

The
Ashen
Egg

A Journal of Undergraduate English Scholarship

Department of English
Western Kentucky University

Vol. 13 (2025)

The Ashen Egg

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Note on Journal's Title:

The phoenix has long been recognized as a symbol of rejuvenation. After arsonists attempted to destroy Cherry Hall by fire in 2006, the English Department adopted the phoenix as its informal mascot in recognition of its enduring spirit. *The Ashen Egg* carries that symbolic connection a step farther. As the intermediary state between one incarnation of the phoenix and its next, the ash-enshrouded egg of

the phoenix is a manifestation of the continuity between generations. The intellectual work of our students, as exemplified by the material in each volume, stands as a legacy fostered by one generation of scholars among the next.

Call For Papers: *The Ashen Egg* Vol. 14 (2026)

Submission guidelines: *The Ashen Egg* is an annual journal publishing essays on literature, rhetoric, linguistics, film, and popular culture. Any current Western Kentucky University undergraduate student may submit work for consideration. Submissions must be endorsed by an English Department faculty member who confirms the submission as a piece produced for one of the faculty member's courses and approves it as worthy for publication. Manuscripts may range from 750 to 3000 words, though exceptions may be made for submissions of stellar quality. Literature, film, and pop culture essays must follow the Modern Language Association style guidelines as defined in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (latest edition); essays on linguistics or professional writing topics may use APA (latest edition). Submissions must be received no later than December 16 and must be accompanied by the cover sheet and endorsement form to be considered.

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NOTE ON CONTRIBUTORS

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Red Flag for Women and Children: The History and Evolution of Little Red Riding Hood.”

Alyssa Southwood is a double major in English Literature and Geological Sciences. She has always had a strong passion for the humanities, but it was her dual-enrollment English professor, Bernard Lewis, who sparked her love for literature and writing. She enjoys using Letterboxd religiously, meeting new people, exploring new places, and trying new things. In the future, she hopes to work in the field of environmental science, focusing on sustainability, and possibly write for environmentally focused websites while traveling the world.

Faith Yonts is a Senior at WKU pursuing an English/Creative Writing Degree with a certificate in Graphic Design. She enjoys writing everything—whether it’s poetry, flash fiction, or creative, literary essays. Topics of interest include struggles with chronic illness, our perception of mental health, and how family dynamics inform our worldview. She believes that the greatest thing we can do as writers is create stories that allow us to understand each other better.

Joel Youngers is a senior from Mt. Juliet, TN studying English Literature and is in the running to be PCAL’s Scholar of the College at his graduation this Spring. He is overly fond of words of any kind in any genre—the ones written at night and when courting sadness are perhaps his favorite, though. You can read some of his own work in both *Zephyrus* and the *Talisman*. The thing he is most grateful for from his time at WKU is its profound scope-broadening on how he views knowledge itself.

“THE HISTORIAN IN HER”: HOW ASEMA SHINES A LIGHT ON PAST AND PRESENT INDIGENOUS ISSUES IN *THE SENTENCE*

by *Elena Adkins*

Though narratives are often shaped by main characters, secondary characters have a vital role in accomplishing the goals of an author. In *The Sentence* by Louise Erdrich, even though the protagonist Tookie presents the central narration of the work and discusses many of the story's major themes, Erdrich uses another character to highlight the struggles of indigenous communities. With a story rooted in the culture of Indigenous Americans, Erdrich presents the experiences of a community many of her readers have likely never explored. Faced with challenges in the past and present, the hardships of Indigenous life are not hidden in this work. Yet one common thread unites the many passages that discuss the realities of Indigenous Americans. In *The Sentence*, Erdrich uses the bold character of Asema Larson to bring awareness to issues faced by indigenous communities through her character's strong introduction, her knowledge of history, and her dedication to promoting modern change.

Asema is given definitive traits about her character within her first introduction in the work. She is a coworker of the main character, Tookie, and they both work at a bookstore in Minneapolis. The first description of Asema states, “Asema is

twenty-two years old, a history and Ojibwe language major at the University of Minnesota” (Erdrich 47). At this first introduction, Tookie’s narration credits Asema’s knowledge of culture and history immediately. A conversation follows between Tookie and Asema where Asema reveals her tightknit relationship with an elder of her community that mentors her in her studies of Ojibwe culture and language (Erdrich 48). Asema’s background is quickly made clear to the reader in these few sentences, showing how even as a young member of the community Asema is deeply aware of her cultural heritage. Described as a “merciless critic” in the reader’s first introduction to Asema’s character (Erdrich 48), Erdrich presents a bold picture of a character who is not content for her culture to be continually hidden. This allows for the introduction of a theme of Indigenous visibility, a theme that is seen in many of Erdrich’s works. In an article discussing Erdrich’s *Tracks*, author Kathleen Brogan observes, “In her fiction, Erdrich investigates varieties of cultural incorporation, searching for a way to translate a lost past in the terms of the present” (174). With so much of Indigenous identity being lost to American awareness, Asema’s character is one way that Erdrich keeps Indigenous culture present in the narrative. The introduction of Asema sets the foundation for her role as a beacon of awareness for barriers to Indigenous life.

Asema’s introduction allows for her historical knowledge to be expressed throughout the rest of the story. A minor plot in the book revolves around the discourse about unethical practices surrounding Indigenous human remains. In one instance of this discussion, Tookie and Asema are approached by a woman who tells them a story of how her relatives have property on historically Indigenous land and discovered two full skeletons of Indigenous remains. The woman goes on to explain how her relative profited from the display of these bones. Asema has a strong reaction to this story, Tookie even observing that she was afraid that “the historian in her [Asema] might choke the woman” (Erdrich 75).

Asema's reaction is supported by other evidence in the work that demonstrates her character's passion for this particular issue in history. This dedication to uncovering the truth about history is seen in an outburst Asema has during a phone call with Tookie. Despite Tookie's protest that she doesn't want to be reminded of the past, Asema makes a claim about the nature of Indigenous history by stating,

Okay, but look. Think how white people believe their houses or yards or scenic overlooks are haunted by Indians, when it's really the opposite. We're haunted by settlers and their descendants. We're haunted by the Army Medical Museum and countless natural history museums and small-town museums who still have unclaimed bones in their collections (81).

Later in the story, the reader learns that Asema is frustrated by the misuse of objects that can contribute to the limited primary record of Indigenous history. In one of the work's prominent storylines revolving around the late bookstore customer, Flora, Asema accuses Flora of stealing a manuscript written by an Indigenous woman in captivity. She claims she will never be able to forgive Flora for that act (Erdrich 195). Asema's attitude toward reshaping the lens of history is a trait that can be seen in Erdrich's other work as well. In Brogan's commentary on *Tracks*, she states that, "Erdrich's emphasis on the necessity of questioning and the possibility of choice defines tradition not as a changeless essence, but as imaginative construction, built from but not limited to the familiar materials of a people's cultural treasury" (173). This posture towards the retelling of history shapes Asema's character as she is not content with her culture's history being consistently interrupted by the agendas of others.

Asema is eager to engage with history, even if it is in a way that her peers at the bookstore do not. This is evident during a scene where Tookie tries to dissuade Asema from "lecturing" her and her husband Pollux about the history surrounding the manuscript that

Flora stole (Erdrich 298). Asema describes the unfair treatment faced by Indigenous Americans in explicit detail, illustrating her vast knowledge as well as her choice to not diminish the harmful treatment of the ancestral tribes in the area. Asema explains to Tookie that, ““The policing of Indigenous people by white people on this continent goes back to the creation of occupying military forces ben on wars of extermination in both U.S. and Canada...It was the bluecoats, the calvary, the RCMP”” (Erdrich 299). Asema recites this information without consulting outside sources during this dialogue, proving that her passion for sharing the history of her community is deeply important to her. And she continues to share this information even when Tookie does not want to listen. During this discussion, Tookie continually uses sarcastic language to show her disinterest, calling Asema “Professor Asema” (Erdrich 298) and asking if she could “get credits for listening to this” (Erdrich 300) while Asema spoke. Asema ignores her and continues sharing the harsh truths about what Indigenous peoples faced in their area. This forces Tookie to learn more about the mysteries of the manuscript and its connection to Flora, developing a central plot in the novel of Tookie’s own self-discovery. Asema’s forcefulness in sharing history with others is a character trait that Erdrich uses to never let Indigenous issues disappear in the narrative, encouraging the reader to think about how these issues are often overlooked in many histories and media.

Historical issues are not the only issues presented by Asema’s character. Erdrich uses Asema to highlight contemporary issues for Indigenous Americans as well. Throughout many conversations in the book, Asema’s dialogue points to issues faced by her community regardless of if those around her deem them important. Erdrich presents Asema as a character who not only thoroughly understands historical injustice but views her culture as a way to reject the injustice of the present. Asema takes this attitude about injustice and transforms it into action toward public policy. During a gathering with many of the bookstore employees, Asema

discusses how wild rice, an ingredient with immense cultural significance, is being threatened by a local government initiative. At Tookie's initial indifference to the issue, Asema makes the claim that "Every world-destroying project disrupts something intimate, tangible, and Indigenous... Wild rice isn't just a cultural issue, or a delicious niche food, it is a way of talking about human survival" (Erdrich 130). This dedication to preserving tradition isn't simply a result of Asema's interest in history, it is her character demonstrating the fact that Indigenous communities are still being harmed by government policies. Erdrich also uses Asema's role in the story to highlight how historical portrayals of Indigenous culture still have ramifications on contemporary culture. A conversation between Tookie and her daughter, Hetta, reveals that Asema was on a committee to have the Minnesota state seal and flag changed. Tookie recalls, "Our state seal and flag: an Indian with a ridiculous spear rides off while a farmer plows his field with a gun propped on a tree stump. Asema was on the last committee to get it changed" (Erdrich 238). Asema advocates for progress to change how society views Indigenous culture, a fact Erdrich intentionally designed for her character to be able to articulate.

Being so heavily based around Indigenous culture and characters, *The Sentence* offers a new perspective on the events of 2020 to its readers. But its impactful message of Indigenous visibility could not have been fully accomplished without the character of Asema. With her strong introduction, dialogue about historical issues, and passion for creating positive change in modern society, Asema's spirited nature is seen clearly throughout the work. By creating a bold, young voice to share the truths of Indigenous experiences both past and present, Erdrich reminds readers to reevaluate the lens through which they view history in the midst of a ghost story.

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GODS, MORTALS, AND FATE IN HOMER'S *ODYSSEY*

by *Christina Colovos*

Divinity is an ageless concept, one that humans have incessantly grappled with and which weaves itself even into secular contexts. The boundary between the divine and the human would understandably be a clear one, yet deciding *where* this boundary falls has proven surprisingly difficult. One of literature's greatest and oldest endeavors is seeking to answer the role of the divine in the lives of mortals. Texts such as Homer's *The Odyssey* battle with the notion that humans may be subject to the gods' decrees, as evident in the protagonist Odysseus' constant setbacks on his journey home because of his habitual scheming. However, that is not to say that men are without autonomy; the introduction to the epic poem suggests that even though the gods may predestine a man's fate, men are still capable of inciting destruction upon themselves through their careless actions. This paradoxical characterization of fate is foundational for the rest of the poem, reiterating time and again that the gods and humans are distinct in hierarchy and authority, yet similar in that they both have some agency over one's destiny.

The poem's introductory lines are among the most recognizable in all of literature, permeating cultural and linguistic barriers for centuries. Despite the dozens of translations readily available to the modern reader, every version transmits the same message: Odysseus is a troubled warrior, and he and his men are

toys of the gods and fate. Just within the first three lines, readers see Odysseus struggling to make his glorious return from exile: “Sing to me of the man, Muse, the man of twists and turns / driven time and again off course, once he had plundered / the hallowed heights of Troy” (1.1-3). The introduction here suggests that Odysseus is at a loss of control over his destiny, if he was ever in control to begin with. In saying that he was “driven time and again off course,” readers can immediately observe his failed plans and incessant struggles. The subject of this sentence is never provided, yet readers can assume that it is the gods who are interfering with his plans to return to Ithaca, since they are the agents of every other trial in the story. However, this is not to say that the gods are so far divided from humanity that they are acting out of cruelty or injustice. Odysseus is not an innocent man; he “plundered / the hallowed heights of Troy” and is first described using the ancient Greek word ‘polytropos,’ which refers to a much-traveled, shifty nature. Such a description paints Odysseus as a “man of twists and turns,” as translated in modern text. The description here can be a bit perplexing, as Odysseus’ “twists and turns” remain ambiguous, seemingly referring to either himself or to his wayward journey. It is instances like these where a synoptic analysis is useful. Emily Wilson, the first woman to translate *The Odyssey* into English, translates “the man of twists and turns” to the more direct “a complicated man,” thereby instilling a certain anxiety in readers about Odysseus’ motives. She wants to suggest to readers that perhaps *he* is the turner of his situation, rather than the deities knocking him off course (Mason 48). Such a characterization proposes that Odysseus’ loss of control is self-inflicted, and that the gods are exercising their authoritative power over humans by misguiding his homecoming as a direct consequence of his pride and other flaws.

The introduction continues to indicate that mortals are subject to the gods’ decrees, yet incite their own destruction through their actions. Just moments after the descriptions of Odysseus’

troublesome voyage, the narrator adds that “the recklessness of [his comrades] own ways destroyed them all” (1.8). This statement is an early bit of foreshadowing for the events described in book twelve, when Odysseus’ men “devoured the cattle of the Sun” (1.9) against the will of Helios, the Sun god. The circumstances again explain the correlation between man’s disobedience and the gods’ wrath. James Duffy, in his article “Homer’s Conception of Fate,” continues this logic, asserting that every man is allotted “a certain amount of inevitable fate,” but that “this fate could be aggravated or hastened by human misconduct” (482). Though Duffy is not referring to a particular instance in *The Odyssey* and instead is providing a general explanation of human suffering in the poem, his logic does embed itself into nearly every line and crevice of the epic. It certainly does relate to Odysseus’ men destroying themselves on Helios’ island, as well as to Odysseus himself on his fateful journey home. The poem’s introduction exudes divine overtones that reiterate the relationship between mortal actions and divine decrees, distinguishing the divine and the human by differences in power, yet suggesting the slight agency that humans possess over their own fate. Beginning the story with such thought-provoking language conditions readers to expect a consistent authoritative direction from the gods and also exposes their “cruelty” as a direct result of man’s waywardness, forcing readers to ponder whether the gods are innately cruel or if humans self-inflict these punishments.

Following the closure of the famous introduction, book one continues discussing the role of the gods in mortal lives. Where the introduction suggests that the gods may be cruel in their jurisdictions, the rest of the book counters this notion by revealing their benevolence and determination to bring Odysseus safely back to Ithaca. Zeus first plans a divine intervention with Athena and Hermes to bring Odysseus safely home after his decades-long departure: “But come, all of us here put heads together now, /

work out his journey home so Odysseus can return” (1.91-92). Zeus here reflects the absolute power and control that the gods are able to exert over humans. Though Odysseus may view his journey home as something natural and even autonomous, he is actually being constantly guided by a divine hand who is deciding his next course of action. The gods also exhibit great benevolence in this situation, using their joint powers to save Odysseus from Calypso’s unrelenting grasp. Despite the introduction inciting suspicion in the gods’ motives, the actual narrative insinuates that they are helpful deities who only bring about calamity when challenged or otherwise provoked. As part of this plan, Athena descends down to Ithaca from Mount Olympus in order to advise Prince Telemachus, son of Odysseus, on how to find his father. She disguises herself as Mentos, a warrior and friend of Odysseus, in order to make herself more approachable and to make Telemachus more likely to listen to her advice. It is unnecessary for Athena to go to such extents to aid Telemachus, yet her trip validates that the gods do, indeed, desire the protection of humans. Ultimately, Odysseus does leave Calypso’s island after Hermes discussed with her the gods’ “fixed decree” to bring Odysseus home (5.34). The debilitated warrior again embarks on his troublesome journey, unknowingly preparing to be shipwrecked and stranded on the island of Scheria. A fate such as this one seemingly discredits the gods’ prior benevolence. How could a loving god protect someone by prescribing such harshness? The divine protect humans by putting us through trials and hardships, but ultimately delivering us from them. We cannot see the end, so we attribute every wrong to things above. But these struggles are intended to produce endurance that will withstand the journey, and see us through to the end. The peril is the protection. So even though Odysseus is, at first, a sort of toy to both the gods and the fate that they exert, his journey is ultimately triumphant and their decrees are ultimately sound.

Where certain elements of the story seemingly propose that Zeus *decrees* these fates, other scenarios offer a challenging

perspective, asserting that Zeus himself *is* fate. Such a notion would imply that there is an extreme, impenetrable divide between the divine and the human, arguing that deities are all-authoritative and leaving no room for mortal intervention. There are some supporting bits of evidence for this theory, such as when Zeus decrees Odysseus' release from Calypso and then the situation does unfold (5.289). Duffy also references this specific scene, upholding the claim that "it was Zeus who ordered Odysseus' release; therefore, when it is said that it was fated that Odysseus return to Ithaca, we must assume that the will of Zeus and fate are identical" (480). Though there is of course both merit and logic in this argument, it does not suffice to place every action and reaction of the poem under this blanket. Poseidon, for example, is a clear example of a god who commands great calamity outside of the rule of Zeus. He is first characterized as a god who is distinct from the others on Mount Olympus: "then every god took pity, / all except Poseidon. He raged on, seething against / the great Odysseus till he reached his native land" (1.22-24). This isolating description occurs immediately after the introduction, towards the very beginning of the poem. Readers see from the opening lines that Poseidon seems to possess his own destructive capabilities outside of the realm of the utopian Mount Olympus. Later, in book nine, Odysseus proudly reveals his true name to Polyphemus, the man-eating cyclops whom Odysseus has blinded, and who has taken Odysseus and his men captive on his island. Odysseus nearly escapes the island unscathed, but this tumultuous act of hubris and physical violence against Polyphemus causes Polyphemus to call on his father, Poseidon, to prevent Odysseus' safe return home. Poseidon listens and a sea of troubles now awaits the crew (9.584-597). Zeus is an absent figure in this scene, yet Poseidon is the creator of many disturbances and woeful fates. To say that Zeus is fate, and that nothing outside of him can protect or prevent any one person's plans, is narrow and naive. In this specific situation, the cyclops, a

mortal being, is able to enlist the wrath of a god on another mortal, suggesting that mortals do, perhaps, have some agency over other people's fate. Though the mortals cannot directly interfere with each other's destinies, intercessions to the gods are a possible medium for doing so, thus emphasizing a distinct hierarchy between the gods and men that can be manipulated and abridged for the accomplishment of our mortal desires.

Much how Polyphemus, as a mortal, slightly bridges the gap between the gods and men by invoking divine wrath on Odysseus, Helios too calls on the deities to harm the ill-fated crew. In book twelve, Odysseus and his men are stranded on Helios' island. Their food eventually runs out, and the crew resorts to eating Helios' cattle, which they were priorly warned never to do. Upon learning of this terrible choice, Helios furiously summons the wrath of Zeus to punish the men, to which Zeus obeys. Though Helios does speak directly to Zeus, rather than to a separate, more "minor" god like Poseidon in the previous example, it still does not seem a natural course of action, or a fated course of action, since Zeus likely would not have otherwise caused the destruction of Odysseus' crew. In the case of Polyphemus and Poseidon, the poem proves that mortals can, indeed, incite the wrath of the gods on other humans. In the case of Helios and Zeus, it is proven that the gods themselves can call on more superior, authoritative gods like Zeus to "aggravate or hasten fate," to put it in the words of Duffy (482). The role of the gods in the lives of humans is ever-present and can evidently be provoked by either mortal or divine means. To argue that Zeus *is* fate overlooks many of the complicated relationships between the gods and men. Though he is often the acting agent of either human blisses or calamities, these are often situations that are called to his attention where he is asked to act forcefully. Therefore, both he and the enlisting agents are bringers of this thing called fate.

Homer's *The Odyssey* is one of Earth's most durable pieces of literature. The dozens of modern translations available provide a similar yet comprehensive message about the brave Odysseus venturing on his troublesome journey back to Ithaca. Though the story is rife with hardship and grief—as readers certainly see him in his most vulnerable moments—there are also moments of profound triumph and beauty, and the relationship between the gods and humans in this poem is a notable one. The story opens with the suggestion that the gods are possibly cruel, driving Odysseus off course time and time again. A closer reading, however, reveals that Odysseus may be the one to blame for his relentless struggle home. This brings into question whether the gods are innately cruel or if our own actions bring about our ruin. The gods and humans are intertwined in such a way that fate is inexorably tied between the two. The gods may predestine and prescribe this fate, but humans and “inferior” gods alike have the agency to call upon higher powers and request the destruction of another; such a relationship implies that fate is not necessarily a natural course of action, but that the free-willed actions of a careless man can expedite that which was bound to happen. Homer's deeply philosophical work therefore implicitly discusses the distinction of the gods and humans in hierarchy and authority, yet offers a unique perspective that humans may, perhaps, be able to conjure that which is already destined.

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ENGLISH IN APPALACHIAN KENTUCKY COMPARED TO OTHER REGIONS OF KENTUCKY

by Mikayla Gambrel

Introduction

As someone who was born in Bowling Green, Kentucky, raised in Pineville, Kentucky, visited Muhlenberg, Kentucky, and now attends college in Bowling Green, Kentucky, I have spent most of my life observing and noticing the different types of English across the state of Kentucky. Because I learned to talk in Eastern Kentucky, my Appalachian accent has been the center of comedy for my friends and family who live outside of Appalachia for my entire life. While the joking is all in good fun, it has sparked my interest on the topic of the variety of English across Kentucky. This paper explores questions like “How does the accent, dialect, and grammar of Appalachian English speakers in Kentucky differ from the accent, dialect, and grammar of people from other regions of Kentucky?” and “How do these differences impact college students?” People with influences from the Appalachian regions of Kentucky consistently speak differently than people not influenced by the Appalachian regions of Kentucky in terms of dialect, accent, and grammar. These differences in speech, such as using “buggy” instead of “shopping cart” or pronouncing “oil” as “old” without the “d,” cause linguistic prejudice, making people, specifically college students, hesitant to speak up because they are afraid of how they will be perceived.

Appalachian Dialect

Appalachian dialect, involving vocabulary and syntax, includes diction and word choices that are unfamiliar to people who were not influenced by Appalachian regions of Kentucky. Even if people can understand the intended meaning of the words, they are not as accustomed to the specific word choices as they are with the ones they were raised hearing and speaking. All in all, the word choice and syntax across Kentucky varies greatly depending on the region and influences of a person's speech.

Vocabulary

When naming an assortment of sweet, carbonated beverages, people raised in Appalachian regions in Kentucky tend to say "pop," while people not raised in Appalachian regions tend to refer to it as "soda." Appalachian English speakers typically refer to the device used to hold groceries while shopping as "buggy," while non-Appalachian English speakers usually call it a "shopping cart." In Appalachian English, the word "hollow," as in "She lives in the hollow," is pronounced as "holler," but other versions of English pronounce it as spelled.

Syntax

Furthermore, there are certain sentences and phrases that Appalachian English speakers commonly use or are familiar with that non-Appalachian English speakers do not use or are unfamiliar with. For instance, when someone is discussing the weather, I have noticed that Appalachian speakers tend to say "pouring the rain," while speakers in other areas would simply say "pouring rain." Another stark contrast I have noticed in my time in Kentucky is the phrase "cut the light on." People from Appalachia are more likely to use this phrase, or are at least familiar with that wording, while people who are not influenced by the Appalachian dialect are unfamiliar with that type of syntax.

Appalachian Accent

Even the pronunciation of the word *Appalachian* itself is different across regions of Kentucky. In my experiences, I have noticed that people from the Appalachian region are most likely to use the middle sound that resembles “latch,” while people not from that region of Kentucky use a middle sound that resembles “lay.” The Appalachian version of English places stress on different syllables and pronounces some words differently at the level of lexicon than other regions in Kentucky.

Accent: -oi Sound as in “Oil”

Appalachian English speakers are more likely to pronounce words with -oi sound, such as “oil,” “foil,” or “coil” as one syllable, while speakers of other dialects of English are more likely to pronounce them as two syllable words. The word “coil” resembles “cool” or “coal” to some speakers of the Appalachian dialect. The ‘Standard English’ pronunciation of “oil” given phonetically is: /ɔɪəl/. The typical pronunciation that I found among Appalachian English speakers given phonetically is: /ɔɪ/. Similar patterns were found in other words that came before or after /l/; this is known as ‘glide deletion of /oy/’ (Labov et al. 2006).

Accent: -ir sound as in “Iron”

Similarly to the -oil sounds, Appalachian speakers are more likely to pronounce -ir words like “iron,” “fire,” or “tire” as a one syllable word than speakers of other dialects of English. The word fire in ‘Standard English’ is phonetically spelled as /faɪəɪ/ while speakers of the Appalachian variation of English are more likely to pronounce it as the phonetic spelling /faɪ/. This sounds similarly to “far” to most Appalachian speakers. Other examples, like iron and tire, are pronounced very similarly.

Accent: -i sound as in “Fight”

Speakers of Appalachian English are likely to pronounce words like “fight,” “light,” and “night” differently than speakers who are not influenced by the Appalachian variation of English.

Phonetically, this difference looks like /fart/ in the ‘Standard English’ variation compared to /fat/ in the Appalachian variation of English. This may be a subtle difference, but it is one of the largest changes I have noticed most of my life as I traveled across the state of Kentucky, and it is usually the first thing people I meet comment on regarding my speech.

Appalachian Grammar

Southern, especially Appalachian grammar, is often noted as uneducated or informal, but this version of English has its own rules, and its speakers are often very educated. Despite a common misconception, it is clear that the level of education, based on the people’s backgrounds that I have interviewed, does not correlate with the grammar of the subjects. Grammar, specifically grammar rules and/or patterns involving negation, direct and indirect objects, and modifiers, varies depending on the influences a person has had in their speech.

Negation

Negation in Appalachian English tends to lean on double negatives, while that type of wording is unfamiliar or non-Standard to other English variations. For instance, people not influenced by the Appalachian variation of English would claim that “I never hardly went fishing” was an unfamiliar or “wrong” sentence. On the other hand, people who have been heavily influenced by the Appalachian dialect would use the double negatives regularly in conversation, or at the very least, be used to its usage by others. Also, the word “ain’t” is much more common for speakers in the Appalachian regions than others. While most English speakers are familiar with the word, most Kentucky speakers not from Appalachian regions would not use it regularly. All in all, the

negation in Appalachian English varies from the negation in other varieties of English.

Direct vs Indirect Object

Both direct and indirect objects in Appalachian English are used and/or structured differently than other dialects in Kentucky. For example, the sentence “I got me a new dress for the dance” may be familiar to speakers with Appalachian influence, while it would likely be a strange sentence to those who are not influenced by the Appalachian dialect; those people would likely omit ‘me.’ Another example of the way objects are used varies is the sentence “They went and got them dinner every Sunday after church.” The use of ‘got me’ or ‘got them’ in this structure is commonly used among Appalachian speakers, but is not as common across other regions of Kentucky.

Modifiers

Speakers of the Appalachian variation of English are more likely to use modifiers, adverbs, and adjectives differently. For example, “It’s awful hot outside” and “That girl was plumb crazy” both use modifiers (“awful” and “plumb”) in a way that many non-Appalachian speakers would find unfamiliar or would not say. Additionally, the addition of a non-plural -s is common among the Appalachian variation. For instance, the sentence “Are you going somewheres tonight?” involves a plural modifier, a pattern similar to the Plural Verbal -s (Montgomery 1997). The addition of an -s to words such as modifiers or verbs is a common pattern that many speakers of the Appalachian dialect are familiar with, while other Kentucky speakers are not.

Conclusion: Causes & Effects

The Appalachian variation of English often carries a negative connotation—a connotation of uneducation—and speakers of the Appalachian dialect tend to adapt or hide their variation of speech to prevent assumptions. After living in Bowling Green as a college student for two years, I have made changes to my speech, such as

now saying “soda” rather than “pop,” so that I am not perceived as uneducated based on my Appalachian dialect. According to a study from North Carolina State University,

In their interviews, some rural Appalachian students recalled times when they spoke up in class only to be met with snickers for sounding "hillbilly" or "country." Others reported they had been hesitant to speak in class, felt singled out, dreaded oral presentations, tried to change the way they talked, and felt that they had to work harder to earn the respect of faculty and peers (Ford et al. 2015).

College students who are heavily influenced by the Appalachian variation of English have tendencies to be more reserved in classes due to the prior experiences of stereotypical judgment from peers and professors. Others refuse to alter their speech because it is a form of identity. Regardless, college students, or anyone of any age, should not be judged or feel pressured to change because of their dialects, accents, and grammar; those things are not a reflection of one’s intelligence, and the variations of English stem from cultural, geographic, historic, and other factors. The Appalachian variation, for instance, is theorized to be caused by the immigration patterns of people coming from the United Kingdom to the United States, particularly to the Appalachian Mountains (Montgomery 1997). When people from different parts of the UK immigrated to the US, the differences in their dialects also immigrated to the particular regions in which they inhabited. Since there were limited interactions between people who lived in the Appalachian regions and who lived elsewhere in the United States, those dialect differences and variations were long-lasting and have survived through modern day (Montgomery 1997). All in all, differences between the Appalachian variation of English compared to other variations of English are certainly notable and relatively consistent across different regions of Kentucky.

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MIRRORS AND REFLECTIONS: THE HEALING PROCESS IN TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED*

by Kaylee Russell

Introduction

Trauma and the healing process are prominent themes in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Many characters in this novel deal with physical, mental, and emotional abuse from their experience of being enslaved, as well as being forced to remember the abuse that all enslaved Africans faced as a community. The characters of Sethe and Paul D are especially affected by their past and are forced by the character Beloved's actions to relive their past trauma. Beloved's actions of discussing Sethe's chokecherry tree scar, having non-consensual sex with Paul D, losing her teeth, becoming pregnant, and describing the terrors of the Middle Passage imitate the abuse that Sethe and Paul D are subjected to throughout the novel. Morrison writes Beloved's actions to reflect and mirror traumatic incidents that occurred during slavery in order to emphasize how Beloved connects all the horrors of the past with the present lives of each of the main characters in the novel to necessitate their healing processes through forced "rememory" of their past traumas.

Beatings and The Chokecherry Tree

Sethe's chokecherry tree scar is one of the most well known symbols of physical abuse in *Beloved*. This scar is located on Sethe's

back and is described by Amy as, "...a tree... A chokecherry tree. See, here's the trunk—it's red and split wide open, full of sap, and this here's the parting for the branches. You got a mighty lot of branches... Your back got a whole tree on it. In bloom" (93). Sethe herself never sees the tree and cannot feel the components of its leaves or branches because it becomes numb after the wound heals and creates a scar. When Paul D first arrives at 124 he places his head on Sethe's back, and Morrison writes, "She straightened up and knew, but could not feel, that his cheek was pressing into the branches of her chokecherry tree" (20). Sethe only mentions the chokecherry tree to her daughter, Denver, and Paul D until Beloved comes to 124. When Beloved returns, she seems to know about traumatic incidents that occurred in the past for Sethe and Paul D and asks them to tell or show her the abuse they have suffered. Initially, Beloved is only interested in Sethe and the trauma that she harbors, stating that "[Sethe] is the one I need" and mentioning that she wants to hear the story of how Sethe gave birth to Denver while escaping from Sweet Home plantation (89-90). In this retelling, Beloved listens intently to Denver as she is explaining the story of her birth and is described by Morrison as "alert," "hungry," and "downright craving to know" about her mother's trauma (91). In this sense, Beloved is "feeding" off of Sethe's trauma and can only be filled by hearing stories of Sethe's abuse.

Furthermore, Vidler discusses Beloved's hunger for hearing about incidents of Sethe's trauma while she is living within the walls of 124 by using the Freudian theory of "The Uncanny." This connection is based on the German terms for "home" and "unhomely" being linguistically similar and how "...inherent within the home is its own threat: home, in other words, is itself a danger to its inhabitant" (qtd. in Soon Ng 235). Beloved only wants to know the story of Denver's birth once she is living in 124 with Sethe, and she allows Denver to verbally express Sethe's trauma in Denver's upstairs bedroom (87). Before Beloved arrives at 124,

Denver only discusses the story of her birth with her mother and the walls of her house. In this respect, 124 itself is a danger to its inhabitants because it impedes their healing process as its walls hold the verbalized trauma of its residents. It is only when Beloved arrives at 124 that Denver has a human audience to tell her birth story to and receive some remediation from the trauma of her birth for herself and Sethe.

Additionally, during the retelling of Denver's birth, Denver herself has an incident of "rememory" that Morrison describes as "...the performative nature of the act of memory in her thinking" (qtd. in Kovács 164). As Denver is recalling the story of her birth, she states that "[she] was seeing it now and feeling it—through Beloved. Feeling how it must have felt to her mother. Seeing how it must have looked" (91-92). Beloved, by forcing Denver to retell the traumatic incident of her birth, allows her to interact with the past in a way in which she had not previously done. She thinks not only of herself, as she normally likes to do when Sethe tells the story, but of her mother who endured the traumatic wound of the chokecherry tree before giving birth. Denver discusses how her mother was a "nineteen-year-old slavegirl...[who] is tired, scared maybe" and how Beloved and herself "...create what really happened, how it really was" (91-92). Throughout Denver's retelling, Morrison begins transitioning from the present lives of those at 124 to the past when Sethe was actively giving birth. During this transition, the reader is transported from Denver's secondhand point of view that she states is skewed because "[Sethe] never told me all of it" (90) to Sethe's first person point of view of actively giving birth to Denver while dealing with the agony of the chokecherry tree wound on her back. This transition supports Ágnes Zsófia Kovács's theory of the subject, object, and medium of memory and how these components can necessitate a person's healing process when used in tandem. Sethe is the "subject of memory (the one who remembers)," Beloved is the

“object of memory (that triggers ‘rememory’),” and the action of Denver retelling the story of her birth and the chokecherry tree incident is the “medium that is used for representing the act of memory” (163). In this sense, Beloved, by triggering the “rememory” of the incident for Denver, allows her to remediate the trauma surrounding the memories of her birth while also allowing Sethe to use “rememory” to recall the angst of that day to initiate the healing process of, as Morrison describes it in an interview with *The Connecticut Forum*, “...liv[ing] beautifully in the space between life and death” (0:52).

Additionally, Beloved’s action of asking Denver to retell her birth story allows both Sethe and Denver to heal from the generational trauma passed from mother to daughter during the traumatic birth experience. Denver states that her mother was the only person alive who knew the true trauma of her birth experience because, “[Sethe] alone had the mind for it and the time afterward to shape it” (92). Sethe’s ability to “shape” the memories of her past to pass on to Denver supports Hirsch’s theory of “...how intergenerational transmissions of trauma, especially between traumatized mothers and their daughters, can take the form of sense memory and become remediation, postmemory, instead of re-enactment, rememory” (qtd. in Kovács 165). Sethe passes on her trauma to Denver through telling her the story of her traumatic chokecherry tree and birth incidents. Until Beloved returns to 124 Bluestone Road and asks Denver to tell this story, neither Sethe nor Denver ever truly invoke their sense of “sense memory” to work through the trauma and remedy the past by recognizing that the incident was traumatic. This recognition of past trauma by both Sethe and Denver allows for, in Kovács’s words, “the painful work of mediating memories of the past [to] begin” (166) and create a space where Hirsch’s theory of “postmemory” and “remediation” can occur (qtd. in Kovács 165).

Non-consensual Sex and Rape

Beloved's actions of constantly being aroused and attempting seduction throughout the novel also mirror the traumatic events that have happened in Paul D's life. One of the most traumatic incidents that Paul D has endured is sexual abuse at the prison camp in Georgia. At this camp, Paul D and his fellow inmates were subjected to oral rape for "breakfast" (127). When Paul D comes to 124, he still harbors the memories of this horror in his past and has not forced himself to use his "rememory" to face this traumatic event in his present-day life. However, when Beloved comes to 124, he states that "[s]he moved him" physically out of the house and emotionally by constantly "shining" with arousement (76, 134). After Paul D has moved out of the main house at 124 and into the shed, Beloved comes to him and has non-consensual sex with him that brings back memories of rape and sexual abuse. Paul D fiercely tries to fight off Beloved's seductions but eventually fails and seems to be "drawn" to her. When Paul D physically enters Beloved on "the inside part" he cries out, "Red heart. Red heart. Red heart" (137-138). The motif of the color red can be found throughout *Beloved* and is often used to both physically and figuratively describe trauma. According to Florian Bast, Paul D stating that he has a "red heart" after having sex with Beloved represents "the effects of trauma on the psyche" in the forms of repressing "red images" of slavery that are too painful for the characters of *Beloved* to face alone (1082).

Additionally, Paul D often refers to the place where his heart used to be as a "tobacco tin" (86), symbolizing the loving and caring part of himself that he lost during slavery. He attempts to remedy this loss by having consensual sex with Sethe when he first arrives at 124, but states that "[i]t was over before they could get their clothes off. Half-dressed and short of breath, they lay side by side resentful of one another and the skylight above them. His dreaming of her had been too long and too long ago." (24-25).

While Sethe's consensual sex did not reinstate his beating "red heart" to his body and mind, Beloved's non-consensual sex accomplished the feat. Her actions mirrored closely the rape that Paul D endured at the prison camp because she demanded "[y]ou have to touch me. On the inside part," showing no room for argument. Paul D makes the statement, "Coupling with her wasn't even fun. It was more like a brainless urge to stay alive. Each time she came, pulled up her skirts, a life hunger overwhelmed him and he had no more control over it than over his lungs" (137, 311). Beloved's actions in this scene allow Paul D to "re-memory" the traumatic sexual abuse he encountered at the prison camp and restore his "red heart" because he is no longer suppressing the "red image" of rape in his mind. Paul D states, "Sethe, [Beloved's] fixed me and I can't break it" (149), further supporting Bast's theory that "red images" of slavery cannot be faced by one character alone, but must be interacted with by multiple characters to ease the pain of the "image" and begin the healing process for the victim of the trauma (1082).

Furthermore, Beloved's seduction of Sethe in the clearing where Baby Suggs preached to the emancipated slave community in Ohio mirrors Sethe's innate desire to have sex with Paul D after being celibate for years. Sethe, Denver, and Beloved go to this clearing to find some form of inner peace from the news that Halle lost his mind after seeing Sethe sexually assaulted at Sweet Home plantation. Instead of finding a relaxing atmosphere in the clearing, Sethe gets choked seemingly out of thin air. This assault leaves Sethe with bruises on her neck that are visible to Beloved and Denver. When Beloved sees the physical wounds on Sethe, she begins stroking them as well as kissing Sethe under her chin. After these actions, "Sethe moan[s]" (114). This "moaning" sound is often associated with sex and according to Kovács, Beloved's sexual actions in this scene are, "...the representation of the subject of memory's repressed emotions" (167). In this sense, Beloved is the representation of Sethe's repressed sexual emotions towards

Paul D based on “her deprivation” from being celibate since losing Halle (25). Beloved’s seemingly “hungry” sexual actions and need to take away Sethe’s pain of the bruises mirror the “hunger” that Sethe has for the emotional release that sex provides for her. In the clearing, Sethe states, “Beloved’s fingers were heavenly. Under them and breathing evenly again, the anguish rolled down. The peace [she] had come there to find crept into her” (114). Sethe enjoys Beloved’s sexual caresses and Beloved “...watched the work her thumbs were doing and must have loved what she saw because she leaned over and kissed the tenderness under Sethe’s chin” (115). In this scene, Sethe finds the release from worry and inner peace she came to the clearing for and, with Beloved’s help and sexual prowess, begins the remediation process for the traumatic news of Halle losing his mind.

Hygiene Conditions and Tooth Loss

Furthermore, Beloved’s action of losing her teeth mirrors the unhygienic conditions that enslaved Africans were forced to live in while they were being transported to North America and after they arrived on plantations. Morrison writes, “Beloved, inserting a thumb in her mouth along with the forefinger, pulled out a back tooth” (157). Beloved, the former “baby ghost” in the novel and now resurrected grown woman, is used as a means for Morrison to communicate the physical abuse of unsanitary living conditions that formerly enslaved people had to endure while living on plantations in America. According to Eric Kyere, “Enslaved people were poorly fed, overworked and overcrowded... Because they were not paid, enslaved people could not maintain personal hygiene. Clothes went unwashed, baths were infrequent [and] dental care was limited” (para. 5). While Beloved’s state of enslavement is ambiguous in the novel, her action of losing her back tooth leads the reader to suggest that Beloved lived somewhere with poor hygiene conditions and no access to dental care.

Beloved also frequently discusses “falling apart” physically as well as emotionally after she arrives at 124 to emphasize the emotional and physical breaking that enslaved people had to endure on plantations. Morrison writes, “Beloved looked at the [lost] tooth and thought, This is it. Next would be her arm, her hand, a toe. Pieces of her would drop maybe one at a time, maybe all at once... Among the things she could not remember was when she first knew that she could wake up any day and find herself in pieces” (157). Many enslaved people would, like Beloved, not know if they would physically “fall apart” from the physical toll slavery took on their bodies or from the lack of medical treatment they received on plantations. Beloved’s physical “falling apart” is also symbolic of the emotional weight enslaved people carried with them through their fight for survival during their bondage that almost “broke” them into pieces. Morrison states in an interview with *The Connecticut Forum* that survivors of trauma need to only “live beautifully in the space between life and death” and that they need to only “attempt” to live instead of trying to find a “solution” for their trauma (0:52).

Forced Pregnancy and Breastfeeding

Beloved’s action of becoming pregnant at the end of the novel mirrors the trauma of forced procreation for enslaved women and the possibility of sexual assault on their bodies while they were breastfeeding. In *Beloved*, Sethe discusses her own experience with motherhood and how, at Sweet Home plantation, there was, “...no woman to help you get through... Mrs. Garner never had no children and we was the only women there” (187-189). Sethe, being the only female enslaved person at Sweet Home, felt utterly alone in her childbearing experiences because she had no one to instruct her on how to care for a child. Morrison herself speaks on motherhood during slavery in an interview with *Manufacturing Intellect* stating that “Those women [enslaved women] were not parents. People insisted that they have children, but they could not

be mothers because they had nothing to say about the future of those children” (4:32). While Sethe had no say in how many times she was forced to procreate, she took action to ensure a better future for each of her children. Sethe states, “I got us all out. Each and every one of my babies and me too. I birthed them and I got em out and it wasn’t no accident” (190) when discussing her plan of escape from Sweet Home plantation to the safety of Ohio. Sethe’s will and determination to have a say in her children’s future counters Morrison’s statement of African slave women not being “parents” to their children because Sethe was determined to make a way for her children to have a better future in a free state even if it meant she was not there to see it.

However, Sethe also experienced the horrors of slavery while pregnant and was used in the novel as a means for Morrison to communicate the inhumane conditions that most enslaved pregnant women were forced to live in. Sethe was subjected to sexual assault at Sweet Home plantation while she was producing breastmilk to feed her young children. Sethe states, “They took my milk... two boys with mossy teeth, one sucking on my breast the other holding me down, their book-reading teacher watching and writing it up” (82-83). Sethe believed that no one witnessed this incident of sexual abuse and that the boys with “mossy teeth” along with schoolteacher were the only people involved. However, years later when Paul D comes to 124, he tells Sethe that Halle lost his mind because he also witnessed her abuse. Paul D states, “It broke him” (82). Sethe’s sexual abuse while pregnant chipped away at Halle until he had no strength left to fight the trauma, much like how *Beloved*’s action of becoming pregnant at the end of the novel chipped away at Sethe’s strength until she had nothing left to fight with. Morrison writes, “The bigger *Beloved* got, the smaller Sethe became” (294). When *Beloved* becomes pregnant seemingly by “feeding” off of Sethe’s strength, she physically and emotionally abuses her to keep her “in-line.” This form of “feeding” supports

Pamela Barnett's theory of Beloved acting as a "succubus" or "incubus" that is derived from the word "nightmare" to mean, in the case of Beloved, a sexually abusive predator that attacks her victims when they are in a weakened or sleep-like state (421).

While Beloved knows that she can overpower Sethe at the end of the novel, she does not physically or emotionally abuse her until she sucks the life out of her and knows that she can control Sethe by trapping her in her past trauma. Morrison writes that Sethe and Beloved become a person with the "same face" after Sethe sees "the scar... the little curved shadow of a smile in the kootchy-kootchy-coo place under her chin" (281). Once Sethe accepts who Beloved really is, the reincarnated baby she killed with a handsaw, Beloved knows that Sethe will do anything for her out of guilt and she begins "sucking the life" out of Sethe's eyes (294). Barnett states that Beloved forcibly taking Sethe's vitality is like how "Incubi suck out vital fluids and thus exhaust the victim" (421). Beloved takes this vital fluid of life from Sethe and impregnates herself with it at the end of the novel in order to mirror Sethe's most traumatic memory of all, giving birth to Beloved and then being forced to kill her to save her from the horrors of slavery when schoolteacher comes to 124 to collect Sethe and her children.

At the end of the novel, Morrison describes Beloved as "the devil-child" and that "[she] had taken the shape of a pregnant woman" (308). After the women of the town discover that Beloved is acting as an "incubus" they band together to exorcize her from 124, thus freeing Sethe from the trauma of killing her infant daughter. Mahboobeh Khaleghi writes that Beloved is placed in the novel to initiate "[Sethe's] journey toward self-definition and a newly constructed sense of self" and that Sethe's journey of self-discovery ultimately ends when she comes to terms with murdering her baby girl and "...the community exorcized the past, opening the way for the old harmony" (472). Morrison writes that Sethe is "not okay" after Beloved's quick departure, but that the townsfolk

forgot Beloved “like a bad dream,” further supporting Barnett’s theory of Beloved acting as a nightmare “incubus” that her victims had to “wake up” from (314, 323). Sethe eventually begins the healing process for this her greatest piece of trauma when Paul D assures her that “[m]e and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow... You your best thing, Sethe” (322).

The Middle Passage and Past Trauma

Beloved’s action of discussing her supposed firsthand account of the Middle Passage mirrors the trauma of past Africans who actually experienced the horrors of this slave transportation. Beloved describes her time on the Middle Passage as “crouching” in the dark, being deprived of food and water to the point of being incapable of producing sweat or tears, and witnessing people die in front of her eyes (248). Beloved also describes how she was taken onto the top deck of a presumed ship where she was standing and watching faces pass by in the water where enslaved people were thrown overboard by the “men with no skin” (249). These descriptions of the Middle Passage were common knowledge for older enslaved people, but the younger enslaved people such as Sethe and Paul D as well as Sethe’s child, Denver, have forced these descriptions to the back of their minds because of the generational trauma that is passed down through these memories. According to Cynthia Dobbs, the negative effects of “rememory” in this sense is that the memory itself “...is not, in fact, open to the subject’s revision or contextualization within a larger, continuous narrative; rather, the horror of memory in this mode is that it remains fixed, frozen in a time that becomes a dangerously timeless space” (568).

In the novel, Beloved creates a “timeless space” for describing the Middle Passage when she breaks from using complete sentences with uniform punctuation when discussing Sethe, Paul D, and Denver’s trauma to conversing in sentence fragments with

irregular punctuation when discussing her experience with the Middle Passage and her connection with Sethe while on the ship. For example, when Beloved describes her time on the upper deck of the ship and the movement of the enslaved people being thrown overboard, her sentences become more fragmented. She states, "They are not crouching now/we are/they are floating on the water" (250). The chapters discussing Beloved's supposed firsthand account with the Middle Passage are also distinct from other chapters in the novel because they do not discuss events that are happening presently at 124. In these chapters, Beloved focuses solely on telling her experience of living through the Middle Passage and does not acknowledge the hunger or arguments that are happening in the present lives of those living at 124. This transition in the structure of Beloved's language, her seeming abstraction from the other characters in the novel, and the present events happening within 124 while discussing the Middle Passage support Dobbs's assertion that the memory and the trauma of the event as told by Beloved "...is not open to the subject's revision or contextualization within a larger, continuous narrative" (568).

Additionally, Morrison writes Beloved's identity as ambiguous in the novel to withhold the contextualization of the narrative from Beloved's point of view. This ambiguity about Beloved's identity leads the reader to infer that Beloved is the reincarnation of the "baby ghost" haunting 124, an enslaved woman who escaped a terrible past, or a demon that "feeds" off of the worst memories of others. Dobbs asserts that Beloved's lack of true identity correlates with the "...individual and communal disintegration" caused by the horrors of slavery in the United States, beginning with the Middle Passage (572). Supporting Dobbs's theory is the way in which Morrison describes Beloved at the end of the novel, writing that:

Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name. Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her, and even if

they were, how can they call her if they don't know her name? Although she has claim, she is not claimed. In the place where long grass opens, the girl who waited to be loved and cry shame erupts into separate parts, to make it easy for the chewing laughter to swallow her all away (323).

In the community surrounding 124 after Beloved's exorcism from the house, no one can remember Beloved's name and she is not claimed as being loved or important to anyone in the town other than Sethe, much like the enslaved people who were forced to suffer on the Middle Passage were not claimed as "real people" or treated like human beings by the white men transporting them to the United States. In this sense, Beloved is creating an image of the Middle Passage for the reader that is "frozen in time" by discussing how "she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her" and her almost dream-like and surreal descriptions of her time on a ship carrying enslaved people, stating that "the others are taken... I am not taken... there is no one to want me... to say me my name" (251). Beloved's action of no one remembering her name and not being taken by the "men with no skin" to be thrown overboard on the ship directly mirrors the trauma that enslaved people faced by being transported on ships to a foreign country where no one knew their native names and where they were often separated from the ones who loved them, leaving them like Beloved who Morrison writes is "not claimed" and is "wait[ing] to be loved" (323).

Furthermore, Morrison adopts qualities of modernism when discussing the merger of Beloved and Sethe as that of an infant and mother as well as the merger of past and present as Beloved discusses the Middle Passage. Dobbs states that these two images Morrison creates "...act as extreme poles on a continuum of wholeness and loss" (572) that supports the main themes of *Beloved* as the wholeness that healing brings and the loss that has to occur before the healing process begins. In the novel, the chapters that discuss the Middle Passage are written in Beloved's point of view

as she merges the past trauma of this slave transportation with the present trauma of formerly enslaved people still reeling from the abuse they faced in slavery, and the distress of their ancestors who were brought to plantations through the Middle Passage. The chapter that holds the most significance about the trauma of the Middle Passage opens with Beloved merging her past self that remains ambiguous with her present self by stating, “I am Beloved and she is mine” (248). In this chapter, Beloved discusses her experience of seeing enslaved people, symbolized by the face of Sethe, being thrown into the sea and going to meet them in the water but “...[getting] lost in the water under the bridge” (253). Beloved’s action of discussing her loss of Sethe in the water under the bridge symbolizes the loss of agency and autonomy enslaved people faced that they had to use their “rememory” to reflect upon and accept as trauma in order for the healing process to begin.

In this same chapter, Morrison writes that “Now I [Beloved] have found her [Sethe] in this house. She smiles at me and it is my own face smiling. I will not lose her again. She is mine” (254). Beloved’s action of finding Sethe again at 124 in the beginning of the novel necessitates Sethe’s healing process where she can remember the physical, mental, and emotional abuse that her ancestors as well as herself went through during slavery to start her journey on the path toward wholeness by the end of the novel. Morrison, in an interview with *Manufacturing Intellect*, discusses the characters’ journeys to wholeness through loss when stating that she wanted to explore the “interior” of the characters’ lives to give “agency back to the slave instead of the slave owner” (6:27). In this sense, Beloved’s discussion of her supposed firsthand account with the Middle Passage gives agency back to the enslaved people, as she is narrating their story from a first person point of view, and describes all of the horrors of this slave transportation without considering how the event looked from the slave owner’s point of view.

Conclusion

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* holds prominent themes of the effects of trauma on past enslaved people and their families, as well as how the healing process is necessitated by the character of Beloved. Sethe, Paul D, and Denver all cope with their trauma by forcing their mind to forget the most traumatic experiences of their lives. Until Beloved comes to live with them at 124 and begins mirroring the physical, mental, and emotional trauma each character experienced in their lives – including beatings, non-consensual sex and rape, hygiene conditions and tooth loss, forced pregnancy and breastfeeding, and memories of the Middle Passage – they are not able to heal from their past wounds. Beloved's actions and interactions with Sethe, Paul D, and Denver in the novel allow each character to use what Morrison deems as "rememory" to remember the trauma they experienced and begin to remediate their trauma in order to activate their "postmemory" that allows them to heal from their distress. Beloved's character is a powerful tool for Morrison to explain the uncensored horrors of slavery and give hope to her readers that healing from trauma, even the most advanced types, is possible through meaningful conversations and interactions with people who share similar traumatic experiences.

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WHILE THE WORLD WATCHES: CINEMATOGRAPHY, SETTING, AND CHARACTER IN *PARADISE NOW*

by *Garrett Schooley*

There are very few pieces of cinema that include little to no conflict. After all, films are more often than not meant to be a reflection of the world as those involved in the creative process see it. One prominent example of this is director Hany Abu-Assad, the son of Palestinian parents, who was born in Israel. In an article featured in *Los Angeles Times*, entitled, “How Hany Abu-Assad Made Gaza’s First Feature Film and Got Past the Israeli Military, Palestinian Authority and Hamas to Do It,” author Lorraine Ali discusses how Abu-Assad’s films typically, “grapple with themes of occupation, oppression and, ultimately, terrorism.” If that title is not enough of an indication, Abu-Assad’s films often set out to capture the dangerous world that has been created by the Israel-Palestine conflict. Giving visibility to people caught up in conflict is best seen in his 2005 critically acclaimed film, *Paradise Now*. In *Paradise Now*, Abu-Assad’s use of cinematography, setting, and overall political commentary in character-driven moments shines light on a generation of people who find themselves ultimately defined by the Israel-Palestinian War, and their efforts to overcome that definition.

To begin, *Paradise Now* tells quite a bit of its story about its characters and the conflict that defines them through cinematography. The first major instance of this comes when main

characters, childhood friends Said and Khaled, are chosen to be suicide bombers. In a scene that, funnily enough, features a camera, we see Khaled film his martyrdom video where he has to lay out demands for Hamas. The scene starts with Khaled in a medium shot, most of his body in frame as he begins to read the script given to him, firearm in hand. As he speaks, the camera begins to slowly close in on Khaled, until it results in a tight close up. This close up is important for three reasons: the audience is given a more intimate connection to Khaled, as he literally gets closer to them as a figure and a character; secondly, the tighter framing of the camera fits well with how Khaled is feeling in that moment, anxious and unsure of his dedication to the cause; and finally, viewers see his internal struggle to break free from the mental confines of a conflict that has consumed his life. As the camera moves in, the facade of Khaled "the freedom fighter" breaks, instead leaving behind the real Khaled and his worries about his family. With a touch of dark humor, this comes to a head when, in his third and seemingly last attempt at the video, the camera zooms in on Khaled's face as he breaks script, telling his absent mother, "before I forget, there are water filters in Al Mokhtar. They are cheaper than the ones from Kanaze," (Abu-Assad, *Paradise Now*, 2005). By using a close up, Abu-Assad drives home how his characters have identities outside of their involvement in the conflict, but are slowly losing touch with reason and humanity.

Another scene where the cinematography defines these characters is where Khaled and Suha, a close friend of Said's who also has connections to the conflict through her martyr father, find Said at his father's grave. By this point, Said is practically suicidal: he is wearing hidden bombs, and preparing to kill himself via explosive at the grave. At first, Khaled and Suha manage to talk him down, only for Khaled to have to chase Said through the graveyard before finally wrestling him to the ground. For one, the scene is shot primarily with handheld camera work, and while this once again ascribes to Abu-Assad's previous rule of creating

intimacy through close ups, the chase scene feels like controlled chaos. The camera runs behind Said and Khaled, resulting in a shaky, uneven look to the cinematography. This helps to illustrate the mental state of both men who are utterly worn down by the conflict they had been initially willing to join, but feel directionless now. The shakiness helps to underline the tension of how, during this whole sequence, the bombs attached to Said are still armed. By adding that small detail, Abu-Assad allows viewers to re-contextualize the scene as a literal balancing act of both men desperately trying to keep up with a situation that is rapidly deteriorating.

Locations play a large part in helping to define the protagonist's struggle and mindset. Nablus, Palestine and Tel Aviv, Israel are contrasted heavily in appearance in the film using mise-en-scène. Nablus is far more run-down in the film compared to what we see of Israel, but a big part of this is where we see Said and Khaled working at an auto repair shop surrounded by either damaged or stripped-down cars. The mise-en-scene reflects one reason why Abu-Assad might define himself as in exile. In "Situating Accented Cinema," author Hamid Naficy defines the concept of exilic filmmakers, which refers to exiles as "individuals or groups who voluntarily or involuntarily have left their country of origin and who maintain an ambivalent relationship with their previous and current places and cultures" (112). This is important to note as this defines Hany Abu-Assad himself, having left the Middle East as a child. But, unlike many exiles, Abu-Assad returned to his homeland to film *Paradise Now*. This return is most likely what colored his view of the filming locations, and how they are portrayed. Years after his departure from Palestine, Abu-Assad expressed how, "[i]n Gaza, with all the destruction, with all the wars, the ghetto, it's hard to see anything else" (qtd. in Ali). The extent of the conflict's continual destruction only becomes clearer as the film moves from their workplace to the headquarters of the

organization that select the two men as bombers. The unnamed organization, which viewers assume represents Hamas, works out of an abandoned building that seems to have been some type of factory or storage facility. Here, the intention of the *mise-en-scène* begins to make itself clear, as it shows just how little these men have to work with in their fight against the Israeli occupation, instead scraping by with homemade bombs and found weapons.

The scenery of absence appears quite a few times throughout the film, even being seen in the homes of Said and Khaled. A home that is decidedly *not* stripped clean is Suha's, which is noticeably nicer than most of the locations shown in Nablus. Suha is portrayed as much more "modern" in her attempts to fight oppression, it being mentioned she works with peace organizations rather than through warfare. With that in mind, it seems that the message is that this never-ending conflict does nothing more than strip people of their identity and homes, and the way to stop it is to try and find different ways to fight oppression. But where this gets complicated is the film's depiction of locations in Israel. Israel is portrayed far cleaner and more organized than Nablus. Modernization of a city could be an indication of reconciliation. Suha, with her modern living, can just as easily be read as cleaning up a violent past, as her father was a martyr to the same cause Said and Khaled joined. However, modernization and cleanliness could rather be read in a far more cynical way. Israel's major city of Tel Aviv appears in the film, and one of the first shots is of the skyscrapers that dot the city's skyline. However, the final scene of the film shows Said on a bus, surrounded by Israeli soldiers. While the soldiers are shown intentionally so viewers see the target of Said's bombing, Abu-Assad's points to how Israel does a better job of hiding its history of violence, and more importantly, oppression.

Paradise Now examines the lingering effects of the Israel-Palestine conflict on the identities of the characters, and how it defines their worldviews are central to understanding the smaller,

more soul-searching, private moments of the characters. Said and Khaled, from the start, are portrayed as different in their outlooks on life. A moment that sticks out is after their bombs are armed, and Khaled goes over into a corner and pretends to pull the cord in a manner similar to a cowboy drawing his gun in a duel (which, as an aside, is a decidedly western moment in a film centered on the Middle East). Said, meanwhile, is far more driven in his motives, and tries to stick to the plan as much as possible. Where identity comes in is not long before the bombs are armed, where the two men are shaved and put in suits. While literally meant to be their disguise when they go to Israel, it also serves to strip away Said and Khaled of any differentiating features, now carbon copies of countless martyrs that came before them in an endless conflict. Ideological conflicts are also something integral to the identity of the characters, best seen in the car ride Khaled and Suha share as they search for Said after he runs from his father's grave. Suha represents someone who has seemingly "gotten out" of the life of conflict, while Khaled is someone still loyal to the cause. In a tense moment during their mutual search for Said, Khaled tells Suha, "If you can't live as equals, at least we die as equals," only for Suha to retort, "If you can kill and die for equality, you should be able to find a way to be equal in life" (Abu-Assad, *Paradise Now*, 2005). While this scene is a great encapsulation of the themes of the film, it also drives home that Khaled, and several others, have been so accustomed to fighting that they see no other way to live. This scene also, however, solidify Khaled's lingering doubts, as he ultimately becomes indecisive about his bombing mission and tries to get him and Said out of it. This scene points to Khaled's identity, struggling to be free from the conflict, and decision to become a suicide bomber stemming more from loyalty to Said than the cause. It is one of the ending scenes that speaks to viewers about Said's motivations. Said's monologue near the end of the film gives a harrowing insight into those who feel they have no identity outside

of conflict. In a pivotal scene, Said tells his commander that he was raised in a camp after his father, an Israel collaborator, was killed. Said has come to view Palestine, and his life as a whole, as living in a cage. He wholeheartedly believes that the only way out is through the fighting, telling his officer, “I don't know how you'll decide, [whether to dismiss him or continue to use him in a mission] but I will not return to the refugee camp” (Abu-Assad, *Paradise Now*, 2005). In this moment, Said speaks not only for himself, but for countless displaced individuals who have known nothing but pain their whole lives and cannot break free from it, perhaps even willingly in a form of learned helplessness.

On the surface, *Paradise Now* is a story that looks at the men often portrayed as the villains and illuminates how terrorists are created. Through Said's monologue, Abu-Assad reinforces the conviction that “the world is watching.” Hany Abu-Assad sets out to tell a story of how the conflict between Israel and Palestine has crafted a generation of people so disillusioned by it that they feel there is no identity beyond the war. Through cinematography and mise-en-scene, the film shows the effects oppression has on an area, and character moments that show how broken their wills have become. But there are still elements of optimism, as shown through Khaled and Suha, that it is possible to find oneself even in a war zone.

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MADNESS AND REASON: THE LITERARY MADMAN AS A CRITIQUE OF SOCIETY IN KAFKA'S *THE METAMORPHOSIS* AND LU XUN'S "A MADMAN'S DIARY"

by *Alyssa Southwood*

Madness is thought to lack reason. However, madness is not merely the absence of reason, but rather the existence of a distorted form of reason; it contains an illusion of reason. This paradox begs an important question: when does reason stop and madness begin? Both involve the pursuit of a form of reason, a truth, an understanding. Therefore, no rational belief can completely escape the suspicion of madness. Reason and madness are inextricably linked, with one constantly shadowing the other (Felman 207). This tension is particularly evident in literature, where madness often serves as a lens through which to critique society, as seen in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and Lu Xun's "A Madman's Diary." In *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa's transformation into an insect leads to his harrowing isolation and alienation, which, in turn, essentially crowns his metamorphosis. Similarly, in "A Madman's Diary," the protagonist, referred to as the Madman, experiences a psychological breakdown centered around his paranoia and firm belief that those around him are cannibals. Both Gregor and the Madman are portrayed as "literary madmen," figures who often serve as "disguised" philosophers

(208). Their so-called “madness” is not simply a manifestation of mental illness but a form of resistance and escape from the societal parameters within which they are confined.

Thought is, by definition, the “accomplishment of reason,” and an exercise of “sovereignty” of a subject that is capable of truth (211). Therefore, to understand the relationship between madness and reason in literature, one must first understand and acknowledge that madness is often defined as a break from rational thought. According to philosopher and psychoanalyst Soshana Felman, madness is an “act of faith” in reason, albeit a distorted form of that faith (207). In other words, the madman does not lose reason altogether; instead, he constructs a reality in which his logic and reasoning take on a form that appears irrational to those around him. The madman’s belief in his reasoning is rooted in the pursuit of truth, even as it deviates from conventional norms, thus highlighting the complex relationship between madness and reason.

This dynamic is clear in Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*, where Gregor Samsa’s transformation is described in the opening line: “When Gregor Samsa woke one morning from troubled dreams, he found himself transformed right there in his bed into some sort of monstrous insect” (21). Although shocked, his first concern is not his grotesque new form but his lateness for work, revealing how completely consumed he is by his job. He is, in fact, so absorbed in the demands of his job that even in his current state of helplessness, and despite the horrifying circumstances of his transformation, he cannot escape them. As the sole provider for his family, supporting his father, mother, sister, and himself, Gregor had little time to be anything but what his job required him to be. Thus, while Gregor’s transformation into an insect is literal, it also serves as a metaphorical representation of his psychological breakdown, and a response to society and his environment, which stems from years of being trapped in a monotonous, dehumanizing

cycle dictated by his overwhelming responsibilities that were not only expected but demanded of him by his work and his family.

Gregor's transformation marks the next stage of his dehumanization, a process furthered by his inability to communicate when he loses his ability to speak and can only produce incomprehensible sounds. To be certain, his mind remains human, but after the loss of his voice, his humanity cannot be perceived by his fellow humans (Sokol 212). Consequently, horrified by his new appearance and unable to communicate, thus unable to confirm Gregor's humanity, his family keeps him locked away in his bedroom. The only person who enters is his sister, who feeds him scraps and garbage (which he now prefers due to his new physical state) while making occasional remarks such as, "He tucked right in today" or "This time he didn't touch a thing," commenting on his existence without acknowledging his humanity (Kafka 60). In his isolation, Gregor frequently presses his body against the door when he hears someone speak and even hides from his sister to avoid frightening her and limiting his already scarce human interaction (60-61). Over time, this isolation deepens while this alienation from society and his family continuously highlights Gregor's tragedy: he thinks and feels as a human being does, while being unable to make his humanity known to others.

Similarly, the Madman in Lu Xun's "A Madman's Diary" suffers from a breakdown of reality akin to Gregor Samsa's; his madness is both a personal and a social critique. The Madman's diary reveals his apparent delusion that those around him are cannibals and that he is being conspired against to fall prey to this cannibalism. This mental breakdown forms a persecution complex: "an irrational belief or suspicion that the actions of other people towards one are motivated by (disguised) ill will or hostility," a belief formed from delusion and without basis in reality (Oxford English Dictionary). To those around him, he seems to have lost his mind, indicating a lack of reason, but the Madman insists that

he has “reason for [his] fear,” as he claims that the people around him “eat human beings, so they may eat [him]” (9, 11). Initially, his suspicions appear to be entirely irrational, but as the story progresses, the symbolic significance of the Madman’s delusions become clear. His fear of cannibalism serves as a metaphor for the social and political conditions of his time: a feudal society that exploits and consumes its people. His madness extends beyond himself by offering a critique of the cannibalistic nature of an oppressive, corrupt society.

Both Gregor Samsa and the Madman can be interpreted as figures whose madness represents forms of resistance as a response to their societies. Gregor’s transformation, although tragic, offers him a form of liberation from the oppressive societal expectations that previously defined his existence and restricted him to merely going through the motions of life, but never truly living for himself. As an insect, he finds moments of freedom and sovereignty, such as when he is lost in some “reverie” of how “liberating he’d always found it to gaze outside” (Kafka 66). This newfound freedom, however, is bittersweet. As Gregor withdraws further into his insect form, he is forced to confront the loss of his human past, especially when his mother and sister decide to remove all of his furniture to give him more space to roam. Initially, Gregor wishes for this change, but after hearing his mother’s objections, he falters. This internal struggle, whether to embrace the freedom of his new form at the cost of losing his humanity, represents the philosophical tension between resistance and self-destruction. This conflict forces Gregor to question his humanity, and yet, his transformation also allows him to explore aspects of his humanity that societal expectations had previously denied him. This is most evident when he becomes so completely absorbed in, and drawn to, his sister’s violin playing that he pondered whether he “was a beast, that music moved him so” (101). Though his physical form is far from human, his mind is

closer to it than ever before. Yet, for the world, Gregor becomes nothing but an insect, even though he remains, in his own mind, a “human being for himself” (Sokel 212).

Similarly, the Madman’s delusions are not merely the result of a psychological collapse, but also a form of resistance against the oppressive society in which he lives, and a critique of the world around him. His belief that people are conspiring to eat him is a metaphor for the exploitation and dehumanization inherent in the feudal system. As Sekine Eiji argues, this delusion gives form to the depth of the shock that was intrinsic to China’s experience of modern values, and a shocking discovery of its own tradition in a very unexpected, new, and negative way. As the Madman writes in his diary, “just because I am brave they are the more eager to eat me, in order to acquire some of my courage” (13). His madness exposes the rot within society, where cannibalism draws attention to the ways in which individuals are consumed by the forces around them, whether through economic exploitation or social oppression. Thus, the Madman’s internal collapse reflects a larger social collapse, where the rational mind is unable to conform to the overwhelming injustices around him, and so the cannibalism is an allegory of China’s long feudal system, which “terrorized” individuals to the point where they could not even think of a possible change (Eiji 50). In this sense, the madness in “A Madman’s Diary,” becomes a critique of both traditional values and the very idea of a rigid system of beliefs.

Both texts reveal how societal structures drive individuals to madness. In *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor’s transformation and madness can be interpreted as a form of rebellion against, and commentary on, the dehumanizing forces of his family and work that had already consumed him before his transformation. Once the sole provider for his family, Gregor becomes a burden to them and is seen as useless when he is no longer able to support them. Eventually, his entire family begins to refuse his humanity and

ignore his existence entirely. This rejection from his family, as he becomes more insect-like in nature, reflects the larger societal tendency of a dehumanizing and bureaucratic society to discard those who no longer serve a useful purpose, reducing them to mere “cogs in a machine” (Hao). Because of this, Gregor’s value in the eyes of society was reduced to his ability to work. Therefore, Kafka’s depiction emphasizes the harsh and brutal practicality of a society that only valued people for their utility.

Similarly, the Madman’s delusions in Lu Xun’s text can be seen as a response to the exploitative society that practically engulfs its members. His obsession with cannibalism reveals a deeper social crisis, one in which human beings are consumed by the very systems that are supposed to support them, and while the Madman’s madness is a form of resistance, it also forces him to confront the possibility that he, too, may have partaken in the oppressive nature of society: “It is possible that I ate several pieces of my sister’s flesh unwittingly, and now it is my turn...” (20). His paranoia becomes a form of resistance to a society that has become morally bankrupt. As he sees the truth of his situation, even if it is in a distorted form, his madness, like Gregor’s, reflects the internal breakdown caused by a world that has itself gone “mad.” And so, the breakdown of his mind mirrors the collapse of the society around him, only emphasizing the alienation and isolation the Madman experiences.

Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* and Lu Xun’s “A Madman’s Diary” both offer an exploration of madness, not just through Gregor Samsa and the Madman, but as a reaction to their oppressive societal structures. In these texts, madness is not a break from reason, but an “act of faith” in their reasoning that challenges the social values of their respective times (Felman 2006). Whether labeled mad or not, the literary madman represents a philosophical stance in that madness is not the absence of thought but an exercise of sovereignty of a subject capable of truth. As

Felman states, “I think, therefore I am not mad; I am not mad, therefore I am” (211). The literary madman of philosophy is therefore grounded in reason, and Kafka and Lu Xun craft their madmen as figures who have not lost all reason, but who reflect their disillusionment with the status quo. Thus, the “madness” of Gregor and the Madman serves as a tool for resistance as their unique form of distorted reasoning offers powerful critiques of the societies that isolate them.

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IN TREATMENT

by Faith Yonts

“I still have migraine. And I have learned now to live with it, learned when to expect it, how to outwit it, even how to regard it, when it does come, as more friend than lodger.”

– Joan Didion, “In Bed” (1968)

Our lives are made up of stories—the stories that tell us how to live and what kind of a person to be. They are often narrow-minded, misleading tales with a predictable message. If we get sick, the stories tell us that we get better, because who would want to admit that you could be sick for the rest of your life? That creates an unsatisfying ending—a story that is awkward to tell.

Joan Didion, an American journalist and writer who lived from 1934 to 2021, gave a voice to the stories that people didn’t want to face or hear. Didion began her career writing fashion for *Vogue*, pivoted towards conventional fiction, then ushered in a new style of writing dubbed “new journalism.” Her remarkable works of fiction, nonfiction, and memoir were all abundant with beautifully unfurling prose that carries readers towards a raw, cutting truth. In Didion’s essay “The White Album,” she asserts that “We look for the sermon in the suicide, for the social or moral lesson in the murder of five.” She knows as humans, we must seek a moral lesson in death—because dying for no reason at all...*just wouldn’t be fair.*

I am 22 and have three chronic illnesses. And the real kicker is...*I may not get better*. It's not really up to me. Well, it is to some degree. There are protocols to follow, like taking a lot of medicines, drinking a ton of water, eating healthy, and getting routine blood work—but these just take the edge off. *My body is broken and I cannot fix that.*

In her compelling four page essay “In Bed,” Didion ruminates over her “physiological error called migraine.” Defining a migraine disorder as a physiological error puts the ball in her court—*she is to blame*: herself, her genetics, her faulty body. Doctors failed to provide an explanation for her illness, so they inadvertently instilled self-blame into her psyche. Didion sarcastically portrays how this belief is harmful: “migraine headaches were, as everyone who did not have them knew, imaginary.” She realizes that illnesses people cannot visualize, cannot fathom, are invisible to those without them—doctors included.

When Didion was afflicted with her first migraine at eight years old, the Air Corps doctor prescribed her an enema. In hindsight, the doctor was so far off the mark that it's laughable, but when you are struggling with an illness that is folded so deeply within the layers of your tissues, organs, and bones, what else can they do? Doctors are taught that “when you hear hoofbeats, think horses, not zebras.” By memorizing the ways in which horses sound, behave, and present themselves, I imagine they overlook zebras quite often.

I was a zebra for six years. My illnesses were *invisible* until they were diagnosed. *And they still are*. I carry symptoms like badges that only I can touch—real diagnoses, stamps of recognition on my medical charts—and that is still not enough for doctors to believe me. I wish I could staple proof of my conditions on my forehead, but I worry even that wouldn't be enough. *Only I know how I truly feel.*

When Didion continues, “For I had no brain tumor, no eyestrain, no high blood pressure, nothing wrong with me at all,” she captures the rift between doctors believing nothing is wrong with you and *nothing actually being wrong with you*. Migraine disorders and other chronic illnesses are so underdiagnosed because doctors are not seeking the answers to your medical mystery – they are fingering through files of preset illnesses they’ve been programmed to treat.

When we are sick, people tell us, “Don’t worry, you’ll get better.” Most people delivering the moral punchline of this story believe you are sick with a cold, the flu, or Covid-19. For these illnesses, there is an incubation phase, followed by an onslaught of symptoms—usually contagious—and then you get tested, prescribed medicine, and you recover.

If I do recover, it will not be quickly. I have Lyme Disease. There is a highly complicated, evolving treatment plan for this disease. I take antibiotics and probiotics, but not at the same time because they will cancel each other out; I take T3 to speed up the thyroid that Lyme Disease is slowing down; I use eyedrops to kill the bacteria blurring and doubling my vision; I take supplements and hormones to increase the vitamin B, vitamin D, potassium, aldosterone, and testosterone that Lyme depletes. When I first got my vitamin D levels tested, I had a value of 14. That is about two points off from being so low that it can kill you.

Didion confesses, “That no one dies of migraine seems, to someone deep into an attack, an ambiguous blessing.” If migraines could torment you to the point of death, then at least the pain would mean something—there would be a lesson in death. But often, having chronic health issues means enduring pain that has no logical meaning. The pain feels like it *should* be able to kill you, but it never does.

The fact that no one dies of Lyme Disease is unbelievable because it strips you of all the sensations that make you feel alive.

You lose your energy, your clarity of mind, your balance, your physical strength, your sanity. You become fatigued beyond belief and shrouded in a thick brain fog. Your muscle tone decreases, you become weak, and you start losing your mind because all of your symptoms are intrinsic—something the doctors often can't prove. So when your brain MRI, Holter monitor, x-rays, ultrasounds, and ambiguous and exorbitant blood tests all come back normal, and you show no evidence of a tumor, a heart arrhythmia, multiple sclerosis, or arthritis, you are sent home.

Didion projects frustration at those who have no understanding of migraines. They say “we are making ourselves sick, that we ‘bring it on ourselves.’” Having a migraine is something you can only truly understand through experience. A small headache is much different than a three-day migraine; a small bout of drowsiness is different from debilitating fatigue. Not having your glasses on or losing your train of thought are very different from Didion's inability to “focus my eyes or frame coherent sentences, generally giv[ing] the appearance of being on drugs, or drunk.”

Someone may take a benadryl to sleep better, but I take them to save my life. I have Mast Cell Activation Syndrome, and stress, onset of allergies, fatigue, a single inhaled speck of tree pollen, or eating the wrong food can all trigger sudden anaphylaxis. I am allergic to anything my body decides is a threat. I take Allegra and Flonase to reduce my daily symptoms. I take allergy drops to lower the chances of reacting to cat dander, mold, and tree pollen. I keep Benadryls and EpiPens on hand because the threat of going into shock is always close by. I eat about 25 foods because most things cause my throat to close up or my tongue to go numb, or I get so fatigued and dazed I forget where I am.

I also have Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome. My heart rate rises to 153 while standing in place, not because of anxiety but because my blood does not circulate properly. When

nurses take my blood pressure, it usually reads 105/60—a perfectly healthy number; however, it is prone to dipping as low as 80/50, so I take medicine to raise my blood pressure. I drink over 120 ounces of water every day, and if I don't I will get very sick and faint. I take shots of salt and electrolytes. I get dizzy from standing up, nauseous from spinning around, out of breath from walking short distances. I am constantly fighting the urge to pass out.

Didion's illness is *my* illness: "All of us who have migraine suffer not only from the attacks themselves but from the common conviction that we are perversely refusing to cure ourselves..." In eight months, I saw twelve doctors. Nine out of the twelve doctors tested me – the remaining three sent me home. Only two doctors truly believed me. The doctor that diagnosed me with Lyme Disease was my psychiatrist. She was the only doctor who took both my physical and mental symptoms into consideration. That is why it's so important to see the patient not only as an anxious young woman, or just a girl with debilitating knee pain, but both.

Today, migraines are considered a valid health concern; however, it took nearly five decades for migraine treatment to evolve into a functional practice. How Didion felt in the 1960s is how I feel with Lyme Disease and comorbidities today. Despite Lyme Disease being recognized in the 1970s, there is still no single diagnostic criteria for the disease. The CDC certified tests only accurately test people who just contracted the disease. Alternative tests help to diagnose people like me who went undiagnosed for over six years. The CDC is searching for the horses, and alternative tests are scrambling to find the zebras who fell through the cracks.

Joan Didion didn't have access to the resources we have today. They could give her "Methysergide," but they could not explain what exactly caused her migraines—the science was just not up to date. This drug was used for intractable migraines, but years later "it was found to cause retroperitoneal fibrosis after chronic intake." Retroperitoneal fibrosis is a disease that "causes scar-like tissue

over organs in the abdominal cavity.” This disease can be caused by asbestos exposure, cancer, and frequent Methysergide use. Migraine medicines today are much safer, have longer clinical trials, and less threatening side effects. In 2024, Didion could have taken Ubrelyv, one of the many ‘triptans, such as Rizatriptan, Sumatriptan, or Zolmitriptan, the stronger cousins to ibuprofen like Naproxen and several types of beta blockers.

Didion’s migraines taught her an important lesson: “once it comes, now that I am wise in its ways, I no longer fight it. I lie down and let it happen...when the pain recedes... .There is a pleasant convalescent euphoria. I open the windows and feel the air, eat gratefully, sleep well...I count my blessings.” While my body may be broken, malfunctioning, and inefficient in some ways, I try not to get caught up in the pain, or blame myself for it, and eventually it passes. There is beauty in the pain, because it forces you to acknowledge all of the good in your life—no matter how big or small.

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CALL ME BY A NEW NAME: THE POWER OF NAMES
IN *WOLF WHISTLE* BY LEWIS NORDAN

by Joel Youngers

Names have power; it is undeniable. Their presence (or absence) has the ability to humanize or otherwise dehumanize; build up or destroy; remember or erase. Further, the bestowment of a name upon another, be it a positive or negative one, is influenced by the values and ideologies of the surrounding culture. It stands to reason, then, that a name is an external manifestation of the heart of a culture; what a culture names other things reveals much about its ideologies. This is certainly true in the novel *Wolf Whistle*, by Lewis Nordan. This is a story that takes place in the Mississippi Delta and retells fictionally the egregious murder of Emmett Till. This real-life event involved a young boy who was alleged to have “wolf-whistled” at a white woman and was horrifically lynched as a result. It was truly a tragedy for the young boy himself, and all those that knew him that, too, were made victims. In this absurdist novel, we see a retelling of this story told from a variety of internally complex perspectives, including the murderers themselves. This is a choice made by Nordan to tell the “white story of the murder of Emmett Till” (304). This choice to tell this side of the story is in no way an attempt to justify or excuse the actions taken against Emmett (named Bobo in story). Rather, I believe he attempted to tell the “white” side of this story to explore what those unconscious, sociological factors were that led to a

murder like this. One clear way he explored those factors is through the power of names. Using the character of Runt, Nordan explores the complex psychology behind and power of names in relation to their ability to become formed by and maintain social ideologies and prejudices; and further, he portrays the power of renaming and its ability to change societal perceptions.

What something or someone is named reflects how others view that thing or person. This seems an obvious statement, and it is; simplicity, however, does not negate depth or weight of meaning. In her article “The Power of Names,” Kathy Charmaz says, “names carry weight, whether light or heavy. Names provide ways of knowing—and being. Names construct and reify human bonds and social divisions” (1). It is easy to say that names reflect how people view things, but inherent in that reflection, that act of naming is a *power*. Power to affect “being.” Power to affect bonds and divisions on the human and social levels. This power in naming further exists on all plains. It is present in the ways we address one another interpersonally, but it is also present societally and systemically. Often, naming is a corporate enterprise. That is, entire groups of people come to an agreement on what to call things, “attach[ing] value to some names and dismiss[ing] others” (1). These value judgements are then symbolized in those names. Therefore, in reversing the order, it follows that if one looks first at a name, one can understand how a culture views something.

Perhaps the most powerful example of this phenomenon in *Wolf Whistle* is the character of Runt. In the story, Runt is one of the main perspectives from which the story unfolds. He is present at many of the key moments that the narrative hinges on, most notably the scene that starts the action: the inciting incident, Bobo asking Lady Montberclair on a date, and his supposed wolf whistling at her. Beyond being very important to the Bobo murder, however, Runt is a complex character in his own right and has an impactful story of his own. His story is one of self-discovery and

redefinition amidst the backdrop of the same culture that insists on maintaining racist ideologies and accusing innocent boys of crimes elevated to the heights of deserving murder as punishment.

Runt is not truly Runt. Well, he is—both to himself and to everyone else around with no exceptions—but he was not born with that name, nor was he born being convinced he was a runt. The book helps illustrate this: “Cyrus was Runt’s real name, but nobody ever called him that, never had. He was the smallest of the children in his family, when he was a boy, and his daddy always called him the ‘runt of the litter.’ It stuck, wouldn’t you just know it” (27). Before he was even given a chance to begin to define himself, he was given a name that generalized a whole personality based off one aspect of his physical person: his size. The point being made, though, is that Runt being called Runt well into his adult years shows the power of a single moment of a father *naming* a son.

The power of names goes further, however, in that the name itself reinforced a kind of behavior. Runt’s story is a perfect example how “categorization breeds expectations” (Charmaz). The Runt we see in the story, both from his own perspective and the perspective of others seeing him, is just that, a runt. He is employed as the town’s gravedigger, a job that both he and others seemingly view as the job of a failure, and he spends almost all-day, everyday drinking his life away at Red’s Goodlookin Bar and Gro. His life certainly does not look to be the successful kind, and this reality is not lost on himself. In his own musings, Runt thinks:

He dug his own mama’s grave, not too many years ago, with a backhoe. She died of a broken heart because Runt was such a failure in life. No woman could live long in the knowledge that her son was the gravedigger and town drunk in the sorriest little podunk excuse for a town in the sorriest state in the nation. That’s why she died, who wouldn’t? (40)

Of course, Runt can have no way of knowing if this was the reason his mama died. Indeed, this theory was only brought to his mind because another character, the town's funeral director, the Prince of Darkness, told him it was the case. Runt is then told by someone else, "don't believe it, Runt, your mama didn't die of a broken heart" (41). However, Runt still clings to the idea insofar that he still "halfway believed the Prince of Darkness anyways. Broken hearts made sense to Runt" (41).

What this all tells us is that "categorization spawns expectations" both externally and internally (Charmaz). That is, the original naming of Cyrus as Runt set an expectation for him, one that opened the door to a life of low-class work and alcoholism. The expectations were not purely external, however; Runt himself was convinced they were true. He grew up being told that he was at the bottom, and he believed it, which led him to, naturally, wind up at the bottom. The insidious nature of this kind of phenomena is that the named person, purely because of social pressure, can begin to identify with what a society tells them they are. And when one lives within a society that condones the murdering of young boys, it is almost a guarantee that what it tells others they are is negative. In this case, Runt was told he was a runt, so he became one. This is an interesting concept to dig into, as it gets complicated to try and figure out what the determining factor is in a story like Runt's. Of course, the social ideologies and prejudices surrounding what a runt is led to the naming, but once he was named, it was the name itself that led to the greater problem of reinforcing what might not have been had the name not been given. That is, is the naming itself the problem? Are people's lives determined by what we decide to call them? I think to some extent the answer to that is yes. It cannot be said definitively what Runt's life would have looked like had he been given the chance to be something besides Runt, but it is very probable that it would have looked different. And it would have looked different most prominently because he would not have

believed it himself that he was a runt. Being convinced of something makes it very hard to live contrary to that.

Another pertinent example of names maintaining a great power in the novel is two of the most prominent street names in the book: Balance Due and the Belgian Congo. These names—both in their origin and their continued existence—illustrate many of the problematic features of the culture the novel is set in. To be more specific though, what is the culture of *Wolf Whistle*? The novel is set in the Mississippi Delta during the 1950s. So, pretty much as bad as it can get. The prejudice in this area and during this time was almost palpable, and the streets highlight this. Both streets contain neighborhoods, the houses of which are described as no more than “shacks” and “scarcely habitable” (Nordan 4, 7). The roads are “not paved” and the “power lines swagged from post to post” (44, 67). Nordan characterizes these places as, quite frankly, dumps. What is interesting, however, is that Balance Due “ran right into the Belgian Congo”; they were both originally part of same big “field” (67, 68). That is, they have the same living conditions and geographically exist directly adjacent to one another. So, what is the difference? Why are they separated in name only? The answer lies in what divided everything in the South in 1955: race.

The names of Balance Due and the Belgian Congo reflect the racist ideologies prejudices of Southern Mississippi culture. The setting for *Wolf Whistle* is a town that is simply very poor, with little to no economic disparity between impoverished “White Trash” people and Black people. To maintain a sense of superiority over their Black counterparts, however, “white trash people cling fervently to their identities as white,” says Brannon Costello in his article on *Wolf Whistle*. The white people in the novel, then, at some point in their fictional history, separated themselves from the Black people by maintaining a marked distinction between Balance Due and the Belgian Congo, a move committed purely motivated by the desire to segregate on the basis of race. Moreover, it is important to

note that the names themselves are not the things that originally caused the separation. They are merely indicative of a cultural value. However, what started out as simply a reflection of a cultural idea can then become something that reinforces the original ideology. To explain further, the existence of the separateness between Balance Due and the Belgian Congo arose out of a racist ideology and a desire to maintain a distinction. However, once those names were given, they reinforced that distinction further. Charmaz helps to lend credence to this idea when she says, “categorization spawns expectation.” That is, once a thing is named, or categorized, expectations arise directly from the connotations associated with that name, regardless of the true nature of the named thing. In the instance at hand, the name “Balance Due” connotes the stereotype of poverty-ridden white people, and the name “Belgian Congo” connotes a sort of racially sourced savagery, which is how the greater culture at large views these two groups of people, poor white and Black. Therefore, though the names are indeed reflections of the culture that made them, they gain more power insofar as they continue to perpetuate the sentiment in which they originated.

Both the street name and Runt are examples of the same sociological phenomenon. They involve a group of people or a person deciding to name something while functioning within the ideological framework in which they exist and then lead to a perpetuation and reinforcement of those ideologies due to the name’s continued use. Further, at a certain point, the name and the issue become almost inextricably linked and mutually dependent. What breaks this structure then? Because of the multivariate nature of sociological issues, there is not a simple way to solve major issues like this. Moreover, the social tendencies underlying why things like this happen are not necessarily wrong in and of themselves. Social agreements, in our case, names, are inherent to any culture, and it is only when applied unfairly or unjustly that it

becomes an issue. So, there is not a real way to present *the* solution to something like this. *Wolf Whistle*, however, does give *an* answer. While it only comes in the form of one person, the principle behind it can be related to large systemic things, like street names.

Through the character of Runt, *Wolf Whistle* illustrates how internal realities can be changed, and lead to a desire to express that outwardly. In a very heartfelt moment of the novel, Runt calls his wife, Fortunata, and asks her to come home, as she had left because she could no longer take Runt's alcoholism (151). This act of calling her is itself very significant for Runt, as he earlier in the book expresses that he "felt sorry for Fortunata, getting mixed up with a drunken gravedigger" and "he wished he could have spared her falling in love with him" (88). These sentiments are severely self-debasing and led him to even consider calling her to "tell her don't come home" (89). The motivation, of course, being that he wants to save her from himself; he feels inadequate, like a runt. A lot of things happen to Runt in the novel, though, that lead to eventually making that call to her to ask her to come home. The main one being the events surrounding Bobo's murder. The specifics will not be relayed here, but Runt's story climaxes in "a change in the heart, in the soul" (153). What brought about this change was the realization that "it's just so personal, baby. I just never knew how personal the world was, life and all" (151). That is, because of his periphery involvement with the Bobo situation, he realized that everyone is connected in ways he never thought of. He understood, in a sense, some of the societal problems that have been mentioned up to this point. He perhaps even felt a sense of responsibility for what happened to Bobo, as he was indeed there for some of the events, even if he never directly harmed the boy. In any case, all this self-reflection leaves Runt feeling "like there's an emptiness inside me," but it, too, left an impression on him that things needed to change (152). He could no longer go on pretending like he was the sole individual in a universe of one. He was one of many, and his existence, actions, feelings, directly

affects others. This is that soul change related to his wife on the phone, which does indeed convince her to come home. She is able to recognize the deep change that has gone on in Runt.

Perhaps the most important part of the phone call, however, happens before he convinces her to come home, and illustrates the power of renaming. At one point, Fortunata says, “Cyrus, you’re drinking yourself to death. I can’t watch it no more” (151). The content of this is not new and had been expressed before in previous fights they had had, but what is important is that Fortunata uses his *name*, his *real* name (89). Runt responds in his mind like this: “Cyrus. Nobody called Runt by his name in twenty years, thirty maybe. The sound of his own name, like a stranger, like an old book he started reading, once upon a time, and liked, too, but somehow never got around to finishing” (152). Being called Cyrus for the first time in that long took him by surprise, but he *liked* it, and very evidently misses it. The book analogy here causes one to think about how different things would have been for Runt/Cyrus if he *had* gotten “around to finishing” (152). Perhaps he wouldn’t have been Runt at all. That cannot be known, but what can be known is what Runt does in response to being given his name back: he takes it and holds on.

Names are powerful, and so too is renaming. Renaming has been used many times by many different civil rights movements to reform how something is viewed by the culture it resides in. In a chapter of a book called *Women and Language in Transition*, the author relates how feminists have utilized renaming to spark social reform (Van Den Bergh). Another instance of this being used comes from groups of people changing street names to commemorate MLK rather than powerful white people they had previously been named for (Alderman). This particularly being a helpful example, as it relates directly to the street names the Belgian Congo and Balance Due; one wonders what kind of change could be sparked from their renaming. What we do see explicitly in the

novel, however, is Cyrus employing this tactic. He has been changed inwardly, and to commemorate that he takes on a new name, which he hopes will be the thing that allows others to begin to see him anew as well.

This takes time, though, as all real social change does; societies resist change. After all, Cyrus is attempting to enact change in a society that has been stuck in its ways so long young boys are murdered over minute things. A wonderful example of this slowness to change in the novel is a conversation between Cyrus and his son's coach, Coach Heard. Throughout the conversation, which is about Cyrus' son, Roy Dale, Cyrus continually has to remind Coach Heard to call him by his real name, as he continues to refer to him as Runt. This goes on for pages on end. At one point Heard says, "you want a little taste before you go in, Runt?" to which Cyrus naturally replies, "call me Cyrus" (268). Coach Heard, ironically given his name, buckles down and says back, "I did call you Cyrus. That is what I called you" (268). This denial of what is happening symbolizes quite nicely how cultures can pretend to be making progress towards a reform, but in actuality are making no headway. At another point, Heard gets extremely angry at Cyrus and yells "goddammit, Runt! I did call you Cyrus! Goddamn, man! I been calling you Cyrus till I'm blue in the goddamn face!" illustrating how a culture might genuinely be trying to make a change, but reacts strongly against a marginalized people insisting things are still not right (270). By the end of the conversation, though, Coach Heard does begin to call him Cyrus, which is an important step in Runt's redefinition of being and signifies that cultures *can* change; they are not totally static or doomed to remain oppressive. This is a hopeful end to Runt's story and signifies a hopeful end for his society as a whole. If his renaming and redefinition can be accepted, then maybe systemic problems like street names could be addressed next, and then eventually, the breaking down of those subconscious factors that lead to the murdering of young boys.

The novel *Wolf Whistle* is an incredibly dense and complex book and deals with a manifold number of topics, one important among those being the power of names. This story shows how the ideologies and prejudices of a culture impact how and what they name things or people. Further, it masterfully illustrates that once named, an object or person then has expectations or perceptions attached to them that have the power to bend personalities to match them—a sort of reinforcement of the original perception that caused the named thing to become more like its name. The street names the Belgian Congo and Balance Due are good examples of this, but the most robust example of is the character Runt, who wound up a social runt seemingly because his society told him he was. Just like names have the power to define, however, renaming has the power to redefine. Runt began a journey to break out of the deterministic social system he was in and attempted to redefine himself. He knew that inside he was fundamentally changed, and he wanted others to acknowledge that. So, he changed his name, or rather, reclaimed it and became Cyrus. He was not met with universal acceptance at first, and he had to fight for the acceptance he did get, but it did come eventually. In short, the power of names is something that has been wielded to oppress and marginalize and separate, but it is an amoral power; its evil or otherwise good is determined by who uses it and how it is used. Runt transforming to Cyrus is an example of how the power of a name can lead to positive social change, which is a principle that can be taken and applied positively to any society that wishes to reform or otherwise improve.

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ANGER AND RESILIENCE SITTING IN A TREE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF "COPULATION IN ENGLISH" AND "A MADMAN'S DIARY" AFTER THE 2024 ELECTION

by Taryn Deckard

Anger and resilience often hold hands, a sweaty grip encompassing the fury of a situation and hope through carrying on. When I first read “Copulation in English” by Mohja Kahf, I observed the frustration Kahf felt with preserving her Syrian culture in America while under pressure to assimilate. By the end of the poem, she uses her anger to channel resilience by rewriting the narrative of cultural assimilation to stand on her culture. In “A Madman’s Diary” by Lu Xun, the narrator experiences anger due to his traditional Chinese culture which isolates him and drives him to a mental breakdown. By the end of this short story, he leaves the audience on a note of resilience, hoping for reform through the children of society. When I first read this story, my hands were calloused, but overall room temperature and steady due to the privilege of security I felt in my society.

As I write this paper now and reflect on these works, anger and resilience are holding hands again. Donald Trump just won the 2024 presidential election—someone who recently and repeatedly said that immigrants from Haiti have been eating domestic pets. Someone who repeatedly said that Mexico is sending their

criminals over the border. Someone who, when asked about The Me-Too movement, said it is very scary for men right now in America, where they can be found guilty of something they may not be guilty of. These are some of the smallest examples. “Copulation in English” was written in 2003 and “A Madman’s Diary” was written in 1918. With 85 years between these two pieces, anger and resilience are still holding hands. 21 years between the most recent work and today, November 6th, 2024, anger and resilience are still holding hands. What do we do with that? We can feel these two emotions while holding hands, reading these pieces, and absorbing their metaphors of the human body, themes of violence, and hope, to see that we aren’t alone, and we haven’t been.

Mohja Kahf writes that her “experiences growing up in the United States shaped her perceptions of the differences and similarities between the cultures of her home and adopted countries” (Mohja). Her poetry shows how her perceptions of Syrian and American culture influenced the way she grew up. Through the similarities and differences between the two cultures in her poem “Copulation in English,” she explores these cultural influences and forces readers to reflect on their role in a dismissive, divisive society in 2003.

The author of “A Madman’s Diary” originally set out to become a doctor, but then switched his profession to writing, where he thought he could save more lives:

Lu Xun came to believe that medicine, by itself, could engineer only a limited form of progress. To alter the fate of his country, he wrote, his people must “change their spirit.” He abandoned medical school and returned to China, and, in the next decades, he turned to essays, poetry, and short stories to rage against the perils facing China in the early twentieth century—fear, poverty, conformity, and nationalism among them (Rojas).

Xun explores these themes through his piece, “A Madman’s Diary” as he, too, leaves the reader to reflect on societal norms and abuses. Although Kahf and Xun have different cultural backgrounds, they both write about the anger and resilience they feel within their society.

Looking at “Copulation in English” and “A Madman’s Diary,” considering the debilitating nature of society on one’s well-being, the stories become a political tool and a lens. She asserts that “If the organismic metaphor is located at the center of political theory, sickness is located in the center of the metaphor” (Rojas 12). If the metaphors of the human body are prominent throughout these pieces, then sickness (or madness) is the center of the metaphor. By using the metaphor of a human body, Mohja and Xun express discomfort in living in their body to reflect the dissonance the characters feel in living in their society.

Kahf writes about this experience through her poem, “Copulation in English.” In her first stanza, she makes her first body metaphor about the spine, which can be associated with the metaphor of the backbone, meaning the foundation of something. In this case, if English is the backbone of language according to years of racist and classist ideology, then Mohja writes about “arcing its spine like a crescent” (3). This begins the sensual metaphor of a back arcing its spine in pleasure while also fundamentally changing the structure. The spine, or backbone, begins to move, suggesting a change in foundation. Mohja finishes the stanza with “We are going to rewrite English in Arabic / Arabic script: *how sweet, how sweet*” (4-5).

Kahf also writes “We are going to make English dizzy / until English vomits its history / Norman, Saxon, Celtic, down / to its Druid dregs” (11-14). This second body metaphor of bodily fluid provokes the guilt and shame of the erased cultures that created the English language and culture. Kahf uses vomit, a symptom of

anxiety, to say she wants to force “English ” to sit with its ancestors until it is so uncomfortable that it has to become accountable.

Xun created the body-related metaphor of cannibalism in “A Madman's Diary.” The character journals his paranoia of cannibalism in his society, which metaphorically could be the “man eat man” mentality of a capitalistic society, where actions force someone to eat or be eaten to survive. This idea shows the capitalistic structure where competition is necessary to be successful, which can cause humans to do whatever it takes to thrive. The first example of this is in section III: “When I interrupted, the tenant and my brother both stared at me. Only today have I realized that they had the same look in their eyes as those people outside. Just to think of it sets me shivering from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet. They eat human beings, so they may eat me” (Xun). This begins the paranoia that only increasingly gets more severe as the passage goes on. Through the metaphorical lens of cannibalism in a society with little regard for well-being, the character realizes that if society could push even his own brother to conformity, then it can do the same to him.

In section XII, he writes: “I have only just realized that I have been living all these years in a place where for four thousand years they have been eating human flesh” (Xun). This can be interpreted as the realization that this is not a new emergence in society, but a pattern that has slowly been dehumanizing people for thousands of years. He then says “How can a man like myself, after four thousand years of man-caring history—even though I knew nothing about it at first—ever hope to face real men?” This continued cannibalism metaphor of the human body eating itself shows his anger increasing as he wonders if there are any “real” men (besides himself) left in society to question the denial of cultural identity to stop this pattern of societal abuse.

Both “Copulation in English” and “A Madman's Diary” highlight violent themes. These violent themes on top of

metaphors of the body show the physical and mental toll, both of which lead to anger, on members of society. This societal negligence led to an ineffable violence that both authors hone in on.

Kahf's themes of violence begin most explicitly toward the latter half of the poem. In stanza four, Kahf writes "...hold the blades of these lilies-of-the-valley / against its jugular vein" (22-23). The poet uses a biblical reference for purity and peace and pairs it with a blade against someone's neck, highlighting how Christianity is often weaponized. This could be interpreted as making "English" see what it has done to other cultures.

Throughout the poem, the violence gets more intense leading to the last stanza, where it reads "we may slaughter English in its bed and redeem our honor" (41). This line is where the sadistic theme slips into a more explicit revengeful theme. This can be interpreted as the death of "English" leading to the rebirth of cultures and languages that have been erased or underappreciated because of English.

In "A Madman's Diary", violence is a major theme; Cannibalism is a body metaphor, but it can't exist without the pairing of violence. In section VII, it reads "They only eat dead flesh! I remember reading somewhere of a hideous beast, with an ugly look in its eye, called 'hyena' which often eats dead flesh. Even the largest bones it grinds into fragments and swallows: the mere thought of this is enough to terrify one" (Xun). This violent imagery provokes the reader to compare cannibalism to a more common example in nature, a hyena, but then the author talks about the bird grinding the largest bones into fragments and swallowing to pull the reader back to the human body metaphor. This violent metaphor moves past human nature to the violence of nature itself, highlighting a timeline that reveals intense paranoia where the character cannot trust anything anymore, not just humans.

In section XII, the violent theme gets personal as the character wonders if he unwillingly ate his sister's flesh (Xun). This can be interpreted as the damage that gets done just living in an abusive society, that even if he resisted the culture, he could have participated in the man-eat-man society subconsciously. A consumption he can't escape. Just when these pieces reach the peak of anger, a light at the end of the tunnel is revealed. In "Copulation in English" and "A Madman's Diary," the hope for change relies on the next generation to come.

In an interview with Kahf, Claudia Savage asks Kahf how she maintains a positive outlook on life with all the societal injustices against her and her culture. She responds with, "Through my children as they become beings who make their way by the light Within" (Savage). This sentiment is reflected in "Copulation in English" when the last three lines read: "we may slaughter English in its bed and redeem our honor, / even while pregnant with English's bastard / Arabic script: *Here comes the dawn upon us like a fire*" (41-43). Although the poem has more violent language than the interview, the message is the same: The hope for a better future is through the children. Their resilience, imagination, and potential for change offer hope for the generations to come. The ending lines can be interpreted as societal change through the next generation, where cultural identity is embraced, and "English" is no longer the standard. The last line is in Arabic, an interesting choice because "Arabic" gets the final word whereas English had in the past. The "dawn upon us like a fire" shows the promise of the generations to come. Ending the poem with this final stanza leaves the reader to sit with an uncomfortable imagery and leaves room for further reflection about what this poem could mean societally.

In "A Madman's Diary," the passage ends on the same hopeful note as "Copulation in English": the ideas of a better future through the next generation. In section XIII, the last words are "Perhaps there are still children who have not eaten men? Save the

children” (Xun). This passage is broken into sections instead of paragraphs, so ending on only these two sentences in a section, compared to the multi-paragraphed sections leading up to this point, shows the physical gap that the future generation can fill in as they grow into agents of change. Although this section could be interpreted as someone needing to protect the children, the first question suggests that the will to change is still in the children's hands because they have not yet been corrupted by society; therefore, their well-being is still intact, and they could be the agents of change. “Save the children” can be interpreted as a desperate cry for hope, where if this character couldn't make the change, maybe after he is gone the children can begin to fix the broken system.

In conclusion, “Copulation in English” by Mohja Kahf and “A Madman’s Diary” by Lu Xun both have narrators that express anger and resilience through metaphors of the human body, themes of violence, and ideas of a better future through the next generation. Both Kahf and Xun choose to end their piece with only a few lines in the final stanza or section to create the space for readers to reflect on societal influence. Most importantly, the final lines show future generations the gap for them to fill, the agents of change they can be, and the hope for a better tomorrow. There needs to be action taken outside of recognizing these comparisons, reflecting on current societal issues, and creating this paper. It is important to advocate for the mental health and well-being of all people and the generations to come, and to advocate for political representatives that want to advocate for these things. Both pieces end on the note of “the children” creating a better future. Although this is a promising thought, it can't be repeated as a concept alone throughout the generations, or change will never come. You were the children, I was the child, we are together. Anger and resilience are holding hands right now, you don't have to pick one or the other. Be angry. Be resilient.

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WELCOME TO FABULOUS AMERICA!

by Laurel Fields

In the wake of the 2017 Las Vegas concert shooting—an event that left 60 dead and over 400 injured—America was forced to confront the staggering reality of gun violence on an unprecedented scale. The shooting occurred at the Route 91 Harvest Festival, an outdoor country music concert, and shattered the public's sense of safety at large recreational events. While mass shootings at schools, churches, and nightclubs had tragically become familiar to the public, the Las Vegas massacre introduced a chilling notion: no place was truly safe. In response, media outlets, public figures, and even the NRA expressed shock, with calls for banning bump stocks—a device that Stephen Paddock, who carried out the Las Vegas shooting, used to fire his weapons rapidly—emerging as a rare moment of consensus. It was in this context that Marc Murphy published a powerful editorial cartoon in the *Courier Journal* in 2017. Through the use of stark imagery and clever metaphor, the cartoon critiques the normalization of gun violence in America, employing both visual and emotional appeals that resonate across a broad spectrum.

The cartoon replaces the iconic “Welcome to Las Vegas” sign with a bullet-riddled version that reads “Welcome to America.” This visual metaphor transforms a symbol of leisure and entertainment into a jarring commentary on how gun violence seeps into everyday life in the United States. By using the instantly

recognizable Las Vegas sign, the cartoonist invokes the shock and horror of the recent tragedy while simultaneously framing the issue as a national crisis. The thesis of the cartoon is clear: America has become synonymous with gun violence. The wide-ranging audience for this message includes not only those who advocate for stricter gun control but also moderates and conservatives shocked by the frequency and randomness of such attacks.

In light of the *kairos*, the urgent cultural and political moment following the Las Vegas shooting, this cartoon stands out for its timing. The shooting occurred at a public event that catered to a broad audience. This event, targeting a large, random crowd, brought home the idea that gun violence could strike anywhere, prompting even the NRA to reconsider its stance on certain weapons accessories. This context broadens the cartoon's appeal beyond gun control advocates; even individuals skeptical of strict gun regulations could see the logic in limiting access to devices like bump stocks. By drawing on this unique moment of unity, the cartoon's critique is situated within a rare national consensus on the need for some form of action.

When looking deeper into the solution, the cartoon's ambiguity about a specific next step makes it more compelling. It does not explicitly call for specific policies, allowing audiences with differing views on gun control to project their own beliefs onto the cartoon's message. While the bullet-riddled "America" is an overt condemnation of the status quo, it stops short of prescribing one-size-fits-all legislation. This rhetorical move gives the cartoon a broader appeal, making space for a range of interpretations and solutions, from banning bump stocks to larger systemic reforms. For instance, moderates who do not fully endorse stricter gun laws might still find the image a powerful reminder that the status quo is refutable, even if they are unsure of how far to go with reform. This openness ensures that the cartoon resonates with various

factions of the American public, not just staunch gun control advocates.

According to opinion polls conducted in the months following the Las Vegas shooting, a substantial majority of Americans supported some form of gun control. A Gallup poll in 2017 revealed that 60% of respondents believe in stricter laws regarding the sale of firearms, while 91% supports background checks for all gun buyers. Even more tellingly, 72% of Americans express support for banning bump stocks—a rare point of consensus in the gun control debate (Gallup). These polls suggest that the audience for the cartoon was likely wide-ranging, including not only liberals but also conservatives and independents who were shocked by the attack and willing to consider moderate reforms. However, the poll also indicated that while many Americans supported these measures, the broader question of gun control remained contentious, with strong opposition to more comprehensive restrictions like assault weapons bans. The cartoon, by avoiding a heavy-handed policy argument, taps into this broader sentiment of frustration over inaction without alienating those wary of sweeping reforms.

An analysis of Marc Murphy's other works reveals a consistent stance on gun violence, often using similar tactics of irony and visual metaphor. The use of cultural symbols like the Las Vegas sign in this cartoon appears frequently in his work, enabling him to critique American issues in a way that feels familiar to viewers, while also shocking them with stark contrasts between the symbol's traditional meaning and the darker reality being depicted. Through these cartoons, Murphy maintains a stance that is critical of the lack of meaningful action on gun control, though he often leaves the specifics of proposed solutions vague, allowing for broader appeal.

In conclusion, Marc Murphy's editorial cartoon effectively harnesses the *kairos* of the Las Vegas shooting, employing rhetorical tactics such as irony, metaphor, and emotional appeal to

resonate with a wide-ranging audience. The open-ended nature of its critique allows viewers from various political perspectives to connect with the message without feeling alienated by a prescriptive solution. By contextualizing the cartoon within the shock of the event and the momentary consensus for reform, the cartoon becomes a poignant and accessible commentary on the state of gun violence in America.



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A RED FLAG FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN: THE HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

by Atiana Spivey

While many would assume the Charles Perrault version of the classic Red Riding Hood story to be the original, a research project by Professor Jamie Tehrani of Durham University proved that the original is actually a Middle Eastern story. The story, often titled “The Wolf and the Kid” or “The Wolf and the Seven Kids” seems to have several versions, like many oral tales. One version features a baby goat who believes that because he has grown horns, he is old enough to venture on his own. When the shepherds call for the herd to come back, the kid ignores them and continues grazing. However, as it starts to get dark, the kid realizes he is truly alone and starts to fear that the Wolf, a known predator, will come for him. As he begins to head home, he is cornered by the wolf. In a moment of desperation and fear, the kid asks to hear one last song before the wolf devours him. The wolf, certain in his kill, plays a pipe for the dancing kid. The sound of the pipe carries past the field and reaches the ears of the herding dogs. Recognizing it as the wolf’s victory song, the dogs return to the pasture and chase the wolf away from the kid. The wolf laments his lost kill as the kid is returned to his family. The moral of this story seems to work in two ways. The first lesson is one taught to the wolf. He berates himself for losing his opportunity to eat the kid, going hungry for

the night. The second, and the one that I am most concerned with, is the lesson taught to the kid. The baby goat learns to not only listen to his mother but to be wary of his surroundings and be on the lookout for the warning of the “wolf.”

In another version of this story, there are seven kids. The mother goat tells her children that she is going to the market and that they should lock the door because there is a wolf on the prowl. She tells them the wolf often disguises himself but can be identified by his hoarse voice and black paws. The mother leaves, and soon after, there is a knock on the door, followed by a hoarse voice calling for the kids. The goats recognize the hoarse voice as the wolf and refuse to open the door. Attempting to trick them, the wolf swallows chalk and again says that he is the kids’ mother. This time, the kids recognize him by his black paws, which have been pressed against the window. So, the wolf asks several people for help to disguise his black paws. The wolf goes back to the house and this time is let inside. He devours every child but the youngest, and with a full stomach he leaves to nap under the nearby trees. The youngest cowers inside the home until the mother returns to find such devastation. She mourns with her youngest before walking outside and finding the sleeping wolf. She watches as his stomach starts to move and instructs her youngest to grab a pair of shears and a needle and thread. She cuts open the sleeping wolf’s stomach and finds all of her children alive inside. After freeing themselves, the family fills the wolf’s stomach with rocks and sews him back up. When he wakes up, the wolf feels bloated and walks to the river for a drink of water. The rocks weigh him down and he drowns before he can climb back out of the river. This story, much like the first, carries a message of warning. It warns evildoers of what could befall them, but it also serves as a warning to children. If the children had been more cautious of strangers and listened to their mother when she warned them to be wary of the wolf, it’s expected that they would have been safe the whole time.

As there seems to be no true written date, there doesn't appear to be a major historical event that inspired the plotlines of any "The Wolf and the Kids" version. I believe that, like other traditionally oral tales, this story is influenced simply by the desire to instill a weariness in children. No matter the version, every story features at least one child who makes a fatal error by disobeying their mother's advice. It is a way to teach children to be aware of their surroundings and listen to the warnings of their elders. Culturally, goats are thought to represent fertility, good luck, and intelligence, as well as play an irreplaceable role in farming and livestock trades. Wolves, on the other hand, are considered an enemy species and represent illness, monsters, and heretics. This is most likely a strong influence on the choice of species for this tale as the storyline itself is not as unique as the characters.

Although the Middle Eastern version is considered to be the first "Little Red Riding Hood" story, the most well-known "original" is the version written by Charles Perrault in 1697. In this French story, the main character is a young girl from a small village. She is considered incredibly beautiful and doted upon by her mother and grandmother. In fact, her grandmother makes her a red hood that fits her so well that it becomes her village nickname. One day, her mother asks her to take a care package to her grandmother in the next village over. On her way, the girl encounters a wolf in the woods who wants to eat her but fears the woodcutters in the surrounding forest. The girl reveals she is going to her grandmother's house and the wolf suggests they take separate paths to see who will arrive quicker. The girl takes her time and explores the forest, gathering nuts and chasing animals. The wolf makes it to grandmother's house first and tricks her into letting him in, eating her immediately. He then dresses in grandmother's clothes and waits for Little Red Riding Hood. Upon her arrival, he lets her in and convinces her that all of his abnormalities are only side effects of the sickness. As the girl starts

to point out his increasingly inhuman features, the wolf continues to excuse them before finally eating the young girl.

At the end of the tale, Perrault includes a section entitled ‘Morals’ where he explains that children, mainly young girls, shouldn’t trust easily. They should especially be weary of strangers who seem gentle and caring upon first meet, chiefly when those strangers are men. Charles Perrault’s story “Le Petit Chaperone Rouge” is influenced by the cultural shifts of the 17th century. As the French language progressed, there seems to be a want for a more stable, refined society. The personality of Little Red Riding Hood appears to be based around the idea of the *honnêteté* character, meaning a hero who is interested in honesty, morals, and social affairs instead of their own glory. The main character of this story commits no real wrongdoings. In fact, her only fault is being honest to a nefarious character. In tandem with this idea, the thought of an educated, autonomous woman was beginning to make headway as the perfect companion of the *honnêtetés gens*. A woman who had heard of this tale would be more likely to be weary of men who could take advantage of her, and more likely to succeed. At the same time, Jean Racine, a famous 17th-century playwright, created works centering on the image of man ruled by his passions, whether perverse or pure. When viewed through the lens of 17th-century France, these literary themes become far more apparent. The French phrase, “voir le loup,” literally translating to “see the wolf,” can also mean losing your virginity. Aside from the obvious negative connotation that wolves already carry, I believe that this also played a part in Perrault’s character choice. The warning to young women is palpable and heavily influenced by the cultural and literary significance of the time.

From a historical “stranger danger” story to a cautionary tale for young women, the evolution of the Little Red Riding Hood story is one worth investigating. With near identical tales spanning the globe, the evolutionary pathway is a confounding one.

However, each story has its own history to tell beyond their written words. Culturally, historically, and socially, the influence of these tales can be seen far and wide.

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