because its soil has been depleted by monoculture farming (68).

It is also easy to deem Jeeter, and thereby the poor white South, entirely ignorant. Though he never actually raises a finger to cultivate the land, he stubbornly continues to think that the land can support him and chalks his misfortunes up to trials of his faith. He prays that "maybe God will send some way to allow the growing of a crop...He puts the land here, and the sun and rain—He ought to furnish the seed and the guano, somehow or other" (176). The reader can easily dismiss Jeeter as stupid or crazy in his determination to continue the same farming practices. His one source of hope throughout the novel is that he could, one day, get a mule, seed-cotton, and guano on credit from the store. His belief in the land and its ability to provide is not unfounded, however, as the narrator reveals in the history of the Lester land on the tobacco road: "Seventy-five years before, it had been the most desirable soil in the entire west-central part of Georgia...The soil at that time was better suited to the culti-

vation of tobacco than to that of any other crop" (63). At one time, the land had indeed been able to do what Jeeter hopes for. Jeeter's hardheaded belief in the land to provide is therefore not unfounded, but his persistence in farming as his father did is misguided. Caldwell links Jeeter's ignorant farming methods, along with those of his neighbors, to manipulation by outsiders and a reliance on tradition. Jeeter's own father raised a monoculture crop of cotton, despite its adverse effects on the soil, "but because of the sandy loam he found it necessary to use more and more fertilizer each year. The loose sandy soil would not hold the guano during the hard summer rains, and it was washed away before the roots of the plants could utilize it" (64). Jeeter is forced to follow in his father's footsteps by the loan sharks who "would come out to the farm and try to tell him how to plant the cotton and how much guano to put in to the acre" (114). The bankers that lend him money are outsiders, unfamiliar with the topography of the land and the content of the soil, and worse, unconcerned with its longevity in any sense. Their only interest is in gleaning the most profit from it as soon as possible. Jeeter's ignorance, as evidenced by his prior cultivation of the land and belief that the land will provide, is unavoidable because he has no suitable model for agriculture and is enforced by outsiders who are unconcerned with the repercussions of unsustainable methods.

Jeeter ultimately quits farming, an act that leads readers to fault him for laziness. His wife, Ada, quips that their children, aside from Dude and Ellie May, left because "they had better sense than to sit here and wait for you to put food in their empty mouths and bellies" (69). It has been nearly eight years since Jeeter last farmed the land, leaving his family with no income and no food. The last time Jeeter had tried to raise a crop, he had been forced to take out loans to purchase the seed-cotton and guano, and ended up paying back double the original loan and actually being in debt an additional three dollars. Jeeter swears to never repeat the experience and determines that "the land had become such a great item of expense" that he must let it lie fallow (65). He always plans on attempting to farm again or setting off for Fuller to beg for credit to purchase materials, but finds himself distracted and paralyzed from the prospect, particularly by the fact that his mule is dead. As John Matthews writes in "Trashing Modernism: Erskine Caldwell on the Southern Poor," "the loss of productive work on the land has

heightened the phantasmal practices of speculation and the monetization of labor and nature; the want of economic means has sapped individual will and made action a matter of idle visions" (209). The land was quite literally a sinkhole into which Jeeter had to keep ineffectually pouring money and fertilizer in an attempt to nourish depleted soil. Jeeter did not want to be lazy. Caldwell writes, "He did not like to sit idly on the porch and let the spring pass, without burning and plowing" (57). An agricultural past over which he has no control denies Jeeter rights to soil that can nurture him and denies him credit to remedy it. The store owner assures him that every farmer in the region is coming to Fuller begging for the same thing, and that anyone with sense "would be able to see how foolish it is to try to farm like things is now" (118). Jeeter's laziness, as exhibited by failing to cultivate the land, is negated; had he continued to beg for credit as he had in the past, he would continually be denied. Jeeter is faulted for not playing into a destructive and futile method of farming, though letting his land lie fallow is probably the most ecologically sound course of action he could take.

Though at no point does Jeeter actually farm his land, he spends the entirety of the novel obsessing about it. His constant circular thoughts about farming are contrasted against the stark inactivity of his life. Caldwell writes that although the land has lain untouched for nearly eight years, "...there was one thing in his life he tried to do with all the strength in his mind and body. That one thing was the farming of the land. There had been scarcely a moment in his life during the past six or seven years when he was not thinking about it" (62). McIlwaine focuses on how Caldwell's characters manifest the Southern poor white mentality, such as "a tendency of limited minds to obsessions; second, a marked insensitivity; and third, a somewhat paradoxical acuteness" (229). Jeeter's repetitive thoughts are used to underscore his stupidity, mental incapacity, and his class. Caldwell acknowledges his preoccupation almost mockingly when he writes, "There was an inherited love of the land in Jeeter that all his disastrous experiences with farming had failed to take away" (68). Jeeter's obsession, though unhealthy, is justified. There is something systemically flawed about the ecology of the land on which he has lived his entire life, the land occupied by the ghosts of his family and the former glory of his state, and he should be concerned. Jeeter's

perspective is easily dismissed because of his lack of education and erratic behavior, but his obsession also points to the serious disruptions in the ecology of his region that he cannot verbalize. Matthews describes the disturbance present in the novel as “the disorienting intrusion of an economy organized by mass production and consumption; greater social isolation of individuals; [and] the commodification of labor and land-based sustenance” (207). Early in the novel, Jeeter tries his best to articulate to Lov the environmental and economic disruption that has created his obsession:

I can't even raise me a crop of my own, because I ain't got no mule in the first place, and besides that, won't nobody let me have seed-cotton and guano on credit...When the winter goes, and when it gets to be time to burn off broom-sedge in the fields and underbrush in the thickets, I sort of want to cry I reckon it is...Then pretty soon all the other farmers start plowing. That's what gets underneath my skin the worse...I get all weak and shaky. (16)

Jeeter has lost access to his livelihood and to cultivating the soil; he has lost the ability to persist in an entire way of life in the South, in an agrarian lifestyle that was his only model. Written more than fifty years later but concerning the same landscape, *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*, by Janisse Ray, summarizes the plight of Jeeter as it continues into the present: “In the midst of new uncertainties in the world...we look around and see that the landscape that defined us no longer exists or that its form is altered so dramatically that we don't recognize it as our own” (271). Jeeter's obsession can be dismissed as mental illness or a description of the Southern poor white, or it can be viewed as a logical and reasonable response to the disruption in the ecology of the South and his powerlessness in the spiral of its ruin.

Jeeter may be accused of selfishness, ignorance, laziness, and obsession, but his most atrocious crimes, however, are committed against others. He snatches Lov's turnips and runs into the brush to eat them himself; he promises again and again to take Ellie May into Fuller to have surgery for her harelip but always spends the money on his own desires; he contributes to the destruction of Sister Bessie's new car in the course of one day; he tries to sleep with his son's wife; he starves, beats, and ultimately buries his own mother with no remorse. These actions are heinous, but they become defensible in light of his

psychological situation. McIlwane chinks the nature of this character up to Caldwell's development of “a long-neglected side of poor-white life, which, narrowed and bestialized by poverty, is of necessity strongly motivated by the instincts of sex, as well as of fear and hunger” (224). Beyond his social identity as a Southern poor white, Jeeter is unable to pursue his primary focus in life and avenue for income, and more importantly, he is unable to feed himself. Maslow describes the role of basic need gratification to an individual's psyche, saying, “The physiological needs, when unsatisfied, dominate the organism, pressing all capacities into their service and organizing these capacities so that they may be most efficient in this service...e.g. hunger-obsessed” (107). Jeeter physically cannot exhibit respect for objects or persons or exercise good stewardship of the earth because he cannot even feed himself. He cannot glean livelihood from the ravaged earth, so he cannot respect it, or anything on it. His utter disregard for the automobile and his relatives' lives is also, simply, a reflection of the utter disregard shown by the banks for the land and the myriad of lives that rely on it. Jeeter must live in the environmental wreckage of a system that has no respect for the land, and therefore he has no reason or ability to respect anything else. It is a cyclical tragedy that, as Lewis Nordan puts it in the introduction to the 1995 edition of *Tobacco Road*, lies “at the core of these lives that seem as sterile as the land on which they are lived” (vii). Jeeter's crimes, though committed in the social/cultural sphere, are a direct result of the environmental situation in which he finds himself unable to provide himself with personal fulfillment or even with sustenance.

Moving beyond Jeeter's individual actions, Caldwell at times offers direct insight into ecology as it relates to the Lesters. Caldwell is famous for depicting the social/cultural issues of the rural poor in Georgia in the 1930s with shocking realism, but they were not the true issue at hand. They are symptoms. At its core, *Tobacco Road* is a book about farming. The rare times that Caldwell speaks through the mouths of his characters to offer a moral message, its primary concern is ecological. After Jeeter's fiery demise, his son-in-law Lov says, “I reckon Jeeter done right...The mills ain't no place for a human who's got that in his bones...The ground sort of looks after people who keeps their feet on it. When people stand on planks in buildings all the

time, and walk around on hard streets, the ground sort of loses interest in the human" (182).

Caldwell advocates a life tied to the land, much like Jeeter's, but acknowledges throughout the novel that such a life can no longer exist in the South under the current agricultural system. The character of Jeeter proves this beyond a shadow of a doubt, but Caldwell goes on to offer direct advice on improving the poor Southern farmers' agriculture practices and subsequently their economic and social situations.

As spring approaches in the novel, all the farmers surrounding Jeeter burn over their lands under the guise of running out the boll weevils to sustain their cotton monoculture but not truly understanding why they do so. It is simply tradition. Embedded in a paragraph of straight description of the practice, Caldwell offers that, had they quit burning the fields indiscriminately and instead cultivated the pines, they could have had something to sell. He adds wistfully, "The cotton plants had to be sprayed with poison in the summer, anyway" (124). The author is directly proposing a new method of working with the land—encouraging native species of pine for the sale of wood and avoiding the use of pesticides—as a solution to the poverty lining each side of the tobacco road and the desolation of the Georgia earth. Caldwell may or may not have been implying that clear-cut logging was a viable alternative—he could not have foreseen that clear-cut logging would be the next practice to devastate Georgia, as Ray addresses fifty years later—but he was certainly suggesting a shift from the intensive monoculture farming that had ruined the soil. McIlwane faults Caldwell for such directives and for "drop[ping] the objective viewpoint by criticizing a landowner for unintelligent management and by advocating 'co-operative and corporate farming' with other sharecroppers" (218-9). However, Caldwell's interpretation could not be more objective, more based upon fact. As evidenced by the character of Jeeter, Caldwell's critique of the agricultural mistakes in the South stems from not only its ecological effects, but its social effects as well.

*Tobacco Road* has been praised as many things. It has been hailed as the first truly realist case study of the Southern rural poor white family. It has been teased apart for its interconnected webs of economics and social class. It has been discussed as an

expression of a stereotype of the South, mindlessly bound to the past and its divisions. Jeeter exemplifies the Southern white experience that Caldwell seeks to portray in his selfish, misguided, and single-minded addiction to the land. *Tobacco Road* does serve as a cultural critique of 1930s Georgia, but Caldwell never lets readers forget that the roots of his social and cultural problems are deeply entrenched in the state's abused ecology. Ray writes of the continuing destruction fifty years later, "Culture springs from the actions of people in a landscape, and what we, especially Southerners, are watching is a daily erosion of unique folkways as our native ecosystems and all their inhabitants disappear" (271). Jeeter can easily become a stereotype, he can be villainized and judged for his vast quantity of sins and faults, but Caldwell has written a space for his defense. Jeeter becomes a tool for explaining how an individual and his particular sins can be traced to larger ecological issues. The land, the source of Jeeter's flaws, is also his excuse for them. The land, destroyed in ways that even Jeeter cannot be responsible for, allows for his defense. Caldwell writes with an eye toward a change in the agricultural practices of his home state and a change in the human experience of the tobacco road. In the end, Jeeter is buried on the land he could never part with, the ruined land that he could not understand, or perhaps whose ruin he understood too well.

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## Brainwashing Bloodsuckers: The Impact of Gender Issues in Young Adult Literature with Close Examination of *Twilight*

*Laura E. Long*

For many years, society has placed a stigma on women, in and out of literature. Likewise, female sexuality has historically been deemed incongruous, immoral, and ignored. In the twenty-first century the oppression of female sexuality has transformed to a subtle stigma woven in the pages of magazines and young adult (YA) fiction. Just how much are our younger generations being exposed to a falsified image of “what a woman should look like?” The ideas of sexuality and body image cause for detrimental self-image agents in female teenage audiences and linger in the minds of young adults. This essay will explore these negative connotations and falsified images of “the ideal woman” by YA literature portrayals like Judy Blume’s *Forever*, Connie Porter’s *Imani All Mine*, and close examination of Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight Saga*, all of which communicate substantial self-image questioning to our generations of young people.

Author Susan Brownmiller portrays a picture of women and society in an article “Misplaced Bodies”: “exalted by poets, painters and sculptors, the female body, often reduced to its isolated parts, has been [hu]mankind’s most popular subject for adoration and myth, and also for judgment, ridicule, esthetic alteration and violent abuse” (qtd. in Mafe 37). In her quote, Brownmiller shares how woman’s body is “forever being measured” (qtd. in Mafe 37). From all kinds of art, in all societies, all throughout time, woman has been identified by her biological functions. Though global society in the twenty-first century differs greatly in societal norms from centuries previously, there are still gender issues faced in culture, in art, and in daily life.

When looking at literature specifically, one must consider the period and societal views of gender. In one scholarly article, author Deborah O'Keefe argues a position on the influence of YA literature by taking note of the differences that history makes. O'Keefe examines women in literature prior to the 1950s. She notes that girls are labeled as "duty-bound, deferential, guilt-ridden yet cheerful. . . . exhibit conventional manners and cooperative behaviors, . . . their main purpose in life is to conform, confirm, and concede" (qtd. in O'Quinn 170). Though these protagonists are in literature examined prior to 1950, literature for younger generations has not much changed in ideas of gender equality. According to author Pecora in the article "Identity by Design: The Corporate Construction of Teen Romance Novels," the market of YA fiction "is distinguished from children's and adult fiction through its featuring of adolescent protagonists and inclusion of issues that are both familiar and seen as important to the average adolescent reader, such as dating, popularity, and social alienation" (qtd. in Platt 73). According to author Beth Younger, sexuality is a major part in the whole of YA fiction: "young adult fictions frequently depict female sexuality as a threatening force [. . .] a primitive, taboo drive that must be regulated" (qtd. in Platt 75), and therefore "the majority of YA fiction still reinforces traditional notions of gender and sexuality" (qtd. in Platt 75).

Younger's article titled "Pleasure, Pain, and the Power of Being Thin: Female Sexuality in Young Adult Literature" gives the reader an inside look into just what YA novels are communicating to female audiences. In Younger's work, she shares, "Judy Blume's *Forever* focuses on the protagonist's loss of her virginity and her subsequent discovery of sexual power and pleasure. Yet imbedded in this otherwise empowering text is an underlying theme of obsession with weight and body image" (46). Female sexuality then in Blume's novel, is directly correlated with the body weight of a female. Female power is not coming from the protagonist's confidence in sexual liberty, but rather from the confidence of her physical looks.

In another novel titled *Imani All Mine* by Connie Porter, Younger shares that the "protagonist Tasha has a baby at age fifteen, combats poverty, and struggles to accept herself even though the images of thin girls she sees in *Seventeen* magazine make her feel huge" (46). What magazines and YA literature are

telling our teenage generation is that they only can achieve power through being the "ideal" fit and thin woman. Bigger, more endowed women in the literature who are acting upon their discovered sexuality are labeled as wanton and promiscuous. In these works, sexuality is being connected directly with weight. This, Younger argues, is a major problem as "these social constructions of young women's bodies become accepted norms" (47). Female sexuality, which should be something young adults should be introduced to in a positive way, is being stigmatized to be immoral unless females are of a thin, attractive appearance.

In Caroline McKinley's article "Beyond Forever: The Next Generation of Young Women Protagonists' Sexual Motivations in Contemporary Young Adult Novels," comes a numeric representative of the impact of low self-esteem in the younger population. McKinley states that a 2008 research study of 8-17 year old girls, exhibited that "seventy percent believe they do not measure up" (39). Seventy percent is more than half, as one recognizes. If, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) "45.7 percent of high school females . . . age fifteen to nineteen have engaged in sexual intercourse" (qtd. in McKinley 38), that means more than half of the 45.7 percent (38) of females feel inadequate with most likely, low self-esteems. McKinley would say that the female protagonists in these novels are "striv[ing] to be someone, to be wanted by someone and gain meaning in their lives through their sexual relations" (40), but the identity they find is rooted in how they look, not who they are or what they experience, and these identities are determining their value as a person. Thus, these issues in young adult novels involve traits such as gender inequality and physical appearance that reinforce archaic sexual principles. To analyze these issues and see how they are continually present in contemporary media, one must explore current works in YA literature. This essay focuses more specifically on the current pop-culture phenomenon, the *Twilight Saga*.

*Twilight Saga*: A pop-culture extraordinaire. One cannot drive the streets without seeing a *Twilight* bumper sticker or shop in a Hallmark without the card aisle having a special section dedicated to vampire and werewolf characters. Though the fans of this series stretch from young to old, the literature in itself is targeted to the YA audience. *Twilight* has made it into the

hands and minds of America's young adults, that is no question. What is to question, however, is the negative connotation of women, equality, sexuality, independence, and dubious implications of abortion that Meyer presents in the series.

The saga presents itself as something sweet, a set of books that addresses "love" between two seemingly young adults; this love even exceeds mortality, making its attractiveness even more enticing. This fantasy series, though, is full of gender issues, sexual politics, and ideas of the physical body as having an ideal shape and weight. These topics are quite interesting for literary critiques, though, and have been in the minds and critical essays of a few scholars who found the issues so wrong that they were compelled to communicate them.

In her article "Twilight and Transformations of Flesh: Reading the Body in Contemporary Youth Literature," Danielle McGeough shares how "the inability [women have] to fully connect with their bodies is, in part, a result of women and girls being socialized to see themselves as objects, not subjects of behavior" (88). McGeough gives a critique of sexuality and the body in the *Twilight Saga*, finding that Bella, the female protagonist of the series, focuses heavily on her appearance in order to remain desirable for Edward (88). Again, the reader can see the vivid correlation between sexual appeal and body weight and appearance. Bella's physical appearance has been revered as the "enticer." She has objectified herself. This focused self-appearance "plays in determining her self-worth, and her behaviors support objectification theory's claim that girls are socialized to treat themselves as objects to be looked at and evaluated" (McGeough 89). Examples of Bella's low self-image are found in the text: "The contrast between the two of us was painful. He looked like a god. I looked very average, even for a human, almost painfully plain" (89). Though sexual encounters between Bella and Edward are not heavily present in the text, Meyer packs the protagonist with insecurities that cause Bella to ornament herself, communicating to thousands of young readers that doing so is normal and permissible, *even though sex is not*. Meyer is flawed in this. By allowing female insecurities that support physical objectification in her characters, Meyer is perpetuating sexual encounters for young girls, what she would call "promiscuity" and indulgences in pre-marital sex. By offering the objectification of young female bodies, Meyer

maintains the "culture [that] desperately tries to contain the adolescent, female body . . . through exercise, plastic surgery, cosmetic creams and other forms of discipline and control" (qtd. in McGeough 99). The consequences of maintained portrayals cause young audiences to think that they must look a certain way to be desirable, and this only feeds the cyclical problem of poor self-concepts in young women.

A similar series, *The Vampire Diaries*, created by author L.J. Smith, sports a female protagonist named Elena. Different from Bella in that she is certainly sure of herself, Elena *still* is "cool and blond and slender, the fashion trendsetter, the high school senior, the girl every boy wanted and every girl wanted to be" (Ames 47-48). Why is it that these women are "ideal?" "Physical beauty," says Platt, "is also sought after and prized in many of these books, with girls spending hours on their appearance in an effort to increase their physical appeal to boys" (73). When critiquing the piece through a feminist lens, one must think about the way women are portrayed in the literature and *why* they are portrayed the way they are. Why are female protagonists only skinny, white females? Can only thin, white, females attain attractive men? Do not intellect and character attract physically appealing men? In *Twilight*, the reader never is introduced to Bella's intellect. She is wholly represented in her bodily appearance and dependence on Edward. Many decisions are made for her, and she is always presented as a damsel in distress.

Younger's article, "Pleasure, Pain, and the Power of Being Thin: Female Sexuality in Young Adult Literature," presents how weight and power are closely associated. With Bella, it is evident that she is physically attractive and yet she is powerless until transformed into a vampire, as she then "claims ownership and control over her body as a vampire, and it is through her transformation that she finally becomes Edward's equal" (McGeough 99). These female body representations in YA literature prompt the reader to question why these portrayals appear the way they do.

In her article "*Twilight* Is Not Good For Maidens: Gender, Sexuality, And The Family In Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* Series," Anna Silver further explores these negative connotations that exist throughout the series: The belief that being oneself is not good enough, that females only attain equality and independ-

ence as a woman when committed to marriage and motherhood, and the importance of abstinence and the nuclear family. Young adulthood is a new phase of life that includes so much change. If young readers are impressionable, what they read will highly influence them. Expanding on the notion, Silver notes different persuasive and effective philosophies Meyer uses in her book to promote personal opinion and belief.

Edward insists that Bella must marry him before they have sex. Here is the platform that Meyer uses to advocate abstinence. Much of the saga revolves around the escalation of the sexual tension between Edward and Bella. This support of abstinence presents the idea that premarital sex is immoral. In Carrie Anne Platt's article "Cullen Family Values: Gender and Sexual Politics in the Twilight Series," she shares just what the topic of abstinence communicates in the saga: "as a matter of life and death, female desire [is depicted] as a uncontrollable urge that must be vigilantly policed by men, and virtue as something that must be protected at all costs" (76-77). Meyer has presented a complete misogynistic, conservative outlook of sexuality through the abstinence of Bella Swan. Premarital sex is viewed by Meyer (and communicated, for that matter) as something "[that] must be avoided at all costs" (Platt 78). Edward is constantly keeping Bella from making him hurt her when she gets too physical with him. To make sure that they remain abstinent, Edward frequently fights himself to guard Bella from his hurting her:

And then his cold, marble lips pressed very softly against mine. What neither of us was prepared for was my response. Blood boiled under my skin, burned in my lips. My breath came in a wild gasp. My fingers knotted in his hair, clutching him to me. My lips parted as I breathed in his heady scent. Immediately I felt him turn to unresponsive stone beneath my lips. His hands gently, but with irresistible force, pushed my face back. I opened my eyes and saw his guarded expression. (qtd. in Platt 79)

Throughout the whole series, Bella is seen as a passive agent. Edward is always keeping himself from hurting her. Bella leaves her friends, lies to her family and gives up her moral code just so that she can be with Edward. Edward is portrayed as a strong leader. He tells her that he constantly might put her in danger if her temptations are too strong; Edward says to Bella, "It's just

that you are so soft, so fragile. I have to mind my actions every moment that we're together so that I don't hurt you. I could kill you quite easily, Bella, simply by accident'" (Meyer 442). Though there is no question that Edward really loves Bella, the way that he acts stronger and superior in their relationship despite his immortality causes the reader to analyze the presentation of gender roles in relationships that Meyer creates. Silver notes this lack of individualism and "gender ideology . . . [that] is ultimately and unapologetically patriarchal" (122) is one of the many repressive themes of the series.

Motherhood is a major topic of interest in the saga. When Bella becomes pregnant in the last book of the series, *Breaking Dawn*, the recurring important theme of motherhood reaches a climactic state. Pregnant with a half-vampire, half-human child, her husband, Edward, forces Bella to consider abortion. Bella refuses the thought of abortion, and the half mortal child almost kills her. Bella transcends death and has to be "saved" by Edward when the childbirth almost kills her. To "save" Bella, Edward turns her into a vampire. In doing this, Silver communicates that Meyer presents that equality between man and woman can only occur within marriage and motherhood (132).

When looking at the depiction of sexuality, one must also look at gender. Gender exceeds what is male or female and is what someone subjectively identifies with. In *Twilight* serious gender stereotyping and large implications of heteronormative ideals exist. Every couple is made up of a man and a woman, and premarital sex is something not advocated by Edward. Bella's father, Charlie, presents himself incompetent in preparing his own meals; therefore, Bella is left to make them for him. These traditional values expose the very heteronormative idea of family throughout the series.

According to Bryan LevAlexander Grossman's article "It's Twilight in America," *Twilight* screenwriter Melissa Rosenberg comments on the sexuality of the books and movies: "For me, the appeal of the vampire is safe sexuality . . . it's the ultimate romantic idea. You have the allure of the danger. And yet there's only so far you can go" (qtd. in Grossman n.pag.). Of course this could be a counterargument to the one this essay is making—to say "Meyer put sex back underground, transmuted it back into yearning, where it became, paradoxically, exponentially, more

powerful" (Grossman n.pag.). To expand this counterargument, one could say that yes, Meyer did utilize the sexuality (or lack thereof) to engross readers and make abstinence a "cool" thing to do. She flipped the norm upside down for young adult novels in that way, and some amount of the population would argue this to be a good thing, particularly in the hyper-conservative environment Meyer seeks to perpetuate. What is overlooked is that in Stephenie Meyer's presentation of a whole series dedicated to the Christianized morale system, young readers are being fed this belief that they must be white, skinny, abstinent, pro-life and assume prescribed gender roles and sexual inequality until marriage and motherhood. Because young girls are impressionable and influenced by much of what they read and see in the media, young females are being intimidated with images, values, and rules being applied to their lives, instead of young females making them for themselves. Young women should have that choice to explore and be introduced to many different ways of viewing beauty and relationships rather than just one narrow, conservative-based author's point-of-view.

It is this argument presented, then, that encompasses my many problems with Meyer's *Twilight Saga*: the portrayal of inequality until marriage and motherhood, policed sexuality, abstinence, and the assumption of the weakness of females. Meyer permits the objectification of women, presenting an "ideal" picture of a woman as a thin, white, weak female. She employs gender stereotyping and heteronormative outlooks on the family. These implications into young adult fiction are perpetuating the cycle of inequality between the sexes into younger generations. There have been many women (and men) who have fought to ensure future generations' freedoms that allow them to break through the manacles of minorities. Meyer's *Twilight Saga* has turned the fiction of mystical, immortal creatures into agents of patriarchal, heteronormative, conservative mores that suck the importance of diversity, gender difference awareness, and acceptance of many different sizes, shapes, sexualities and backgrounds; and thus, are severe, negative, power figures to our generation of young people.

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## Argument as Negotiation

*Samantha McMahan*

### *Argument Defined*

There appears to be an obvious shortcoming in our ability to argue when violence visibly permeates our culture, and politics is reduced to a series of perpetual disagreements with no resolution. In her essay on defining argument, A. Abby Knoblauch cites the World Trade Center tragedy as an example of the consequences of mankind's resistance to constructive communication that results in acts of radical aggression (244). The current definition of argument protects a system that identifies war as the solution to situations in which the participants fail to agree, an obvious flaw in conducting international relations.

The ultimate aim of argument should be compromise between all involved parties, and thus the avoidance of physical hostility as a possible outcome. Currently, United States politics involves people choosing a stance and defending it simply for the sake of presenting themselves as proficient orators in the public domain. If politicians shift their approach from debate to negotiation by seeking out a policy upon which both parties can agree, argument would in turn be conducive to progressive action rather than stagnant conflict. Argument should be centered on the concept of exigence, or "some kind of need or problem that can be addressed and solved through rhetorical discourse," rather than on irreconcilable two-sided debates (Grant- Davie, 265). I posit a definition of argument as a "negotiative" measure in which all parties reach a consensus. Students in today's schools should be taught the skills necessary to engage in arguments focused on results through observation, evaluation, and practice. This is not to say that there is no place for uncompromising argument. Students should be able to

defend a position if the medium does not allow for dialogue (such as an essay or letter to the editor), but the negotiative form of argument that I advocate should be introduced to the curriculum in order to expose students to a form of argument in which the purpose is compromise.

Future generations should learn the previously-mentioned skills of observation, evaluation, and practice in order to effectively negotiate instead of blindly defending a static position. Supporting one resolution to a problem and failing to yield to any potential adjustments results in a political system that repeatedly beats to death issues with only two inflexible sides. This is especially problematic when people seek discourse with others who share their views, which leads to polarization and causes them to “perceive in blacks and whites a world that typically unfolds in grays” (Kristof). Our media-based culture encourages confirmation bias (finding evidence that supports preexisting views and discarding other information) rather than critical thinking and rationality, intellectual traits that have a greater potential to lead to collaboration and tangible change (Cohen 1).

Proponents of a discussion-based argument approach called “mature reasoning” likewise advance the goals of learning about a situation and examining all sides of the issue. From an argument textbook by Crusius and Channell, Knoblauch extracts the notion that “rather than starting with a position to defend, mature reasoners work toward a position. If they have an opinion to start with, mature reasoners think it through and evaluate it rather than rush to its defense” (249). The goal of mature reasoning, however, is to come to a greater understanding of your opponents’ ideologies. I agree that this desire for understanding is indispensable, but I feel that the definition is flawed due to its evasion of a crucial real-world component: action. Students should be taught that argument is a dynamic process in which the goal is not to defend one stance and one solution but to find a course of action to which all parties can acquiesce. I specifically chose the words “all parties” because our current system often compresses the complexity of issues to a two-sided confrontation, further excluding the possibility of a reasonable compromise among all participants. Knoblauch quotes an argument textbook by Lunsford, Ruszkiewicz, and Walters, saying, “arguments seldom if ever have only two sides:

rather they present a dizzying array of perspectives, often with as many ‘takes’ on a subject as there are arguers. Understanding arguments, then, calls for carefully considering a full range of perspectives before coming to judgment” (251).

Persuasion is an integral component of my “negotiative” argument definition because “students need to learn and practice the arts of persuasion in order to effect change in the social realm” (Knoblauch 247). The purpose of education is to equip students with valuable skills that are applicable to their lives beyond the academic world. In order to achieve this persuasion, I advocate the Rogerian fundamentals of empathy and understanding (Knoblauch 253). Rogerian argument aligns with my definition of argument as “win-win negotiation rather than win-lose debate,” because it places “emphasis on common ground, threat reduction, and bridge building in order to reduce resistance and facilitate listening” (Knoblauch 260). In order to create a world in which argument is conducive to positive change, students should learn to be effective negotiators rather than rigid debaters.

### *Teaching Argument*

I propose that students be taught to become effective “negotiative” arguers by observing discourse in the form of “deliberative democracy,” in which the participants engage in a collaborative forum that cooperates in order to ultimately agree on a course of action (Cohen 2). This would shift students’ perceptions of argument from a political debate between two opposing viewpoints that results in a transient “win” to a discussion among a group of people that results in an altered or new policy for the community. Students should view videos or listen to audio in which different organizations negotiate in order to reach a consensus that all parties agree is the best course of action. In these situations, the focus changes from two leaders butting heads to a number of group members actively engaged in finding a solution that everyone can tolerate.

Before practicing argument based on negotiation and compromise, students should learn to evaluate discussion contributors and differentiate between beneficial behavior that would advance the argument toward a solution and detrimental behaviors that would hinder such progress. Educators should introduce video clips of political candidates engaged in a debate

and ask students to evaluate their apparent openness to compromise, their ability to listen, and the reasonability of their stance. Then, they should lead a discussion in which the students would discuss how effective an argument is if both parties refuse to adapt their stance according to different qualifications. Students should point out any flaws in judgment, especially reasoning that suggests that there are only two possible viewpoints and thus only two possible solutions. Students should also brainstorm the different feelings that people would have about the issues (beyond the two posited positions) and whether or not the politicians would alienate those who do not conform to the presented positions. Additionally, students should evaluate the positive and negative collaboration behaviors in a group of classmates as they work to reach a plausible consensus. Finally, students should evaluate the negotiation of adults in different careers at recorded board meetings or staff conferences. All of these scenarios are applicable to student success as arguers in the world after school.

In order to become proficient as arguers in these negotiation-based environments, students need to practice their empathy, listening, and critical thinking skills. Empathy is necessary for students to understand the rationale behind each viewpoint and to avoid triggering an emotional reaction from the other participants. Negative emotional responses will only undermine the process of reaching a goal upon which all members can agree. Students must learn to listen in order to fully process the members' opinions instead of assuming that they understand the other person and becoming ensnared in an unintentional misunderstanding. Finally, students should develop their critical thinking skills by engaging in these "negotiative" arguments and collaborating with others to reach a viable and useful solution. In order to refine this set of skills, students should be presented with an existing problem, at the national, state, or local level, and through discussion, come to a reasonable consensus about an active and feasible plan. Prompts can range from business dilemmas to differing religious worldviews that are interfering with political decisions— any real-life scenario that students may one day encounter.

I encourage any teacher attempting to educate students using this form of "negotiative" argument to avoid textbooks

and instead rely on finding information from current sources to which students can relate. Students will be more motivated to become successful "negotiative" arguers if they feel that the knowledge and skills will assist them in their future endeavors. If enough students around the world are taught to use this form of argument, we may one day see signs of humanitarian progression and positive change in international relations among future generations.

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## An Investigation of Rivers and Sassoon as Soldier and Healer in Pat Barker's *Regeneration*

Brittany Moster

*Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: Physician, heal thyself"*  
—Luke 4:23

It is easy, when reviewing the politics of war, to forget the fact that the soldiers who fought were actually human beings. It is also easy to recall war in a romanticized view: to see the glory of the returning soldiers as the heroes of a nation. However, much else is necessary to the understanding of war than what is explained in the history books, like the fact that soldiers were not all supportive of the cause for which they fought, or the understanding that not all soldiers were fighters, but artists, as well. In *Regeneration*, a novel set during World War I, Pat Barker investigates the unseen struggles men faced when they were removed from battle and sent to hospitals to recover while exploring the paradox of doctors being asked to heal the men they then sent to their deaths. Through the real life characters of W. H. R. Rivers, a psychiatrist, and Siegfried Sassoon, a poet and soldier, Barker calls into question the true role of healer and patient and the ability of each role to transform an individual.

It is evident from the beginning of the novel that Sassoon, who is sent to Craiglockhart Hospital after issuing a declaration in which he condemns World War I as being "evil and unjust" (Barker 3), will be a challenge to practiced psychiatrist Dr. Rivers. Rivers had been a researcher of anthropology and psychology; however, "in 1916, Rivers was commissioned captain in the Royal Army Medical Corps and was transferred to Craiglockhart Hospital for Officers near Edinburgh, where severe emotional trauma was being treated" (Slobodin 301). At

Craiglockhart, Rivers often dreams of going back to his research days, convinced that being an active doctor is not what he was meant to do in life. Sassoon is sent to Rivers because Rivers is the best in his field, but Rivers has a difficult time diagnosing Sassoon, presumably because there is nothing to diagnose. Rivers does not think that Sassoon is suffering from trauma or any kind of neurosis; in fact, he does not think anything is wrong with Sassoon at all: "He'd been working on the file for over an hour, but, although he was now confident he knew all the facts, he was no closer to an understanding of Sassoon's state of mind" (Barker 8). Rivers claims that it is only the fact that Sassoon threw his medal away—a medal he had acquired for saving lives—that does not make sense to him. This is the first sign that Sassoon will not only be a challenge for Rivers as a doctor, but also in identity. In *Regeneration*, Rivers and Sassoon are both essential to one another's journeys, for "at the book's end Sassoon and Rivers reverse roles as Sassoon, 'healed' by Rivers, returns to the front, choosing to abandon his protest out of feelings of loyalty to his men, while Rivers retreats from Craiglockhart, with self-doubt, exhaustion, and loss of direction" (Nickerson and Shea). There is also another aspect to this transformation: not only do Rivers and Sassoon trade ideologies, but also occupational roles. As the novel progresses, Rivers develops traits that characterize him as a soldier and patient, while Sassoon takes on the role of doctor as he heals himself and another patient and poet, Wilfred Owen.

One of the most obvious clues to this role reversal comes during Rivers' and Sassoon's first meeting. The medal Sassoon threw away still weighs on Rivers' mind, and he asks Sassoon about it: "You threw it in the Mersey, didn't you?" (Barker 15). These words set the scene for the two men's relationship, for when Sassoon admits that he threw his medal in the Mersey River, he essentially confirms that he is handing his burden—of the war, his declaration, and his mental health—over to Rivers, who with this admittance Sassoon asks for mercy. Immediately after this conversation, Rivers tells Sassoon that he is obliged to cure Sassoon's problem and send him back to the front lines: "You realize, don't you, that it's my duty to...to try to change that? I can't pretend to be neutral" (Barker 15). Rivers, making use of war-specific terms like "duty" and "neutral," accepts the burden that Sassoon turns over to him, thus assuming the role of soldier in Sassoon's place. Later in the novel, as Rivers speaks of

the expectations the public has of soldiers and of men, he comes out and admits that he has, in essence, become a soldier himself. He recognizes that the soldiers had “been trained to identify emotional repression as the essence of manliness. Men who broke down, or cried, or admitted to feeling fear, were sissies, weaklings, failures. Not *men*. And yet he himself was a product of the same system” (Barker 48). Rivers, who spends his days listening to broken men discuss and try come to terms with the most terrible moments of their lives, never lets himself go. He lives and breathes the conditions of his patients, and as their burdens become his, he is forced to face theirs while also shouldering his own. As he battles his own emotions and doubts about the system he serves, he assumes the role of soldier in the war that is society.

In much the same way as Rivers slowly finds himself transforming into a soldier, Sassoon becomes a healer. Wilfred Owen, a patient at Craiglockhart and a poet who hero-worships Sassoon, in a sense becomes Sassoon’s patient, coming to him for recommendations on his poetry. In fact, it is Sassoon who relieves Owen’s stammer, for when Owen comes face to face with his hero, “he relaxed. It didn’t matter what *this* Sassoon thought about him, since the real Sassoon was in the poems” (Barker 82). Sassoon continues to work with Owen, telling him to write, a healing process. This was in fact one of Rivers’ own strategies in treating patients: “Rivers understood self-awareness as a product of memory and self-narrative. One discovers oneself by remembering oneself (autobiography), the psychological continuity of the body is through its memories” (Young 375). In utilizing Rivers’ approach—the idea of writing about one’s experiences in order to come to terms with them—Sassoon characterizes himself as a healer and, more specifically, as a doctor like Rivers. Sassoon, in a sense, actually observes the transformation of himself when he notes of Craiglockhart, “The rubbery smell lingered on his skin, a clinical smell that made his body unfamiliar to him” (Barker 63). Sassoon is undergoing a major transformation, but he has yet to recognize its significance.

However, as Sassoon finds his direction, Rivers loses his. Rivers had a stammer as a child, and as the novel progresses, his stammer returns, drawing the attention of some of the patients and staff at Craiglockhart. Billy Prior, one of Rivers’ charges, points out to Rivers after hearing his stammer, “You know one

day you’re going to have to accept the fact that you’re in this hospital because you’re ill. Not me. Not the CO. Not the kitchen porter. *You*” (Barker 97). Immediately after Prior points out his stammer, Rivers strolls across the grounds and “his footsteps showed up dark along the path he’d come” (Barker 97), indicating that Rivers can see how he reached the place he is at, but has no idea of how to continue. This idea is reinforced when Rivers sees the grass cutters come around the building with their scythes, “comically symbolic: Time and Death invading” (Barker 98). Rivers, so sure and directive in front of his patients, has lost all sense of direction in his life. He tells Prior during one of his sessions, “You’re thinking of breakdown as a reaction to a single traumatic event, but it’s not like that. It’s more a matter of...*erosion*. Weeks and months of stress in a situation where you can’t get away from it” (Barker 105). Rivers, without recognizing it, has diagnosed himself—during his time at Craiglockhart, away from the comfort of his research, Rivers has lost his sense of self, leading him to assume the role of patient. Another doctor, Brock, confirms this role when Rivers tells him during a hospital debriefing, “The whole point of these meetings is to protect the patients,” and Brock responds, “Is that what I was doing? I thought I was protecting you” (Barker 73). With these words, Brock confirms that Rivers has, indeed, become a patient to be protected, both from the war raging outside the hospital and from the one raging within Rivers himself.

The stress from his work leads Rivers to go on leave, a break that allows the audience to discover some surprising similarities between Rivers and Sassoon. In fact, it is while Rivers is gone that their relationship seals itself, for Sassoon has come to think of Rivers as a father and Rivers thinks of Sassoon as his son, indicating that these two have essentially become the same person, Sassoon with a future and Rivers with none. Sassoon admits his feelings for Rivers when he finds out that Rivers is going on leave: “He’d joked once or twice to Rivers about his being his father confessor, but only now, faced with this second abandonment, did he realize how completely Rivers had come to take his father’s place. Well, that didn’t matter, did it? After all, if it came to substitute fathers, he might do a lot worse” (Barker 145). Now it seems as if all of Sassoon’s work with Owen—his encouragement of Owen’s writing to promote healing—is not simply the work of a doctor, but of a young man who wants to be like his father.

Rivers experiences something similar while on leave. Rivers visits his brother's house, where much of their father's furniture has ended up. His father, a speech therapist, had tried to treat Rivers' stutter when he was a child, but now that Rivers is back in his father's study, he remembers a time when he was less-than-appreciative of his father's efforts. The younger Rivers "thought suddenly, this is nonsense. It *doesn't* help to remember to keep your tongue down, it doesn't help to think about the flow of breath. So he'd thought, sweeping away his father's life work in a single minute as twelve-year-old boys are apt to do" (Barker 155). Then Rivers notes something that classifies him as every bit as much of a soldier as Sassoon: "He stared at the back of [his father's] neck, at the neck of the man whom he had, in a way, just killed, and he didn't feel sad or guilty about it at all. He felt glad" (Barker 155). A twelve-year-old Rivers felt joy at destroying the life of another, indicating that the young Rivers had to transform in some way in order to be a doctor. Rivers admits to this transformation, thinking, "Only recently it had occurred to him that if some twelve-year-old boy had crept up to his window at Craiglockhart, as he'd done to his father's window at Knowles Bank, he'd have seen a man sitting at a desk with his back to the window, listening to some patient" (Barker 156). Rivers, he knows, has become his father.

Rivers also has settled into the role of being a father for Sassoon. While on leave, Rivers goes to church and notices the images of the glass windows, with "God the Father beaming benignly down. Beneath it, and much smaller, Abraham's sacrifice of his son...Abraham, if he regretted having to sacrifice his son at all, was certainly hiding it well while Isaac, bound on a makeshift altar, positively smirked" (Barker 149). This biblical story represents Rivers' relationship with Sassoon remarkably well. When Rivers speaks of Sassoon to the other doctors at Craiglockhart, he says, "it's *his* duty to go back, and it's *my* duty to see that he does" (Barker 73), mirroring Abraham's sacrifice of his son to a greater force. For Abraham, that force was God; for Rivers, it is war.

Also interesting to note is Rivers' desire for youth, not for the sake of youth, but for the ability to go to war. One night at Craiglockhart, "Rivers pulled the curtains to, and settled down to sleep, wishing, not for the first time, that he was young enough for France" (Barker 108). Of a patient, Rivers notes,

"Basically, he was suffering from being too old for the war, a complaint with which Rivers had a little more sympathy every day" (Barker 138). Rivers wants to go to France; he wants the chance to be a soldier and see the results of his work instead of hearing about his success stories being killed on the front. Sassoon, on the other hand, has become accustomed to life at Craiglockhart: "he'd given in, lapsed, pretended to himself that he was still actively protesting whereas in reality he'd let himself be pacified, sucked into the comforting routine, the uneventfulness of Craiglockhart life" (Barker 114). He helps heal Owen, to whom he explains, "the *fact* that you admire somebody very much doesn't automatically mean they're a good model" (Barker 124). In context, this phrase is intended to discourage Owen from looking at Sassoon as a model, but it could also be a warning Sassoon gives to himself about Rivers, for Sassoon indeed becomes a healer during his time at Craiglockhart.

Brock, a real life doctor and a character in *Regeneration*, was an advocate of using art to help patients heal. In her article "Therapeutic Measures," Meredith Martin explains the process:

The patients' responsibility for the management of their own time through physical and social activities would, in Brock's reckoning, force the patients to actively and metrically order their mental chaos in new contexts of time (the five-beat line of a poem, a first person narrative or short-story, a play) and space (a diagram of the city, a lecture on botany, a description of local museums). (Martin 40-41)

It is a tactic Sassoon utilizes to heal himself and Owen, whom he instructs to work on a poem: "Work at it till you think you've made some progress, then bring it back and we'll have a go at it together" (Barker 124). When Owen tells Sassoon that he spends fifteen minutes a day working on the poem, Sassoon responds, "Good God, man, that's no use. You've got to sweat your guts out. Look, it's like a drill. You don't wait till you *feel* like doing it" (Barker 124-125). Sassoon is Owen's personal coach, an advocate who pushes him to heal to the point where Sassoon tells Owen that Rivers said "there were no grounds at all that he could see for keeping you at the hospital a moment longer" (Barker 219).

Sassoon, with the healing help of his writing, also is declared fit enough to go back to the war, although he never admitted to having any sort of neurosis at all. In his writings, however, the effects of his front line experiences become evident: "His terminology is of course different from Rivers's technical discourse, but the psychological suffering he describes seems to be the same, as he invokes 'feeling nervous and rattled,' being 'over-strained,' wary of 'my nerves,' and after the war being in a state of 'nerves' and experiencing 'nervous exhaustion' (Hemmings 115). It is interesting to note that Sassoon makes use of many of Rivers' own terms, focusing on the nervous system, almost as though he has adopted Rivers' jargon along with his occupation.

Rivers, however, remains unable to heal himself. Instead, he says, "I don't know. I think perhaps the patients've...have done for me what I couldn't do for myself" (Barker 242). Rivers, however, is not healed, for that would imply that he has reached the place he was at the beginning, which he has not. Rivers has transformed, and he attributes it to Sassoon: "If anything, he was amused by the irony of the situation, that he, who was in the business of changing people, should himself have been changed and by somebody who was clearly unaware of having done it" (Barker 249). After battling with his own self-doubt, Rivers comes to discover that "the work he did...was the work he was meant to do, and, as always, this recognition brought peace" (Barker 186), the peace that comes after war. Rivers, however, is leaving Craiglockhart, the place he has come to love, for another hospital and as a result he is continuing to fight in a war of his own making.

Rivers has truly become a soldier, and he even mirrors Sassoon's words and actions. When he visits a patient and sees firsthand the terror the patient experiences as a result of his war experiences, Rivers says, "Nothing justifies this. Nothing, nothing, nothing" (Barker 180), alluding to the words of Sassoon's declaration when he calls the war "evil and unjust" (Barker 3). Also, throughout his career at Craiglockhart, Rivers risks his own health and takes on as many patients as he can, in a sense mirroring Sassoon's "Mad Jack" actions of the war in which Sassoon risked his life several times in order to save others. Also significant to note is the fact that the novel begins in Sassoon's voice with his written declaration, and ends with

Rivers' written note discharging Sassoon to duty. Sassoon and Rivers have literally traded places; Rivers has become a soldier while Sassoon has learned to heal.

Barker's *Regeneration* is a war novel, but instead of designating the role of soldier to the men on the front and the role of healer to doctors in a hospital, Barker allows the line between the two roles to blur and, sometimes, to disappear completely. In calling into question the permanence of each seemingly predestined role, Barker succeeds in also calling into question the motives behind the war that blurred those lines. Rivers truly becomes a soldier in the fight that is his own self-awareness while Sassoon becomes a healer to Owen, but both, with the influence of each other, lead the reader to question the justification of the war that is the root of both conflicts.

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## The Spirituality of Death in Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer*

Abby Rudolph

Barbara Kingsolver's novel *Prodigal Summer* is undoubtedly a book that celebrates life and procreation in all their earthly forms. It links human love to animal love through shared biological rhythms, and focuses on the universal need for community and companionship. From the title onward, Kingsolver's novel is dedicated to unbounded, unruly life, full of enthusiasm and grace. A truthful depiction of the wholeness of the natural world requires a full treatment of death as a part of life, as the great unifier of all organisms. Kingsolver's novel, which at first seems purely a celebration of continued life through sex, birth, and rebirth, is equally concerned with death and its spiritual nature.

There are many manifestations of spirituality regarding death represented in *Prodigal Summer*, the most prevalent of which is a sort of pantheistic view of the world in which all life is viewed as sacred, the birth and death of every creature connected by the same biological cycles. Kingsolver says of herself in the article "A Good Farmer," "I'm a scientist who thinks it wise to enter the doors of creation not with a lion tamer's whip and chair, but with the reverence humankind has traditionally summoned for entering places of worship: a temple, a mosque or a cathedral. A sacred grove, as ancient as time" (16). This identity is certainly given voice throughout *Prodigal Summer*. More conventional forms of religion and their treatments of death also surface throughout the novel. True to life for many rural communities, the prejudice and misinformation regarding non-Protestants within the fictional community isolates one of the main characters, Lusa, during a period of grief after the death of her husband. A pair of old

neighbors argue over their place in the universe. And an isolated woman, Deanna, finds a way to become unified with the realm of nature which she reveres, by throwing off death's shadow and returning to the land of the living. Perhaps the most gracefully articulated motif regarding the spirituality of death that unifies the novel is that of ghosts. Every central character is preoccupied with ghosts in one way or another, and ghosts become an outlet for grief, loneliness, and fear of death throughout the story.

Kingsolver's idea of eternal life is different from the traditional Christian image of a physical heaven or paradise; some of her characters agree with her notion of eternal life and some do not. Its first mention is in reference to mating lacewing moths that Deanna happens upon in the woods: "winged silhouettes rose up like carnal fairies to the urgent search for mates, egg laying and eternal life" (16). The exuberance of mating and reproduction is described as the means to a metaphorical afterlife through a continued genetic lineage. This image is applied to humans as well when Deanna and Eddie's human copulation is described as a "pursuit of eternity" (24), equating human reproduction and animal reproduction in their shared intention of conquering death. Deanna is one of the characters in *Prodigal Summer* who believes in Kingsolver's biological interpretation of eternal life. When she finally catches sight of the family of coyotes that she has been studying from afar "she wishe[s] so hard for her father it fe[els] like a prayer. If I could only show him this, oh, please. Let him look down from Heaven, whatever that means, let him look up through my eyes from the cells of genesis he planted in me" (203).

But not all of Kingsolver's characters agree with her ideas, albeit these characters are usually depicted as stubborn and ignorant in their own beliefs. For example, Garnett, one of the bickering old neighbors, is a staunch Protestant in the most traditional sense. Another literary critic has described Garnett aptly as combining "religious conservatism with sexism and anthropocentrism" (Wenz 120). His purpose in the book seems simply to serve the role of the devil's advocate, someone Kingsolver can argue with under the disguise of her other characters. He is offended by his neighbor's progressive views on religion and life and argues with her through letters on the subject of the proper role of humankind within creation. Garnett insists: "If the Holy Bible is to be believed we must view God's

creatures as gifts to his favored children and use them for our own purposes, even if this occasionally causes this one or that one to go extinct after a while'" (Kingsolver 186). In Garnett's narrative, the voice of reason comes from his neighbor, Nanny Rawley, who argues that all creatures believe they are the center of everything and even have their own particular forms of worship. She speaks on behalf of the fragile web of existence and biological principles while backing up her spiritual statements with passages from the bible. To Nanny Rawley, the death of any creature, human or otherwise, is ultimately as important as the death of any other. That is to say, an organism's death is not significant in the greater scheme of the universe, only to loved ones left behind.

The argument between these two old neighbors is deeper than a simple difference of opinion, for both have had to deal with personal loss in their pasts and have learned to grieve in different ways. Their philosophies about the world are thus intrinsic elements in their ability to accept their circumstances. Nanny lost her disabled daughter, Rachel, and turned to science in pursuit of an explanation of that tragedy, chalking it up to a genetic roll of the dice and what she describes as the "miracle" of sexual reproduction (390). Garnett, on the other hand, after losing his wife, "turn[s] to his God for solace" (49), a conventional conception of a Christian God: personal, all-knowing, and all-powerful. Their stubborn attitudes regarding their beliefs stem from a defense of their own versions of a common existential experience: the process of defining a spirituality of death for themselves in order to give their lives meaning after loss.

Scholars Yang, Stapps and Hijmans describe this meaningful experience as being characterized by a sense of connectedness, of being embedded within a larger whole, in their article "Existential Crisis and the Awareness of Dying: The Role of Meaning and Spirituality": "Experiencing oneself as part of a larger context seems to diminish the immediate threat to the existence of the individual," they say, "[h]e perceives a new meaning in his existence, not positioning himself any longer at the center of the universe. Dealing with an existential crisis leads to the acceptance of reality as it presents itself," not as one wishes it to be (65). By this definition, Nanny has clearly made it farther in her own existential journey than Garnett has. But,

though Garnett is caged by orthodox theology in defining his own spirituality, he does have such an epiphany and is changed because of it. This is evidenced by his loyalty to his chestnut trees and their continuation as a species. He does not take direct responsibility for this noble endeavor, but says instead that he is sure it is a part of God's plan which he must carry out (129).

Lusa goes through the same process of dealing with death and searching for some sort of spiritual explanation that she can live with. After her husband Cole dies, Lusa is at first viewed by several of his sisters as an outsider and a usurper of the family property. A deep mistrust of non-Christians fosters this view. At Cole's funeral, Lusa overhears one of his sisters say, "Now, you know, the wife isn't Christian" (74), and she faces ignorance about her heritage at every turn. Lusa's father was of Polish descent and Jewish; her mother was of Palestinian descent and Muslim, but a member of Cole's family describes her religious background as "one of the other Christianities" (151) that "worships the devil" (153). Even though Lusa's spiritual path is not greatly informed by her heritage, it marks her as an outsider at a time when she desperately needs a supportive community. In the end, her spirituality regarding death closely resembles that of Deanna, Nanny Rawley, and Kingsolver herself. Stable in these beliefs, she makes the decision to stay on the land that belonged to her and Cole. She also decides to raise her sister-in-law's children when she dies due to a losing battle with cancer, transforming her in the eyes of Cole's family "from devil-worshiper to saint in one short summer" (419).

Deanna, Lusa, and Garnett are all aware of ghosts in different capacities. Deanna views the extinct species that once populated the forests as ghosts: "So many extinct creatures moved through the leaves just outside of her peripheral vision, for Deanna knew enough to realize that she lived among ghosts. She deferred to them as she would to the spirits of deceased relatives, paying her quiet respects in places where they might once have been" (60). She also describes her beloved living coyotes as ghosts of the extinct red wolf, come back to fill the hole left in the woods for a keystone species, a top predator: "The ghost of a creature long extinct was coming in on silent footprints, returning to the place it had once held in the complex anatomy of this forest like a beating heart returned to its body" (64).

Throughout the story, the coyotes become like ghosts in other capacities as well. They are an unseen presence, felt by all and feared, or at least misunderstood, by most. In traditional farming and ranching communities like the fictional Zebulon Valley, the illusive nature of coyotes is perceived as ominous by farmers, who blame them for every mysterious death of a sheep or a cow, and hate them with a passion beyond the bounds of reason. Deanna, Nanny and Lusa, however, know better than to hate them for what they are. Rather, they appreciate them as an important thread in the web of existence, just as they are able to accept death as a part of life and live accordingly. The coyotes lurk in the wild background of the story and subtly link the lives of every character in a controlling metaphor.

Deanna seems confident in her interpretation of her surroundings, but perhaps not her own role within them. Throughout the story, she has to overcome a sense of loneliness and jealousy of the beasts she so admires because of their confidence of their place on earth. After all, as Nannie Rawley points out, a salamander never questions his place at the center of the universe (215). Deanna muses: ““They’re all doing their own little piece of this big rowdy thing. Their plan is the persistence of life on earth”” (258). She wants to feel like she is contributing with her own life to the same “thing,” and strives to put herself in accord with the wilderness. Hers is an existential crisis as well. She realizes her own mortality and the fleeting fragility of life, and feels the need to somehow leave a mark to give her life meaning, something she senses it ultimately lacks.

For Deanna, science and spirituality are inseparable and harmonious. So it is no surprise that she mourns what she assumes is her transition to menopause as the death of her chance at biological salvation and eternal life: “She kept herself still and tried to think of coyote children emerging from the forest’s womb with their eyes wide open, while the finite possibilities of her own children closed their eyes, finally, on this world” (330). Her attention to the coyotes is a reflection of her preoccupation with both life and death; she is dedicated to their safety and survival but they also represent the world of the dead. This changes when she learns that what she thought was lost fertility turns out to be just the opposite, pregnancy: “She would step somehow away from the realm of ghosts that she’d inhabited all her life to commit herself irrevocably to the living”

(386). By the end of the book she is pregnant and on the verge of contributing to the natural cycles of life she has respectfully observed in the wilderness for so long.

Even Deanna’s relationship with Eddie Bondo, though a celebration of sexuality and fertility in a very simple and blunt sense, is also shadowed by undertones of the mystical. Throughout the story, he appears and disappears silently, sometimes under Deanna’s very nose. He slips in and out of sight like a skilled tracker...or a ghost. He is a fleeting presence in Deanna’s life, a transient who stays only for a summer, long enough to plant his seed and move on. At one point Deanna even yells during an argument that he doesn’t exist (255). But, in his absence, he leaves the physical trace of himself in of Deanna’s unborn child, like a gift from another realm.

Lusa is also uncertain of her spirituality and her place in the world at the beginning of the book. When her husband dies she learns a new reality: “How strange that you could share the objects of your life with whole communities of the dead and never give them a single thought until one of your own crossed over. Lusa had come only lately to this truth: she was living among ghosts” (76). As she learns about Cole’s childhood, she finds herself in a landscape of mingled lives and memories in the Widener Homeplace, and she describes these borrowed memories of the Cole’s family as ghosts several times. In particular, she talks about Cole’s mother haunting the kitchen (114) and the ghosts of Cole and his sister Jewel as children running around on the porch (240). These ghosts take on a new form when Lusa becomes close with Jewel’s children, Crys and Lowell, who she sees as living incarnations of the ghosts of Cole and Jewel (309), much as Deanna’s coyotes represent an extinct predecessor.

Lusa is also surrounded by ghosts from her own family, particularly her *zayda*, or grandfather, who she can hear playing the violin when it rains (357). The ghosts of her own family will her to stay on the Widener farm because they lost their own family farms. On one side of the family, her ancestors had to flee their land as Jews in Poland during World War II. On the other, her ancestors were robbed of their land in Palestine by the creation of Israel. Lusa feels compelled to settle onto a piece of land for their sake as well as her own (357). Her decision to stay

in Zebulon Valley connects her to her ancestors in “one long story, the history of a family that stayed on its land” (437).

A manifestation of this newfound connection to land and place is Lusa’s garden, which she tends with diligence. She grows food that is different from what most people in the area grow, namely fava beans for falafel meal and four different kinds of eggplants for old family recipes (375). By tending the soil of the Widener Place while growing food that her ancestors would have grown, Lusa gracefully merges the two halves of her identity. Gardening has long been studied for its meditative and therapeutic benefits, particularly for people grieving the loss of a loved one. A recently published article studies spirituality as connectedness, an expression of inner being, the garden as a spiritual place, and gardening as spiritual activity. Stewardship of the land is particularly healing during periods of grief or loss (Unruh and Hutchinson 567-574). Lusa is an example of this thesis: she finds solace in being around growing things and the botanical life that is present in her garden and which she is intrinsically connected to as its steward. Barbara Kingsolver is of the opinion that being closely connected to one’s food is always a spiritual endeavor, as she states in “A Good Farmer,” “Modern American culture is fairly empty of any suggestion that one’s relationship to the land, to consumption and food, is a religious matter. But it’s true; the decision to attend to the health of one’s habitat and food chain is a spiritual choice” (15). Lusa makes that spiritual choice as a result of her subconscious need for fulfillment after the death of her husband.

Though Lusa talks about her ghosts in a literal way, she thinks of them figuratively: “Maybe I shouldn’t even call them ghosts. It’s just stuff you can’t see. *That* I believe in, probably more than most people. Certain kinds of love you can’t see. That’s what I’m calling ghosts” (357). She talks about smelling and hearing the ghosts around the house, and compares this sense to the way animals communicate, because animals depend on senses beyond sight much more than humans do. This comparison between animal instinct and seeing ghosts opens up a unique perspective on spirituality, Kingsolver’s perspective. Like Deanna, Lusa learns to embrace death as a part of life and accepts that not everything can be explained by human reason. Animals are lifted to a spiritual plane by this belief, because many of their senses transcend those belonging to humans. At

one point a moth is even directly compared to a supplicant bowing towards Mecca (169). This reflects the same loyalty to nature and ecology that is so blatant in Deanna’s worldview.

Old Garnett is also aware of ghosts. In particular, his attempt to bring back the Chestnut trees reveals this. Garnett is “haunted by the ghosts of these old chestnuts, by the great emptiness their extinction had left in the world.” He even describes his rituals of admiration for old chestnut wood as “going to the cemetery to be with dead relatives” (128), a remarkably similar sentiment to Deanna’s feelings toward the ghosts of extinct species of animals. And, as Nannie Rawley points out, chestnuts are biologically dead, beyond the possibility of reproducing on their own. In his attempt to bring the chestnut trees back, he is honoring their ghosts. A surprisingly pagan thing to do for such a crotchety old Christian.

Garnett is also kept company by the ghost of his dead wife, Ellen. He talks to her out loud and thinks about her all the time. He has a very literal interpretation of the spiritual world and believes that Ellen is actually listening directly to him when he speaks, that she can even see what he sees. But Ellen’s ghost is apparently not without a biological lesson of her own. It is suggested that her lung cancer may have been caused by the pesticides he sprayed on his crops: “It dawned on him with a deeper dread that it might possibly be true. He’d never read the fine print on the Sevin dust package, but he knew it got into your lungs like something evil” (272). Thus, in perhaps a rather heavy-handed way, even the most traditional ghosts in the Kingsolver’s novel offer lessons in ecology and responsible agricultural stewardship.

Towards the end of the novel, all of the main characters see coyotes, except for Deanna who has seen them several times throughout the story. She hears them instead: “Coyotes began to howl from the ridge top. With voices that rose and broke and trembled with clean astonished joy, they raised up their long blue harmony against the dark sky. Not a single voice in the darkness but two: a mated pair in the new world, having the last laugh” (435). Deanna’s coyotes, the ghosts of the red wolf, slip into the consciousness of the rest of the characters. They literally have the last laugh. Even old Garnett is astonished by their wildness and beauty, describing their presence as a sort of magic (393).

The last chapter of the novel is told in the perspective of a female coyote, walking in the forest after a wild storm, which in itself is a symbol of death and the fragility of life. The coyote, which had been a vehicle for the ghost motif throughout the book, speaks. Kingsolver's ghosts are incarnations of death, which is an incarnation of life. Throughout her narrative, her characters learn to live alongside manifestations of ghosts, and subsequently death, in harmony. In that journey towards an understanding and acceptance death, a community is formed that is sustainable and will continue for generations. Deanna moves in with Nanny, pregnant with a child that will hopefully one day continue Nanny's organic farming legacy. Lusa adopts two Widener children who will then inherit the Widener farm and the sacred responsibility that accompanies the use of that land. These same children will be introduced to Garnett's chestnut trees with the hopes that they continue their regeneration after his death. Thus, through the eyes of several different characters, who's spiritualities range drastically, Kingsolver manages to define ghosts as symbols for death, and death as a natural force that keeps the ecological world in balance, and perpetuates the universal rhythm of life.

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## The Insanity and the Shrine

*Kayla Sweeney*

Within the world of Edgar Allan Poe, we are enshrouded inside impeding darkness, unconquerable danger, and perpetual melancholy. Between the crevices of psychologically disturbed minds, the perspective of the realm around us turns from normality to insanity. Pets turn into mockers that must be punished. Teeth transform into gleaming scoffers contained inside a woman's lips. The mind turns into an inescapable chamber of darkness and confusion. We enter through the eyes of a demented man—and looking inside, we come to the realization that even the uttermost intimate emotions cannot escape as remnants unaltered. The word *love* appears throughout the works of Poe. Images of women, pets, and friends cover the pages of his *Tales of Terror*. Within the chambers of these diseased and darkened psyches, however, even "love" itself cannot repel madness. Throughout Poe's *Tales of Terror*, we see the displacement of love as objects of adoration mutate into idols of sickening worship, the madness of the narrators conquers hidden perspectives, and acts of murder turn into acts of mechanism.

Within the consciences of Poe's neurotic narrators, any object of "love" is soon altered into a piece of artwork, analytically and obsessively appraised by its beholder. In "Ligeia" the nameless narrator describes the beauty of his "beloved" as the "radiance of an opium dream" that "passes into [his] spirit . . . [and] there dwell[s] as in a shrine" (195, 197). Before the shadowed throne, he admires this ghost-like figure, described with long tassels of wording, yet leaving the reader still questioning the true attributes of the "airy" Ligeia. No emotions of hers are penned. No deep sense of humanity is detected. Rather, she and the other idols throughout Poe's stories are presented as elegant statues,

covered in marble—exquisitely beautiful, but possessing only stone within the vessels of their beings. In Poe’s “Berenice,” we see this essence as the narrator confesses that his eyes behold her not “as the living and breathing Berenice, but as the Berenice of a dream,” who is not “of the earth . . . [but merely] the abstraction of such a being” (224). Canopied in rich language, the figures underneath are vague, unclear, and apparently heartless—they are only external; they are only wistful gestures, faints of mist, and shadows of fleeting beauty. As we see in Poe’s “The Black Cat,” even the love for a pawing pet cannot escape the overbearing claws of insanity that emerge from the bizarre psyches of Poe’s narrators. Before falling into his abyss of madness, the protagonist depicts his fiend friend as a “large and beautiful animal, entirely black and sagacious to an astonishing degree” (656). This majestic figure is soon brought into destruction, however, when the hand that admired its form slaughters what it once worshipped. The narrators of these tales, dwelling within the obscurity of their own minds, cannot see beyond mystical and darkened beauty, and therefore do not paint love in their lines, but merely infatuated, idolatrous worship of the grand figures that they will eventually eradicate.

While the pages of Poe’s tales are filled with names, the majority of the interactions within these stories are solely existent between the narrators and their diseased, battling psyches. Others’ emotions are stifled, and points of view are obliterated from our lens. Though described exasperatingly, the voices of the marble idols are never heard from the tops of their pedestals. Under the narrating voices of madness, we hear not emotion, and certainly not love, for within the realms of these thoughts, we see that feelings are never of “heart . . . [but] always of mind” (224). This is the perspective we gaze through—the irrational, neurotic reasoning that convinces itself that terror exists within white teeth or a glass eye, that a cat is vengeful in his lack of affection, and that the other side of the narrator’s state of mind is seeking spiteful destruction of itself. This state of mind convinces Montresor in “The Cask of Amontillado” that his friend’s insults force him to “punish. . . [and] punish with impunity,” leading him to imprison Fortunado into inescapable death (259). It induces the nameless narrator in “The Tell-Tale Heart” to conclude that although “it [is] not [an] old man [himself] who [vexes] him,” he owns an “Evil eye” that must be destroyed, if only by a midnight

murderous assault (364). It causes a man to long for women’s teeth “with a frenzied desire” until “all other matters and different interest[s] bec[ome] absorbed in their single contemplation” (226). It even persuades William Wilson to see and hate “a second William Wilson” until he “plunges [his] sword, with brute ferocity, repeatedly through and through his [very own] bosom” (9, 23). Here, in the minds of psychotic, vengeful narrators, the reader finds himself unable to grasp any sense of genuine characterization, unable to detect any emotion within the wistful victims, and unable to care when these characters fall into utter and helpless ruin.

As diseased psyches fall into irreversible madness and objects of affection are changed into idols, violence strikes. But murder is not presented as agonizing tragedy; it is presented as a process. Rather than the ravaging of true life, whether animal or human, Poe’s narrators speak of murder as the ingenious capture of majestic statues, the strategic killing and storage of hunted game, or the slaughtering sacrifice of golden-cast images. As the narrator of the “Tell-Tale Heart” slithers noiselessly into the room of his future victim, he recounts “how cunningly he thrust[s] [his lantern] in” before he destroys the innocent man (364). As Montresor confines his wallowing friend into his death, he methodically describes how he “la[ys] the second tier, and the third, and the fourth . . . hear[ing] the furious vibrations of the chain” until he “cease[s] [his] labors and s[its] down upon the bones” (265). The nameless narrator of “The Black Cat,” having murdered his wife with an axe, “[can] readily displace the bricks. . . [and] having procured mortar, sand, and hair” can plaster his victim within the wall (663-664). Death, the cause of the most grievous states, is not portrayed in mourning, sorrow, or even surprise in the midst of Poe’s narratives. Rather, we are taken through psychotic systems of murder that have been laid out, with the most cautious and meticulous thought, into the sickening minds of the narrators.

Given the darkened world of Poe’s narratives, we find ourselves imprisoned in overwhelming melancholy and tragic endings, and yet soon discover that we can only muster enough emotion to be slightly disturbed. We are not despondent over the death of the black cat. We do not mourn the murder of Fortunado. We are not broken-hearted when the old man falls dead to the floor. Rather, because love in its true form is absent

in Poe's tales—and mutated into sick, idolatrous obsession over vague images of beauty—we ourselves cannot love these images and therefore must leave the works with numb consideration of the characters inside and apathetic disgust over the ruination into which they fell.

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#### “The Dream of the Rood”: A Synthesis of Anglo-Saxon Culture and Christian Beliefs

*Susan Taylor*

The haunting medieval poem “The Dream of the Rood” chronicles the narrator’s dream wherein he speaks to the cross from which Christ was hung during the crucifixion. The rood, now adorned with jewels, details the crucifixion from a unique outside, yet intimate, perspective. “The Dream of the Rood” is exceptional, not only in its creative approach to an important Christian event, but also in its reflection of Anglo-Saxon culture. “The Dream of the Rood” is able to effectively synthesize Christian values and Anglo-Saxon culture through the retelling the story of the crucifixion with an emphasis on important Anglo-Saxon ideals. Through an examination of the portrayal as Christ as a medieval hero, the *comitatus* of the cross, and the embracement of *wyrd* by Christ and the cross, one is able to perfectly detect the intricate blend of medieval culture and Christian values.

The distance of England from the central Christian church in Rome created some tensions in the process of conversion, which allowed the Church in England to develop a decided local flavor (Black 9). The fusion of pagan traditions and a new Christian belief system was reflected in the literature of the time. In fact, it has been noted that it “...is impossible as well as inappropriate to separate ‘Christian’ from ‘pagan’ elements in the literature of the Anglo-Saxons. A longing for the heavenly home could be expressed in the tones of the traditional elegy, Christ could be portrayed as a mighty warrior and his crucifixion as a heroic battle...” (Black 10). “The Dream of the Rood” demonstrates these literary conventions in the description of Jesus Christ and through the portrayal of Christ’s suffering on the cross. The rood explains, “Then the young hero made ready — that was God

almighty —/strong and resolute; he ascended on the high gallows,/ brave in the sight of many, when he wanted to ransom mankind” (39-41). In these lines Christ is the epitome of an Anglo-Saxon hero—brave, stoic, and accepting his fate with dignity. In addition to portraying Christ as the classic Anglo-Saxon hero, Christ is directly referred to as a “hero” several times throughout the poem (39, 78, 95). Further fulfilling the conventions of literature featuring a blend of pagan and Christian values “Dream of the Rood” describes the crucifixion scene in language similar to a description of a battle:

There they took almighty God,  
lifted him from his heavy torment; the warriors then left me  
standing drenched in blood, all shot through with arrows.  
They laid him down, bone-weary, and stood by his body’s head;  
they watched the Lord of heaven there, who rested a while,  
weary from his mighty battle. (60-65)

The powerful imagery and the carefully chosen rhetoric of those lines draw an apt comparison between the suffering of Christ on the cross and the agony of warriors in battle. Such depictions of Christ and the crucifixion are a perfect blending of Christian belief and values of an Anglo-Saxon society that was focused on war and achieving glory through battle.

The Anglo-Saxon society, which placed a special import on war, battle and heroism, established a heroic code of conduct known as *comitatus*. Comitatus explains the relationship between a leader and his warriors, a relationship that is based on unrelenting trust and servitude. The honor of comitatus is expressed in “The Dream of the Rood” in the relationship between Christ and the cross from which he hangs. The cross describes its devotion to Christ by remaining strong during the entirety of the crucifixion despite the horrible nature of the event:

I trembled when he embraced me, but I dared not bow to the  
ground,  
or fall to the earth’s corners – I had to stand fast.  
I was reared as a cross: I raised up the mighty King,  
the Lord of heaven; I dared not lie down.  
They drove dark nails through me; the scars are still visible,  
open wounds of hate; I dared not harm any of them.

They mocked us both together; I was all drenched with blood  
flowing from that man’s side after he had sent forth his spirit.  
(42-49)

Comitatus expects that warriors will stay by their lord until the end of battle—in a society that has established comitatus as the code of conduct there is no greater dishonor than to abandon the king during a time of strife. Just as a warrior who abides by comitatus will withstand the horrors of war as long as it benefits the king, the cross will endure the crucifixion and the humiliation of the crowd’s mockery with his lord, Jesus Christ.

“The Dream of the Rood” explores a concept that appears frequently in Anglo-Saxon literature, but does not have a modern equivalent. *Wyrd* is described as “a powerful but not quite personified force; the closest parallel in modern English is “Fate” (Black 51). Essentially, *wyrd* is a quiet acceptance of destiny. In “The Dream of the Rood” both Christ and the cross embrace *wyrd* and accept what fate has in store for them. Christ is described as approaching the cross without protest and suffers in silence as he is tortured and mocked—He has accepted that in order to provide salvation for His followers he must be willing to suffer and die on the cross. Similarly, the rood accepts its fate as part of the means of Christ’s death and a symbol of His sacrifice:

Then I saw the Lord of mankind  
hasten eagerly, when he wanted to ascend onto me.  
There I dared not bow down or break,  
against the Lord’s word, when I saw  
the ends of the earth tremble. Easily I might  
have felled all those enemies, and yet I stood fast. (33-38)

Though Christ and the rood both have a means of escaping the torment of the crucifixion, both accept fate without protest, thus accepting *wyrd*.

“The Dream of the Rood” is an excellent synthesis of Christian beliefs and Anglo-Saxon values. The poem reflects the importance of battle, honor and bravery, all of which were core ideal in the Anglo-Saxon time period. An analysis of “Dream of the Rood” provides insight into the ushering in of Christianity into a previously pagan society.

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