

## (Re)Creation

July 2018





Issue 26  
July 2018

## **(Re)Creation**

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## **Artist's Statement**

A Chinese-Scottish visual artist based in London, Ben Yau interrogates the aesthetics of global conflict, historical narratives, and social tensions. Trained in lens-based media, he now works with found visual artefacts, such as images from British Ministry of Defence research papers, market data from the Financial Times archive, and YouTube videos of political leaders speaking at UN general assemblies. These artefacts are appropriated and re-contextualised to address systemic frictions within notions of power. He has exhibited in group and duo shows in London and Glasgow, and in 2017 cofounded the art collective against climate change, Decade Zero, with fellow artist Zaneta Zukalova.

The covers for this year's publication, on the theme of (Re)creation, makes use of largely bygone symbols of good and evil: an angel for one cover and a demon for the other. One is a Western rendering, and the other an Eastern one. They are displayed through cryptic coding to suggest a modern reinterpretation of these antiquated iconographies and elementary ideas.



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## Contributors

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**Tessa Buddle** is a PhD candidate in Theatre Studies at the University of Glasgow, and a core member of UK-based theatre company The Suitcase Ensemble. Tessa's research is concerned with innovative practice in collaborative, participatory, devised and touring theatre, and with the concept of utopia as a dramaturgical method. She is a member of the International Federation of Theatre Research and her PhD research is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, via the Scottish Graduate School for the Arts and Humanities.

**Prema Arasu** completed a BA (Hons) at the University of Western Australia in 2017 and is a current Masters student at St. Andrews University where they are undertaking an MLitt in Modern and Contemporary Literature and Culture. Their Masters research focuses on metafiction and fantasy in the work of Terry Pratchett and Diana Wynne Jones. Their research interests include literary theory, post-theory, children's literature, science fiction and fantasy, medical humanities, and the history of emotions.

**Eleanor Small** is a postgraduate student at the University of Glasgow, studying on the Ancient Cultures MLitt. She has a BA in Classics with English from the University of Exeter, and used much of her research from her undergraduate dissertation in this article. Eleanor's academic interests include the status of women in the ancient world, particularly ancient literature, and how this translates to modern-day perceptions of gender. In the future, she hopes to conduct further research into the ancient Near East.

**Jack Rutherford** has recently completed an MRes in American Studies and is about to embark on an AHRC-funded PhD in Film at the University of Essex.



**Robert Scott** is a Master's student in Literature and Philosophy at the University of Sussex. His research examines Hegel's speculative philosophy in relation to the politics and poetics of verse. His doctoral thesis will explore the philosophical intersections between Hegel and the English Romantics. Other areas of interest include critical theory, Marx, Gillian Rose, aesthetics, and American modernist poetry (especially Hart Crane). He also writes the 'Eighteenth-Century Poetry' chapter for the *Year's Work in English Studies*.

**Calum Scott** is a sound artist from Aberdeen, Scotland, currently undertaking AHRC-funded doctoral research at the University of Glasgow. His practice focuses on the development of object based sound art works (or sound sculptures) which seek to interrogate links between sound and the physical world. For more information about his work you can visit his blog: <https://calumscott.wordpress.com>

## Editors' Note

When choosing a theme for the 26<sup>th</sup> issue of *eSharp*, '(re)creation' universally appealed to the editorial board, all of whom hail from very different disciplinary backgrounds. By inviting submissions from postgraduate students in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, we sought a diverse range of interpretations of this theme. Though these articles represent a wide range of scholarly fields, when read collectively their work speaks to each other in meaningful ways.

In '**Pathways and Practice**', Morag Allen Campbell scrutinises the developments in the medical profession in nineteenth-century Dundee, discussing the rise of one of the key professions in our current national health care system – the general practitioner.

The concept of recreation is literally performed in '**Rebirth and the Dramaturgy of Utopia**', Tess Bundle's article that analyses the work of *The Travelling Show*, a theatre production that creates its performances using the gifts offered by the previous audience. These gifts mean that the storyline is constantly evolving. At the end of each performance new gifts are added, recreating the narrative of the *Travelling Show*.

Manon Thuillier takes us from the stage into literary analysis in her fascinating examination of the poem that marked the origin of Anglo-Welsh literature, '**The Welsh Hymn to the Virgin**'. The article offers a detailed depiction of the *Hymn to the Virgin's* philology, analysing the twelve known versions of the poem while also examining the relevance of *The Hymn to the Virgin* for Welsh and English scholars.

Our next two articles take an intertextual approach to their analysis of their chosen texts. In '**Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials**', Prema Arasu examines Pullman's recreation of the book of Genesis in the *His Dark Materials* series and his depiction of adolescence as a period of recreation of the self. Then in '**This Tiny Rivulet**', Eleanor Small contrasts the novels *Cassandra*, *The Penelopiad* and *Lavinia* with the classics the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*, demonstrating how their female authors create an antithesis of the dominant male-narrative in the Classics by retelling these Greco-Roman narratives from the point of view of their female characters.

Moving from literature into contemporary cinema, in '**(Re)Creating Boundaries**' Jack Rutherford uses Alejandro G. Iñárritu's film 'the Revenant' as a case study for representations of Native Americans in Hollywood, focusing on Glass – the film's main character – and his stereotypical characterisation of 'Going Native'.

In Robert Scott's '**Humanity Is Dead**' we look to the future and the evolution of humankind. In this thought-provoking article, Scott encourages us to reflect on what it means to be human and how the use of technology can bring us to a posthumanist stage.

The collection concludes with Calum Scott's '**An Exploration of the Notion of Sound**', in which Scott reflects on the notion of sound, asking whether it is possible for technology to ever recreate the intrinsic

characteristics of sound. In doing so, Scott presents us with the rationale behind his sound sculpture, *Eigenfunction*, a piece that attempts to encapsulate the raw experience of sound.

The process of working on the 26th issue was itself an act of creation – we created a new issue of the journal by reshaping the ideas and voices of the authors, peer-reviewers and editors to form a single, coherent work. We hope that this issue, which moves from medical history to sound art, and from the late Middle Ages to the present day, will enrich the minds of our readers and encourage them to build bridges between different disciplines.

Adriana Alcaraz, *General Editor, eSharp 2018*



# Pathways and Practice: The General Practitioner in Nineteenth-Century Dundee

Morag Allan Campbell (University of St. Andrews)

*Although the care of the basic medical needs of much of the population, or what might be termed general medicine, accounted by the mid nineteenth century for the work of the majority of medical men in Britain, those who practiced within this field were an irregular group of practitioners who had evolved from the surgeon-apothecaries and man midwives of the eighteenth century, and who formed an unspecific mix of medical men with different qualifications, training and experiences. Increasing legislation forced the radical development of the medical profession by the end of the century and, in a changing climate of education and opportunity, medical men competed for professional survival. This they did through the cultivation and exploitation of 'community niches' to gain professional recognition (Digby, 1999, p. 261).*

*The medical establishment in mid-nineteenth-century Dundee was made up of a diverse group of practitioners, in terms of education, qualification and experience, much of which still reflected the pathways and practices of the late eighteenth century. Dominated by leading medical families and intricate social networks, the medical community increasingly established itself in a distinct quarter within the city, and entrenched itself in the wider community through public appointments and civic office. This paper will explore the landscape of medical practice in this local 'niche', examining the ways in which the resident medical men created themselves both as individual practitioners with status and influence – the newly emerging 'general practitioners' – and as a distinct and respected professional community.*

**Keywords:** Medical practice, general practitioners, nineteenth century, local, Scotland

## Introduction

In 1872, the cream of the medical profession in Dundee gathered in the Royal British Hotel in Castle Street to honour one of its longest serving and 'most highly-esteemed' members. Having disposed of a sumptuous meal, followed by numerous toasts and speeches, the sixty-plus diners applauded and cheered as Matthew Nimmo was presented with a 'magnificent' silver salver, a bronze gilt clock and the grand sum of 800 sovereigns 'as an expression of their high sense of his professional service and private worth' (*Dundee Courier*, 1872a). Matthew Nimmo (1801-1884) had entered the medical profession at the age of only fourteen years, in apprenticeship to his uncle, Patrick Nimmo (1776-1855). A local newspaper, reporting on the event, summed up the significance of the occasion:

If any professional man has a right to retire from his profession long before he has been engaged in it for fifty years, it is the medical man. But, at the same time, when a medical man reaches his jubilee in his professional career, a completeness and roundness are given to it that it would not otherwise possess [...] none but the man who has worked on for such a period of years in such a profession, through encouragement and discouragement, through summer's heat and winter's cold, by night and by day, can in any worthy measure realise the toil and trouble through which he has passed (*Dundee Courier*, 1872b).

Matthew's death at the age of eighty-three would follow a long, successful and varied career as a doctor. He actively engaged in public life in a number of ways, earning him the respect of the community as a whole. His funeral at St Paul's Free Church in Dundee, where he had been 'long an esteemed office bearer', was attended

by ‘the greater number of the medical faculty of the town’, echoing the happier occasion and presentation of twelve years earlier (*Dundee Courier*, 1884). He had pursued, down to the last, a well-rounded and complete medical career, the diversity of which characterised this generation of doctor (Digby, 1999, p. 264). In the accolades and tributes, the consumption of great feasts and the presentation of trophies, the members of the medical establishment celebrated their position in Dundee society. They also consolidated their professional status, a status which had had to be earned and needed to be safeguarded. During the course of their careers, these doctors witnessed radical changes in the profession, to the systems of medical education, and to the daily business of being a doctor.

Matthew Nimmo and his contemporaries were among what might be regarded as the first ‘general practitioners’, although early in their careers the term was not in general public use and indeed was infrequently used within the medical profession itself. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the ‘general practitioner’ was responsible for the ‘ordinary medical care for much of the population’ (Digby, 1999, p. 2). Competing for ‘professional survival’ in a new and evolving climate, early general practitioners needed to cultivate and exploit ‘community niches’ to gain professional recognition, manipulating and infiltrating local organisations and societies (Digby, 1999, p. 261).

This paper will examine the landscape of medical practice in one such ‘niche’, the rapidly industrialising city of Dundee in which Matthew Nimmo practiced, during the mid-nineteenth century, and will consider how he and other general practitioners created and maintained professional personae, both as individuals and as members of a medical community. Three main strands will be examined; the backgrounds and qualifications of mid-nineteenth century medical practitioners, considering how far their education and experiences reflected those of eighteenth century practitioners and were a re-creation of their roles; the establishment of an enclave of medical practitioners within the city, and the creation of a respectable, genteel medical community; and the participation of ordinary medical men in a professional network, examining this in terms of Digby’s understanding of the exploitation of ‘community niches’ in order to create and maintain a robust model for professional survival.

### **Becoming a Doctor: Education and Experience**

The general practitioner as we might recognise the term was a creation of the nineteenth century, evolving into the family and community doctor from the ‘surgeon-apothecary and man midwife of the eighteenth century’ (Loudon, 1986, pp. 1-2). Previous uses of ‘general practice’ had referred to just that – ‘usual’, or ‘broadly based’ medical practice (Loudon, 1986, p. 1). Changes in ideas about the situation of disease and its identifiable markers in the body itself moved medical care from the remote diagnosis of the physician into the realms of hands-on medicine, allowing medical men to become ‘the licenced examiners of strangers’ (Nicolson,

2017). Innovation and improvements in medicine brought effective treatments, and an increasing awareness of the practicalities of public health, opening up the possibility that a doctor's efforts could actually do some good. Furthermore, the nature of day-to-day ailments and the illnesses and diseases encountered in the community, generally medical rather than surgical, made the blurring of boundaries between 'supposedly distinct' groups necessary for economic survival (Loudon, 1983, p. 14).

The 'general practitioner' came into being as a medical man and 'general practice' as a branch of medicine, facilitated by these new ideas in medicine and changing social structures. At the same time, the general practitioner was a re-creation of the ideas and practices of previous practical medical care, of those who undertook the day-to-day business of primary care. In essence, emerging from an unspecific mix of medical men, with different qualifications, training and experiences, the general practitioner was the self-creation of a body of like-minded practitioners, and came into being in the nineteenth century as a result of the existence of 'a substantial number of medical men, joined by a sense of corporate identity, who adopted and wished to be known by the title of "general practitioner"' (Digby, 1999, p. 1; Loudon, 1983, p. 13). This was not to be an easy path. While the cost of medical education was high, the market was fed by aspiring middle class families and 'an abundance of young men who had set their hearts on a career in medicine', producing a surfeit of doctors and an 'overcrowded profession' (Loudon, 1983, p. 16).

Providers of eighteenth century healthcare had been a mixed and varied group – tradesmen and shopkeepers, itinerant entrepreneurs and confidence tricksters, quacks and 'quasi-irregulars', alongside trained practitioners of one form or another; it was not easy to differentiate between 'orthodox' and 'unorthodox' (Loudon, 1986, pp. 11-13). As Loudon notes, 'at each end of the spectrum the two are easily distinguished; in the centre, they merge imperceptibly' (Loudon, 1986, p. 13). Even among 'regular practitioners', boundaries would fluctuate, particularly between urban and rural areas, leaving the various titles open to interpretation, and often depending more on what practitioners would or would not do rather than their education and training.

Some called themselves 'physician' but had no degree; others who were fully fledged physicians in the provinces sometimes dispensed medicines, although the refusal to dispense was one of the features which typically distinguished the physician from the apothecary and the surgeon-apothecary (Loudon, 1986, p. 24).

Of the three main types of medical practitioners in the eighteenth century, the physicians were the highest ranking, and were usually in possession of a degree, though not necessarily a university education. It was possible to acquire a medical degree 'with minimal effort' through some kind of study abroad, or 'for a modest fee and the recommendation of two colleagues'; though despite the financial basis and the apparent lack of undertaking any kind of medical curriculum, this transaction did at least reflect an assessment of the recipient's previous work and experience and 'proven clinical ability' (Loudon, 2000, p. 1589; Loudon, 1986, p. 38). Physicians, in the true sense of the word, did not physically examine their patients, but offered an opinion

and diagnosis based on observation and the responses of the patient (Loudon, 1986, pp. 19-20). The patient's description of his illness, and not the body itself, was therefore 'the pivotal point in the diagnostic process' (Nicolson, 2017). The more practical, manual nature of the surgeons' work placed them further down the scale, though their status rose in the eighteenth-century due to advances in the understanding of anatomy (Loudon, 1986, p. 24). A third group, the apothecaries, dispensed medicines and were not supposed to treat patients at all, though many did, and they were subject to inspection by the physicians (Loudon, 1986, p. 21). The physicians' 'elite status' was underlined by their inherent lack of contact with their patients, emphasising the superiority of the mind over 'manual skills' (Nicolson, 2017). Understandings and practices of these definitions cast their shadow into the nineteenth century.

Such distinctions may have had less relevance in Scotland than elsewhere in Britain and Europe, as the boundaries between 'physic' and 'surgery' were culturally less defined (Lawrence, 2006, p. 212). Nicolson has argued that, in Scotland, the historical influence of a strong research culture had the effect of reducing the 'social and professional distance' between physicians and surgeons, citing many instances where prominent members of the different branches of medicine in Scotland had worked together without any regard for any loss of esteem or status in doing so, resulting in a quite distinctive climate in Scottish medicine and healthcare (Nicolson, 2017).

Medical education in Britain during the early nineteenth century was still largely unstructured, with practitioners able to gain their qualifications from a number of sources (Dingwall, 2003, p. 269; Lawrence, 2006, p. 215). Although in Britain the move towards doctors being educated primarily through a university education and medical curriculum seems to have begun in Scotland, the usual procedure in the first half of the nineteenth century remained a collection of routes followed by licensing by one of the medical corporations (Lawrence, 2006, pp. 212-213). Matthew Nimmo had followed a not uncommon path in entering into an apprenticeship at the young age of fourteen. During the eighteenth century, and to some extent into the nineteenth, the most commonly followed route for young men pursuing a medical career was an apprenticeship to a surgeon followed by collegiate licencing. A university degree was not a licence to practice, and, although more common in Scotland at this time, did not become a standard element of medical education until much later (Lawrence, 2006, p. 213).

An apprenticeship could be a rigorous and demanding start to a medical career, with boys as young as fourteen placed entirely in the hands of a master who acted 'in loco parentis in guiding his young charges' (Bonner, 2000, p. 44). Alexander Bell (1776-1855), a Dundee physician of forty-three years practice between 1807 and 1850, was noted as having had 'numerous pupils and apprentices' to whom he 'endeared himself no less by the kind interest which he manifested in their professional education and prospects, than by the excellent example which he set before them of what a professional man should be' (Norrie, 1873, pp. 135-136). An apprenticeship to a respected relative, a father or an uncle was also common and an attractive option for the sons and nephews of medical men. For the apprentice, this was a 'painless entry to a prosperous occupation';



for the mentor, this was an economical way to add to the practice, though it often led to the formation of ‘medical dynasties’, with successive generations and multiple members of the same generation entering the profession (Loudon, 1986, p. 29; p. 34). The Nimmo family’s influence was significant, and perhaps began with Matthew’s grandfather, Patrick Nimmo (died 1836), who is noted in 1788 in the Dundee Lockit Book, the Burgess Roll of Dundee, as a ‘Barber’ (FDCAb). It might have extended further, had it not been for the untimely death in 1845 of Matthew’s cousin (also Patrick), a surgeon, from ‘disease of the heart and lungs’, at the age of 35 (FDCAa).

Following his apprenticeship, Matthew Nimmo studied in Edinburgh at the Royal College of Surgeons to qualify as L.R.C.S. (Licentiate of the Royal College of Surgeons) in 1820. The educational background of doctors practising in Dundee during the mid-period of the nineteenth century reflected a range of qualifications, and no clear path to medical practice. The Dundee Directory for 1853-54 lists thirty-four men as ‘medical practitioners’ for the Dundee area, and of those, twenty-two are listed in the Medical Directories as ‘LRCS Edin’ and one as ‘MRCSE’ (Member of the Royal College of Surgeons, England); ten of those are listed as ‘LRCS’ only. This last category tended to apply to the practitioners who had been practicing medicine since early in the century, though some of these acquired a degree at a later date; for example, James Maxwell (1795-1863), who was awarded his diploma in 1815 from Edinburgh, gained his MD (Doctor of Medicine) from the University of Edinburgh in 1839. Of those practitioners with medical degrees, nine were awarded at Edinburgh University, six by St Andrews, and one each by Aberdeen and Glasgow. Five doctors held a degree but cannot be identified as having been awarded a licentiate – these again were the longest practicing doctors (*Dundee Directory 1853-54; British Medical Directory 1853; The Medical Directory for Scotland 1855; The Medical Directory and General Medical Register for Scotland 1859*).

The dominance of the University of Edinburgh in this group reflects the position of Edinburgh Medical School as one of the most prestigious in the world during the nineteenth century, though Glasgow would soon increase in influence, with the expansion of the city itself. It is noticeable that all but one of the Edinburgh graduates gained their degrees during the 1820s and 1830s. St Andrews, on the other hand, was ‘a byword for worthless degrees during the Enlightenment’ and, while standards rose in the late Victorian era, it was not a major centre (Lawrence, 2006, p. 213). The relatively high number of St Andrews graduates in this group is probably a reflection of its proximity to the Dundee area. All but one of the St Andrews alumni graduated in the 1840s, a point at which this university was beginning to adopt ‘more modern characteristics’, having had no actual medical faculty and a reputation for selling degrees, though it was not until the foundation in 1881 of University College in Dundee that St Andrews was able to claim anything like a ‘full medical school’ (Lawrence, 2006, pp. 216-217).

A further component of medical education was often a period of some kind of practical service in which the young doctor would have the opportunity to try out and refine his medical skills. Following completion of more formal educational studies, of whatever form, a short career at sea, or in the military, was a common start

to a professional career and could provide many opportunities for a young physician to try out and improve their skills, and enjoy a significant financial boost. Matthew Nimmo served as a surgeon aboard the East India Company vessel the *Mellish*, sailing to Madras and Calcutta, before returning to Dundee to set up practice (*Dundee Courier*, 1872a). Such a position offered a ‘lucrative source of medical employment’, as did the opportunities offered by slave ships in the eighteenth century and emigrant vessels in the nineteenth (Dingwall, 2003, p. 194). Prior to taking up practice in Dundee, Alexander Bell served in Ireland during the rebellion of 1798 with the 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment of Dundee Volunteers, as surgeon, and at first as lieutenant and rising to the rank of captain (Norrie, 1873, p. 135). James A. Cowper (1826-1866), served in the Crimean War as first surgeon to the 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the Turkish Contingent (Norrie, 1873, pp. 263-264). David Greig (1831-1890) made the acquaintance of Florence Nightingale during his time in the Crimea. He had trained under James Young Simpson at Edinburgh, who apparently urged him to take with him to war a supply of chloroform in the hope that he could ‘show them how to use it’ and urged Greig to write to him about not only the wounds but the diseases he encountered. Such experiences offered the chance of excitement and adventure and were regarded as providing young doctors with a good foundation on which to build their medical careers. David Greig declared that his intention in joining the army was ‘to get surgical practice, to see the world, to get the *éclat* of being at the war, and to get a year’s recreation before settling into practice’ (Kinnear, 1954, p. 144).

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the apprenticeship system was dying out, though it remained common outwith large towns, and a move towards medical reform was underway, a ‘bitter struggle’ driven largely by a desire among those who considered themselves to be legitimate medical practitioners to distinguish themselves from the ‘quacks’ or ‘irregulars’ (Lawrence, 2006, p. 215; Loudon, 1986, pp. 2-3). The 1858 Medical Act represented a move to standardise the various routes of entry to the medical profession on a national level, in order to ensure, on the basis of ‘examination as proof of knowledge and competence’, that all entry routes were ‘equally worthy’ (Dingwall, 2010, p. 269). While not universally welcomed by the Scottish colleges, who saw the Act and subsequent proposed amendments as ‘a threat to their recognition as licensing bodies’, the Act did set the profession on a route to a regulated curriculum and national standardisation, introducing a requirement for registration, for which a recognised qualification was necessary (Dingwall, 2010, pp. 269-270; Lawrence, 2006, p. 215). The intention, if not the effect, was to even out the anomalies present in the landscape of medical education and establish professional credibility. The doctors practicing in Dundee in the mid nineteenth century were undoubtedly a diverse group reflecting the practices of the not-so-distant past, in terms of education, qualifications and experience, but there was demonstrably an influential and active group of practitioners keen to demonstrate some level of medical knowledge and able to provide evidence of having received instruction and undertaken assessment, and to advertise themselves according to a defined and organised public identity.

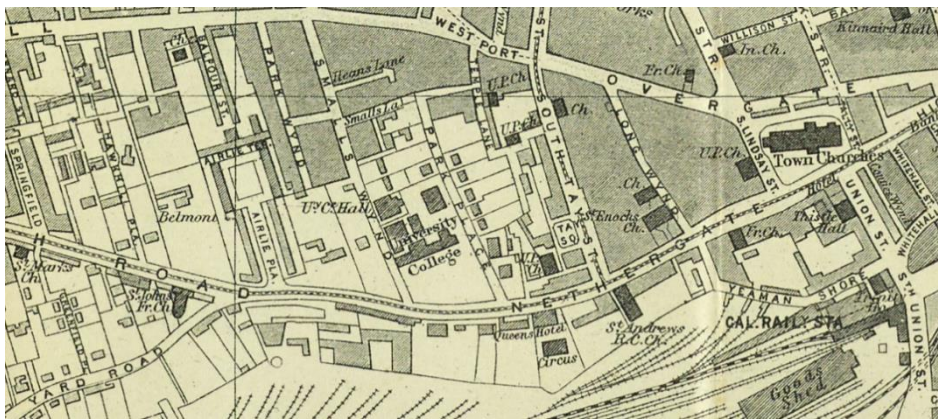
## Doctors in Practice: The Doctor's Place

Alexander Bell, noted as being 'a surgeon and general practitioner, and consulting physician', ran an 'extensive and lucrative' medical practice in Dundee from his residence at 164 Nethergate (Norrie, 1873, pp. 135-136). Very few of the doctors listed in the 1853-1854 Post Office Directory are noted as having a home address as well as a professional one. Digby, in her study of general practitioners between 1850 and 1948, noted that the doctor's house was frequently both his home and his surgery, and acted as the 'lynch pin between public and private', bringing the doctor's family into his professional life (Digby, 1999, p.278). Portraits of Bell and his wife Anne, whom he married in 1803 and who predeceased him by only two years, are housed among the Tayside Medical History Museum collection. The paintings were presented by the Bell family to Dundee Royal Infirmary, where Bell had officiated as a surgeon, but the inclusion of Anne's portrait is a fitting tribute to her own role ([www.Dundee.ac.uk/medical\\_portraits](http://www.Dundee.ac.uk/medical_portraits)). As the wife of a doctor, she would have had a significant contribution to make to the success of the practice; she would have been a valuable 'professional asset', ensuring the smooth running of his household, and also performing more specific tasks such as account keeping, collecting outstanding fees, carrying out correspondence and generally keeping the practice running smoothly. A well-connected, respectable and pious doctor's wife could help raise his social profile and greatly enhance his professional reputation (Digby, 1999, pp. 275-276).

The Bells' residence was a two-storey villa built around 1785, offering respectable accommodation, one of 'a handful of self-contained dwellings' housing the city's more 'affluent citizens' in the commercial quarter of the city (Historic Environment Scotland; Whatley, 1993, p. 111). Of the thirty-four medical practitioners noted in the 1853-54 Dundee Post Office Directory list, no less than twenty-one are listed as residing or practising in the Nethergate or a closely neighbouring address – Tay Street, South Tay Street, Perth Road and Victoria Square. Matthew Nimmo and his uncle Patrick Nimmo occupied properties next door to each other at 17 and 15 South Tay Street. Other medical practitioners had their addresses in the Seagate, Murraygate and Wellgate areas, with some doctors residing in King Street, presumably conveniently near to the site of the original Dundee Royal Infirmary (Whatley, 1993, p. 107). The concentration of doctors in the Nethergate area and adjacent streets was quite marked, and increased as the century progressed. By the mid-1880s and towards the end of the century, the most popular address for physicians had become South Tay Street, and the medical enclave had extended to include nearby Airlie Place, a street of elegant terraced houses built around 1846, and to some extent the parallel terrace at Springfield (British listed buildings; *Dundee Directory 1885-86; Dundee Directory 1899-1900*).

There may have been a collective memory of the area as associated with healing and medical care – the Nethergate had been the site of the Town's Hospital, an impressive 17<sup>th</sup> century construction which had once dominated the entrance to the city through the Nethergate Port (McKean et al., 2008). This building, fully

demolished by 1830, had latterly been used to house French prisoners of war, and whatever function it had ever had in the business of healing was some distance in the past by the time the medical practitioners of Dundee had begun to establish a presence in the area. The influx of doctors, moreover, seems to have been a development of the nineteenth century. In the late eighteenth century, the Nethergate had been populated with a diversity of occupations – hammermen, coopers, wrights and carpenters, maltmen and merchants, shipmasters, and others including a private teacher and ‘chaise and horse letter’ (*Dundee Register*, 1783). The area did have the advantage of being close to the city centre, and to business, communication and transport links, and it would have presented a good position in which doctors could live and work. It may also have been indicative of a move by the members of the profession to display their respectability and standing.



Plan of Dundee to accompany directory. 1889-90 [Dundee: James P. Mathew & Co., 1889 to 1890]. Detail showing the Nethergate, with Springfield and Airlie Place to the left of the plan, and South Tay Street (leading to Tay Square) leading north from the Nethergate just right of the centre. Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland: <https://maps.nls.uk/index.html>

Nethergate, one of the streets connecting the city to the main route from Perth, was a crowded mixture of businesses and houses. Until the mid-nineteenth century, it was largely undeveloped and remained a densely populated street characterised by ‘narrows’, points where the width of the street was as little as six feet (McKean, 2011, p. 13). A small number of mansions and villas, including that of Provost Riddoch, built in 1790, had begun to pepper the area (Whatley, 1993, p. 100). Such developments echoed a continuing trend in city landscapes in Scotland which allowed urban gentry to reside ‘in the relative seclusion of new streets and squares’ while allowing their gentility and refinement a certain visibility (Harris and McKean, 2014, p. 304). In this, Dundee had tended to lag behind other Scottish cities. Plans to improve the city centre and develop a ‘new town’ in Dundee were long hampered and delayed by local politics and lack of strategic planning on behalf of the town council. The building of new streets in the early and mid-nineteenth century such as Tay Street, Tay Square, Airlie Place and Springfield did form part of these plans, and the resulting terraces provided elegant, respectable accommodation (McKean, 2001, pp. 26-27).

In comparison with other Scottish cities, the professional sector in Dundee played a lesser role within the overall employment structure, and medicine and dentistry made up only a small percentage within that landscape (Morris and Rodger, 1993). Nevertheless, the members of the medical profession sought to make

their mark in local society. They had not enjoyed the same social standing as law or the Church, and sought to claim ‘a gentlemanly status’ through being seen to enjoy ‘the trappings of gentility’ and the conspicuous ownership, or at least occupation, of desirable property, with carriages, and the employment of servants (Digby, 1999, p. 41). The Bell household in 1851 boasted three live-in servants (1851 census). Gradually the numbers of doctors residing in the Nethergate area increased until they had formed an enclave of the most active and connected of their profession, inhabiting the fine Regency-style terraced housing with Doric porticoes – though they remained closer to the emanations of local industry than those who had chosen to join the ‘middle class exodus’ of the 1830s in favour of suburbs like Newtyle and Broughty Ferry (Whatley, 1993, p. 111).

### **The Name of the Doctor: Public Profiles**

The public profile of the doctor was key in establishing the status of the profession and its members. In order to enhance their reputations, medical practitioners, particularly in town settings, employed a range of ‘opportunistic strategies’ which often involved as much participation in charities and community organisations as possible, and included both medical and non-medical appointments. As Digby notes:

Especially during the Victorian and Edwardian eras general practitioners showed enterprise in developing the potential of their local environment by seeking out medically related appointments of varied kinds. [...] To establish a reputation, and to foster the trust of local people through face-to-face contact in a range of activities was vital to professional success (Digby, 1999, p. 261).

Throughout his long career, Matthew Nimmo combined his duties as a doctor with a number of appointments, and maintained a strong public profile. In addition to his medical appointments, he served on the bench of the Court of the Justice of the Peace, was involved as a director of the lunatic asylum, and took an active interest in public health. In 1853, he protested at the ‘filthy and noxious state’ of an area of land near Trades Lane which, he claimed, in a letter penned to the *Dundee Courier*, was responsible for ‘emanations’ which were ‘destructive of the health and comfort of the inhabitants of Dundee’ and ‘a continued source of disease (*Dundee Courier*, 1853). In 1876, he signed a petition in support of the removal of the city’s ‘time-gun’ from the vicinity of the Infirmary, on account of the distress it was apt to cause to severe and vulnerable cases (*Dundee Courier*, 1896).

Nineteenth-century Dundee was indeed richly endowed with opportunities for suitably prominent public medical appointments. William Lockhart Gibson (1811-1876) served as physician to The Home, an ‘institution for the reclamation of women who [had] lapsed from the paths of virtue’, founded by Lady Jane Ogilvie in 1848 (Norrie, 1873, p. 199). Robert Cocks (1812-1875) was ordinary director and surgeon to the Eye Institution in the Murraygate, and James Arrott (1808-1883) was physician to the Institution for Diseases of the Chest. There were also opportunities for physicians in civic services and organisations. Alexander Webster (1799-1863), as well as being physician to the Royal Infirmary, was also Medical Officer for Dundee Police Establishment. William Crichton Saunders (1809-1881) and William Monro (1829-1902) were both Certifying Surgeons under

the Factory Act. Robert Cocks, William Lockhart Gibson, Robert Langlands (1820-1865), John Lothian (1813-1859) and David Lyell (1807-1881) all served as medical referees to various life insurance companies, positions which were presumably more financially lucrative than appointments with charitable organisations (*British Medical Directory 1853; Dundee Directory 1853-1854*). Non-medical appointments were also useful in gaining or maintaining a 'high profile' in the community, which in turn could lead to opportunities for effective social networking and the potential to attract more 'affluent' clients (Digby, 1999, p. 264). John Crichton (1772-1860) was elected a Magistrate of Dundee, though he himself 'never troubled himself much about politics, and least of all about burgh politics' (Norrie, 1873, p. 183).

Professional reputations could also be forged, on a local and national level, through publication in the thriving numbers of medical journals which had begun to proliferate during this period. John Crichton wrote and published a number of papers in the *Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal* on his special subject lithotomy, but also offered observations on hydrophobia a case of caesarean section and an account of the intriguingly named 'Angus-shire leaping ague', a condition apparently prevalent among the marshy lands of Angus (*British Medical Directory 1853; Crichton, 1829; Warden, 1895, p. 178; 206*). James Arrott, in a contribution to the *Scottish and North of England Gazette*, added to the discussion on the 'epidemic fever of 1843' with a description of the characteristics of an outbreak in Dundee and similarities with yellow fever observed in the West Indies (Smith, 1844, p. 299; 301). Matthew Nimmo was a contributor to the *Edinburgh Monthly Journal of Medical Science*, including the publication of an article entitled 'Case of Caesarian section' (*British Medical Directory for England, Scotland and Wales 1853*). George Paton (b 1811) of Dundee was among a number of physicians, drawn from the length and breadth of Scotland, England and Ireland, who contributed to a report by James Young Simpson which was published in the *Monthly Journal of Medical Science* on the progress of anaesthetic midwifery. Mr Paton reported positively on the successful use of chloroform in 'upwards of fifty cases' but noted public antipathy towards its use following the deaths of two ladies from puerperal fever, as the public mind attributed their deaths to the use of 'the new agent' (Simpson, 1848, p.234-235).

On a more local level, Dundee doctors circulated and discussed their ideas through a number of medical organisations. The formation of such organisations was in part a reaction to the lack of a cohesive or 'collective body' to represent the interests of general medical practitioners (Loudon, 1983, p. 16). The Forfarshire Medical Association was formed in 1858 for the 'cultivation and promotion of medical science and of good fellowship'. The first meeting took place at the British Hotel on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1858 (thereafter the committee met at 140 Nethergate, the residence of David Greig). Annual meetings of the whole association were held in hotels around Dundee, Montrose, Brechin and Arbroath, and were accompanied by a dinner and the presentation and discussion of papers by its members (UoDA, MS 46/1/1-4). The association also incorporated the Circulating Medical Book Society and the Montrose Medical Society. There were other organisations active in the area during the nineteenth century, such as the Dundee Medical Society, formed in 1864, the Dundee

Clinical Club and a Dundee branch of the British Medical Association, although the latter two did not come into being until 1893 and 1894 respectively.

These activities were all over and above the duties which might be expected of a family doctor, and demonstrate a personal commitment to making the most of opportunities. Even by the middle of the century, Dundee doctors can be seen to have actively embraced the use of opportunistic strategies to further their careers and reputations. They offered their services not only for the benefit of the community, but for the benefit of their own personal professional reputations.

## **Conclusion**

The Dundee medical establishment of the mid-nineteenth century comprised a relatively diverse group of practitioners, in terms of education, qualification and experience, many of whom reflected the pathways and practices of the late eighteenth century. They represented a close community, both vying for professional survival and co-operating in the development of their new social and professional standing, very much in accordance with Anne Digby's concept of the 'community niche' (Digby, 1999, p.261). Dominated by leading medical families and intricate social networks, the medical community increasingly established itself in a distinct quarter within the city, entrenching itself in the community through public appointments and places of influence. They referred to each other as 'medical friends' and 'brethren' – social niceties or professional etiquette, perhaps, but these habits, along with their rituals and celebrations, signified, at least outwardly, this supportive and cohesive community.

While Dundee's medical practitioners sought to establish themselves as professionals, gentlemen and leaders of the community, they also reached out to the medical establishment beyond the area through publication and active participation in the wider discussion of medicine and medical practice. They were instrumental in creating a new kind of doctor, and a new specialty, though they would remain for many years an 'anomalous' group with no professional body to look after their interests – attempts as early as the 1840s to establish a College of General Practitioners were blocked by the 'petty objections' of the Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons (Bonner, 2000, pp. 183-184; Loudon, 1983, p. 17). In fact, it was not until 1952 that the College of General Practitioners was legally constituted, gaining a Royal Charter as late as 1972 (Simon, 2009, p. 7). The role of the general practitioner today remains crucial to the functioning of health care provision in Britain today, as the first point of contact and the gateway to specialist services (Dingwall, 2003, p. 212).

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# Rebirth and the Dramaturgy of Utopia in The Suitcase Ensemble's Travelling Show

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*The utopian promise of popular culture is revealed in the 'carnival utopia' emerging in Mikhail Bakhtin's writing. This utopia not only enables active participation in the potentiality of a different world, but through the principle of rebirth it embeds the process of change into the fabric of its aesthetic consciousness. This marks a significant compositional difference between the carnival utopia and the literary utopian tradition begun by Thomas More. In fact, the structural features of carnival are consistent with more contemporary thinking on utopia, and might also invigorate contemporary dramaturgy.*

*This article is an interrogation of the dramaturgy of Travelling Show, a new theatre production by The Suitcase Ensemble that travels and creates stories in dialogue with the people it encounters. As the production's dramaturg, the author discusses the function of rebirth as a structuring principle in the work, considering how this dramaturgical structure facilitates a dialogical and provisional creation of new worlds. Through reference to Bakhtin's carnival utopia, Levitas's sociological utopia as method, and Jain's discussion of contingency, the article unfolds Travelling Show's treatment of rebirth as a 'dramaturgy of utopia'; a dramaturgical methodology that endlessly reconstitutes itself according to principles found in utopias that resist the traditional 'blueprint' dogmatism. Travelling Show's dramaturgy of utopia works to open spaces of contingency in which artists and audience enter a dialectics of construction and criticism, of openness and closure, of possibility and impossibility, contributing to the renewal of a world that they constitute on an ancestral level.*

**Keywords:** Theatre, dramaturgy, utopia, rebirth, carnival

## Introduction

A train ticket, a love note, a receipt, a 20 pence piece taped to a drawing of a tooth, a Christmas card and a nightclub flyer, are all placed into an open suitcase.<sup>1</sup> They are gifts from the first ever audience to witness The Suitcase Ensemble's *Travelling Show*, a new theatre production by this UK-based company in which the audience's gifts provide the catalyst for the stories that are told. These gifts will not inspire a story to be told to tonight's audience, but a story to be told tomorrow, when The Suitcase Ensemble travel to a new location to encounter their next audience. When the company meet the next afternoon, the gifts ignite a rebirth. The world of *Travelling Show* is born again for the new audience.

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Andy Gledhill and Maria Malone, my artistic collaborators on *Travelling Show*. To the staff, volunteers and participants of Collective Encounters Youth Theatre in Liverpool and MATE Productions in Prescot, Knowsley, who hosted the first two performances of *Travelling Show*. To my colleagues who provided the initial set of 'gifts', and those who attended the third performance at the University of Glasgow. Finally, thank you to my PhD supervisors Deirdre Heddon and Michael Bachmann for their feedback on the performance, and comments on drafts of this article. This research is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council as part of a PhD studentship.



Image 1: *Travelling Show's* suitcase full of gifts

This article is an interrogation of the creative process employed in *Travelling Show*. As the production's dramaturg, I discuss the function of rebirth as a structuring principle in the work, considering how this dramaturgical structure facilitates a dialogical and provisional creation of new worlds.

In this article, creation is understood as a process of imaginative invention that is dependent upon human agency but also necessarily indeterminate. In *Travelling Show*, creation involves both thoughtful construction and an openness to the unknown. I consider this form of creation not only as one that manifests theatrical worlds, but that might intersect with a sociological method of reconstituting society. That is, I investigate where the creation of theatre and the creation of utopia meet. Or perhaps more accurately, I investigate utopia itself as a method of creation, operating in *Travelling Show* as an intersection of theatre-making and utopian transformation.

I investigate this intersection initially via Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of carnival. In what I term the 'carnival utopia' invoked by Bakhtin's writing, I identify certain structural features that find consistency with *Travelling Show's* dramaturgy and with a contemporary understanding of utopia as, not only a reconstituted society, but as an opening up of imaginations towards the possibility of change. Of particular interest is the new 'artistic awareness' (Bakhtin 2984, p.73) carnival takes on as it enters the era of rebirth: the European Renaissance. Rebirth not only characterises this era, but is considered in this article as an integral

structuring principle embodying cultural and historical change, which is embedded in Renaissance-era carnival imagery.

I begin by identifying this principle in Bakhtin's carnival, then show how it is transposed as a dramaturgical principle in *Travelling Show*. I go on to draw on contemporary utopian theory to consider how *Travelling Show*'s interplay of construction and critique, and its engagement with contingency, further conceptualise the practice as a 'dramaturgy of utopia'.

### Rebirth in the Carnival Utopia

'Carnival utopia' refers to a desire for a better life, expressed in the form and content of pre-modern European carnival festivities. I borrow the term from Kendrick (2004, p.74), who uses it to describe the projection of desire appearing in the old English folk poem 'The Land of Cokaygne'. Cokaygne is a fantastical land of plenty appearing in the folk mythology of late feudal societies, and is recognised by some scholars as a pre-modern utopian configuration, pre-dating Thomas More's 1516 *Utopia*. Morton (1969), for example, explicitly links the poem to utopia, and also to carnival. The poem's dream of an abundant life of leisure mirrors the abundance and equality of communal carnival feasting, while its themes of reversal and upheaval are shared with popular Medieval festivals such as The Feast of Fools (Morton 1969, pp.29-32).<sup>2</sup> The 'utopian promise' inherent in these carnival rituals and symbols is revealed particularly strongly in Mikhail Bakhtin's discussion of Medieval and Renaissance carnival (Gardiner 1992, p.37). Bakhtin describes carnival as a utopian 'second world' of the people, opposed to the official, 'serious' culture (Bakhtin 1984, p.6). While More's *Utopia* sets out a vision of an alternative society, carnival enables collective participation in 'the potentiality of a different world' (Bakhtin 1984, p.48); an expression of desire that I describe as a 'carnival utopia'.

More's *Utopia* emerged in the Renaissance, a time of major social, cultural and economic transition. The same historical context provides the backdrop for Bakhtin's discussion of carnival, a word he uses to refer to an encompassing culture of 'folk carnival humour', which had immense importance in Medieval Europe and underwent a particular change in the Renaissance (Bakhtin 1984, p.4). This folk carnival humour includes folk festivities, rituals, pageants, comic shows, and parodies (Bakhtin 1984, pp.4-5), whose spirit becomes preserved in 'carnavalesque' Renaissance literature (Bakhtin 1984, p.217). As I will discuss, this spirit begins to orient itself towards the future as it is 'fertilized by humanist knowledge' (Bakhtin 1984, p.72); the same mode of thought that influenced More's *Utopia*. The new literary utopian genre spawned by More, and the new carnival utopia with its 'critical *historical* consciousness' (Bakhtin 1984, p.73), might then be seen as differing aesthetic responses to an era of deep change.

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<sup>2</sup> A modern English translation of the poem can be found as an appendix in *The English Utopia* (Morton 1969, pp.279-285)

Bakhtin's utopian vision of carnival need not be confined to its historical context; as Gardiner (1992, p.22) argues there is a significant rapprochement between Bakhtin's utopia and contemporary developments in utopian thought, which depart from proposals of totalising blueprints and instead stress the role of the utopian impulse in social transformation. I too recognise connections between the carnival utopia and more recent notions of utopia, but most significantly consider both in relation to theatre practice. As a dramaturg I ask what utopia might offer, not as a future vision, but as an aesthetic that plays a role in the process of change.

Before discussing contemporary utopian theory, I am interested in certain compositional features that distinguish carnival and the traditional utopia as distinct 'dramaturgies of utopia'; features that serve to illuminate potential convergences with theatre practice. Carnival and the literary utopia reveal their desires for change through differing compositional textures and organising principles. For example, the carnival utopia retains an oppositional relationship with the status quo, inverting the present social system and remaining 'desperately at odds with it' (Gardiner 1992, p.34), while More's *Utopia* appears relatively acquiescent, expressing its critique in a classical form that Kendrick suggests lends it a legitimising 'dignity' (2004, p.84). Their dramaturgical distinction might also be understood in terms of their authorship (collective vs solo), intended audience (the masses vs the bourgeoisie), or audience engagement (participatory vs contemplative). All are features that could be discussed in relation to *Travelling Show*, but in this article I follow the theme of (re)creation to focus on a specific compositional nuance that marks a difference in the way these utopias express their orientation towards change. While the traditional utopia sets out a blueprint for a better society, the carnival utopia embeds the potential of change into the fabric of its aesthetic consciousness. I will briefly identify how this aesthetic consciousness is described by Bakhtin, and go on to explain how it is reconsidered as a dramaturgical principle in *Travelling Show*.

For Bakhtin, carnival is a feast of 'change and renewal' (1984, p.10). It offers the chance to 'realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things' (Bakhtin 1984, p.34). The temporary reversal of hierarchies in festivities such as the Feast of Fools highlights the changeability of, not only the ruling elite, but the entire hierarchical order. The election of a mock king is a mockery of 'the high and the old', casting the present order to the lowest depths to signal its 'death and rebirth' (Bakhtin 1984, p.82). The rebirth principle is especially pronounced in the 'grotesque body' of carnival imagery. The 'grotesque' is an aesthetic form that Bakhtin distinguishes from the 'classical' (1984, p.318). While the classical canon presents the body as 'entirely finished' and 'strictly limited', the grotesque emphasises the cycles of life, celebrating a body that is inseparable from the earthly cycles of seasonal changes, vegetation, harvest, sun and moon (Bakhtin 1984, pp.318-319). The grotesque body 'is a body in the act of becoming', where the beginning and end of life is interwoven in images of orifices and convexities that present another, newly conceived body (Bakhtin 1984, p.317). This grotesque body contains an 'ancestral aspect' (Bakhtin 1984, p.323); an emphasis on humanity's innate connecting force, expressed in the body's capacity for reproduction. In the carnivalesque writings of

Rabelais, for example, images of copulation, conception, and birth are imbued with ‘the preservation and perpetuation of humankind’ (Rabelais cited in Bakhtin 1984, p.324).

This grotesque representation of the body has prevailed in European culture ‘over thousands of years’ (Bakhtin 1984, p.318), but Bakhtin’s main interest is the Renaissance-era grotesque, when the ‘cyclical character’ of grotesque images is superseded with a ‘mighty awareness of [...] historic change’ (Bakhtin 1984, p.25). The reproducing body becomes intimately related to historic progress, where ‘the human race is not merely renewed with each new generation, it rises to a new level of development’ (Bakhtin 1984, p.324). In the Renaissance grotesque concept of the body, an act of copulation, a pregnant body, even a single sperm, contains the possibility of a rebirth of humanity; such images are interwoven with ‘the change of epochs and renewal of culture’ (Bakhtin 1984, p.325).

In carnival and carnivalesque literature, the principle of rebirth appears most cogently in images of the body. With *Travelling Show* this principle is transposed into the dramaturgical structure of the work. This does not preclude the use of grotesque imagery in the work as well, but as a dramaturg, I am particularly interested in how rebirth can operate to structure a piece of theatre.

Rebirth is not uncommon as a theatrical structure. The ‘logic of crownings and uncrownings’ in Shakespeare’s drama (Bakhtin 1984, p.275) and the ritual of death and resurrection that structures the English Mummers Play might be seen as theatrical survivals of carnival’s principle of rebirth and renewal. In more recent examples, Street Theatre performance *Crackers* (Caustic Widows 2016),<sup>3</sup> and Leigh Bowery’s ‘birthing’ performance art (see Bancroft 2011, p.77) are structured around physical transformations that celebrate fluid identities and the becoming of the subject Richard Schechner’s Performance Group incorporated a rebirth ritual in its *Dionysus in 69*, producing what Fischer-Lichte has described as a ‘powerful and effective theatrical symbol of man’s rebirth out of the body of the community’ (2002, p.340). Booker also identifies rebirth as a storytelling structure recurring in fairy tales and literature in which a protagonist falls into and emerges from a state of ‘living death’ (2004, p.204). In all these cases, rebirth is a representational trope. Conversely, in exploring rebirth as a principle that propels the dramaturgy, *Travelling Show* does not represent rebirth, but attempts to carry it out. *Travelling Show* removes the principle of rebirth from an individual protagonist or body and embeds it in the body of the performance as a living growing entity. It does not attempt to reproduce a festive rebirth or a ritual rebirth. As I describe in the next section, *Travelling Show* illuminates what a specifically dramaturgical rebirth could be.

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<sup>3</sup> *Crackers* sees three women transform into birds over the course of the performance; Bowery’s performance involves him ‘giving birth’ to his partner, who begins the performance concealed under Bowery’s costume.

## Rebirth in Travelling Show

The Suitcase Ensemble's *Travelling Show* is the company's fourth touring production since our inception in 2008. The production represents an experimental new approach to the company's touring repertoire, in which the travels of the company are integral to the dramaturgy of the work we are touring. In December 2017, we undertook our first 'touring experiment', visiting three different locations in the UK – Liverpool, Knowsley and Glasgow – as we began to explore the possibilities of *Travelling Show*. I was one of three company members involved in this touring experiment, and as a practice-as-research inquiry, I focused on the production's evolving dramaturgy.

The central premise of *Travelling Show* is that each performance is different. Each audience experiences a unique performance, created by the company taking inspiration from 'gifts' offered by the previous show's audience. Towards the end of each performance, an invitation is made for the attending audience to share gifts, to inspire the performance for the next group who will encounter *Travelling Show*.

'This evening, for one night only' announces the narrator, 'The Suitcase Ensemble's Travelling Show is delighted to present: "By the Light of the Moon"'. The title is never the same and neither is the story that follows. As promised in the narrator's announcement, the audience will enjoy a 'one-time only performance, created just for you'.



Image 2: The Suitcase Ensemble's *Travelling Show*

‘By the Light of the Moon’ was the first ever performance of *Travelling Show*, taking place at a youth theatre in Liverpool, and created with an initial set of gifts offered by my PhD colleagues. The performance begins with the introduction of a character called Moon:

Once, there was a moon who wanted to build a home. Turning and circling, rising and setting, her cyclical movements allowed her to illuminate life across the land. And sometimes that life left traces... little discarded remnants that the moon would light upon. And when no one was looking, she would gather them up. These mementos were hoarded in the moon’s suitcase, as memories for a home, all of her own (‘By the Light of the Moon’, *The Suitcase Ensemble*, Liverpool, 12 Dec 2017).

The central character’s collection of memories provides a frame for the telling of several short stories, which are revealed in the course of the performance. At the end, the audience are invited to share memories of their own, to inspire the next performance.

The next performance is thus conceived within the world of ‘By the Light of the Moon’. Audience members place their gifts into the moon’s suitcase, optionally sharing a memory attached to it. They drop their gifts directly into the world of the performance, which now bulges with new additions. The gifts are full of imaginative potential, symbolically reaching beyond the world of this performance like the ‘various ramifications and offshoots’ of the grotesque body, revealing ‘a growth that exceeds its own limits’ and the ‘ever creating’ nature (Bakhtin 1984, p.26) of *Travelling Show*. The suitcase full of gifts is an opening in the performance that presents ‘another newly conceived body’ (Bakhtin 1984, p.317), or a newly conceived performance at least; the gifts are the conceptual seeds that give birth to the second iteration of *Travelling Show*, titled ‘The Travels of Mouse-Dog’.

‘The Travels of Mouse-Dog’, performed for a community drama group in Prescot, Knowsley (13 Dec 2017), again involves the telling of several short stories, this time framed by the regular train journey of a Mouse and his alter-ego, Dog. This story is inspired by a train ticket gifted in the previous performance. This gift, offered by audience member James, was accompanied by a story about James’s regular train journeys between two stations.<sup>4</sup> The company combines this story with an existing character – Mouse – who was first introduced in ‘By the Light of the Moon’. Mouse’s canine alter-ego is inspired by a gift from Sara, who offered a receipt for some dog food. The remaining gifts inspire a series of short stories, taking place in Mouse-Dog’s imagination as he sits on the train. Each performance not only tells a new set of stories, but creates a new world within which to tell them. Each new world is conceived within the last; ‘a point of transition in a life eternally renewed’ (Bakhtin 1984, p.318).

The gifts from the audience in Liverpool – a mixture of objects and writing/drawings on paper – represent memories. As physical objects they are akin to mementos that are kept for ‘sentimental’ reasons, to keep a memory alive. Whether audience members share items that really hold personal sentimental value or

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<sup>4</sup> Audience member names have been changed



not, these gifts become imbued with this level of significance as they are offered to *Travelling Show* and accompanied by a personal story. As the gifts go on to inspire the next performance, their value multiplies as they become keys to unlock new realms of imagination. No longer items that might trigger a personal memory, they now become items that open new worlds, triggering new associations for multiple new audience members. As gifts they hold no practical or financial value, but they are full of imaginative value. Offered from the personal memories of one group, to inspire the creation of something new for another, the gifts are lynchpins of ‘the receding past and the advancing future, the becoming’ (Bakhtin 1984, p.195).

In *Travelling Show*, the act of exchanging gifts and of creating a new world is not a representational trope. We are not telling stories about the creation of worlds, but implicating the audience in the creative process of giving birth to new worlds. This is not to say that the dramaturgy does not also operate on a representational level. The rebirth of *Travelling Show* could be seen to embody an optimistic vision of the development of humanity and historic progress. The dramaturgy does operate symbolically, but it does so through an active process of rebirth.

This active dramaturgical structure constitutes *Travelling Show* as an ever-growing collective entity that connects all those who have ever, and will ever, contribute to it. The dramaturgy contains its own ‘ancestral aspect’ (Bakhtin 1984, p.323). One audience member (in Glasgow, 18 Dec 2017) commented that they felt ‘like a link in a chain’, connected to both the previous audience (who provided the gifts for the performance they enjoyed) and to the next audience (who would enjoy the gifts they provided). This is the same language used by Bakhtin to describe the grotesque body as ‘the link in the chain of genetic development’ (1984, p.26). As audiences contribute to the birth of a new world, they impact on all future rebirths, becoming an integral part of the ancestry of this ever-growing entity.

Each rebirth creates a new world with new possibilities, but one that carries traces of what has come before. In fact, it might be more accurate to say that each new performance gives birth to the world again. Just as Bakhtin proposes that carnivalesque rebirth represents humanity’s rising to ‘a new level of development’ (Bakhtin 1984, p.324), *Travelling Show* aims to enrich and improve itself with each rebirth. As well as creating a new imaginative world, the rebirth enables the company to discard elements we feel unhappy with, and to develop those we are excited by. The rebirth enables us to better tackle any issues that have arisen, and to more consciously explore any accidental successes.

For example, the Mouse character was underexplored in the first performance. In the second performance, the audience’s gifts provide momentum to the character’s development, while allowing the other two actors to withdraw from characters they are unexcited by and instead explore new stories. The same introductory song recurs in each performance, while the moment of ‘gifting’ changes each time as the company experiments with *Travelling Show*’s relationship to its audience. What constitutes ‘improvement’ is not a fixed ideal, but is open to question with each rebirth.

Gardiner argues that Bakhtin's analysis of carnival reveals a belief in the 'indeterminacy and openendedness of human history' (Gardiner 1992, p.33). With an emphasis on 'growth' and the 'ever unfinished' (Bakhtin 1984, p.26) nature of the human and of society, Bakhtin presents carnival as a transformative but unpredictable force. Gardiner (1992, p.40) connects such openendedness with the need for constructions of solidarity, admiring Bakhtin's optimism in the possibility of a liberatory cultural politics, while stressing that such utopianism relies on actual transformative politics and the opening up of imaginations. Gardiner here hints at the enabling connection between construction and openness in the process of utopian transformation; a theme found in much contemporary writing on utopia. Levitas proposes that the best utopian thought emerging under postmodernism 'implied a dialectic of openness and closure' (2013, p.103). This can be seen in Bakhtin's carnivalesque rebirth, embracing the indeterminacy of human history while emphasising its interconnecting universality in the 'collective ancestral body' (Bakhtin 1984, p.19). It is found too in *Travelling Show*, which is engaged in utopian improvement, neither through the identification of a desired end state, nor indulgence in process as an end in itself. Levitas suggests that an overemphasis on process and openness can become unhelpfully disengaging, and she prefers a recognition of provisionality and dialogue (2013, p.124). I find this a useful way to understand *Travelling Show's* dramaturgy, which is 'ever creating' (Bakhtin 1984, p.26), but relies on acts of closure, construction, and circling back in a critical and dialogic method that finds some correlation with Levitas's 'utopia as method' (2013).

Utopia as method is a sociological approach to imaginatively reconstituting society (Levitas 2013). The method moves through three different modes – archaeological, ontological and architectural (Levitas 2013, p.153). The architectural mode of constructing society is always subject again to the archaeological, a mode of critique that exposes complete proposals as provisional, fragmented and inconsistent. *Travelling Show* is always moving between its architectural construction and archaeological critique, opening both modes to infiltration by the audience through their offering of gifts. In its architectural mode, each rebirth of *Travelling Show* involves a construction, for which the audience provides the raw materials and the company members are architects. The company members seek structures and stories that arise from the audience's gifts, attempting to build a world in which these offerings can coexist. These worlds constitute intricate constructions that are contingent upon the gifts that have enabled them to materialise. But they are also joyously temporary.

At the end of each performance, *Travelling Show* circles back to its archaeological mode. Audience members offer gifts from their own world that will enrich or expand the world of *Travelling Show*. Some choose to gift things that retain something they like about this world, while others introduce something to improve it. The train ticket, for example, was offered after watching a performance that involved a train journey. This scene struck a chord with James, who chose to share his own train journey story along with the gift of a train ticket. Following the next performance, in which James's train ticket inspired the storytelling structure of a train journey, Sid felt connected to the theme of train travel, and gifted his own train ticket accompanied by a story. It is possible that someone in every audience will feel connected to the theme of travel and share something to

keep that theme alive in the regenerating world of *Travelling Show*. After the third performance, in Glasgow, some audience members said they wanted a stronger sense of place and to know more about the location the gifts had come from. They offered gifts that came with a strong sense of Glasgow and Scotland, introducing a place-based specificity to the world of *Travelling Show* that was not there before. Perhaps future audiences will enjoy this, and ‘place’ will become a central theme of the performance. Perhaps future audiences will grow bored of train travel and site-specificity and offer gifts that send *Travelling Show* in a different direction. The trajectory remains open to all these possibilities; future rebirths are indeterminate and provisional.

Rather than an approach toward something, rebirth allows us to think of *Travelling Show* as an entity ‘in the act of becoming’ (Bakhtin 1984, p.317). The ever-creating nature of *Travelling Show* opens up a future where change is inevitable but its content remains indeterminate. This approaches one of the essential functions of utopia according to Levitas (2013, p.119), which is to ‘disrupt the closure of the present’. This happens less through the content of proposed alternatives, than through ‘the act of imagination itself’ (Levitas 2013, p.119). *Travelling Show* facilitates a generosity of imagination in which all participants – the company and the audience – are embraced in a flow of ideas and creativity. As gifts coalesce into stories, a closure takes place, but in a way that opens up new pathways.

### **Opening a Space of Contingency**

Closing in order to open new possibilities is one of the ways *Travelling Show*’s rebirth engages a ‘dialectic of openness and closure’ (Levitas 2013, p.103). The nuances of this process can be further unpacked by observing how the principle of rebirth in *Travelling Show* works to open spaces of contingency.

Contingency, in classical philosophy, describes ‘everything that is, but is not necessarily as it is’ (Jain 2009, p.409). It is a mode of thought recognising that events could be otherwise, and do not proceed from a rational necessity (Mackay 2011, p.1). Etymologically stemming from *contingere* – to befall – contingencies tend to be understood as things beyond our control, that happen to us (Mackay 2011, p.2). This can be embraced as a ‘loosened liability of social relations’ (Jain 2009, p.409) or result in a ‘state of mourning for lost certainties’ (Mackay 2011, p.3), among other responses that variously welcome or criticise an understanding of society as contingent (see Jain 2009, pp.409-410).

I draw on positive understandings of contingency, that seek an active engagement with the concept. For Mackay (2011) this is about *thinking* contingency, while for Jain (2009) the emphasis is placed on action.

Mackay explains that thinking contingency frees us from ‘dogmatic modes of thought’ that subordinate events to ‘predestined necessity’ (2011, p.1). In utopian terms, such thinking can reject utopia as a controllable static blueprint and recognise it as a dynamic interplay of unknowable potentialities. However, there remains the risk of Levitas’s cautioned ‘overemphasis on openness, process and impossibility’ (2013, p.124).

Mackay recognises ‘that contingency cannot be thought through neo-romantic concepts of openness, chance and process’ and, in artistic terms, contingency demands ‘a special sort of discipline’ (2011, p.5). I propose this is provided by Jain’s focus on action.

Jain (2009, p.408), like Mackay (2011, p.6), argues that we live in a society that creates ‘regime’ out of contingency. Far from offering openness and chance, our social reality is ‘in a certain sense indeed hardened and compulsive’ (Jain 2009, p.410), where ‘possibility’ only hides the impossible (Jain 2009, p.408). This means an obscuring of utopia, which ‘represents the impossible in the sphere of the imagination’ (Jain 2009, p.411). To overcome this, Jain proposes that we approach the space of contingency (2009, p.408). This is not a space in which to merely ‘welcome the increase of possibility’ (Jain 2009, p.409), but a space in which to take action, thus opening up new possibilities and further extending ‘the contingent space for action’ (Jain 2009, p.413). This is a utopian space because it retains a quality of impossibility. The ‘regime of the possibility’ confines possibilities within strict limits (Jain 2009, p.408). Jain’s emphasis on action pushes at these limits, towards the impossible. Utopia – the impossible – must remain ‘the horizon’; as soon as it melts into reality, ‘any possibility of becoming a *different* society is eliminated’ (Jain 2009, p.413).

I invoke this ‘space of contingency’ to conceptualise the moment of gifting in *Travelling Show*. In this moment, audience and company members enter into what Jain calls ‘a dialectics of punctualisation and depunctualisation’ of contingency (2009, p.413). Punctualisation is the shrinking of contingency to a single point; the process by which the abstract space of possibility becomes crystallised into reality. This is always accompanied by the creation of new possibilities, and the opening of new spaces of contingency – hence a ‘depunctualisation’ also occurs.

At the end of ‘The Travels of Mouse-Dog’, the audience in Prescott are invited to leave an item on Mouse-Dog’s train, to provide a gift for the next audience. On making this invitation, we enter a dialectics of punctualisation and depunctualisation of contingency. The invitation is not completely open, but contains a specific imaginative cue. Of the myriad of possible invitations we could have made, we opted for this one. Contingency shrinks to a single point. But this also opens up unknowable responses. An item left on a train encompasses a huge range of possibilities, and the artists cannot predict what they will receive. As an audience member rummages around their bag and pockets to select an item, they choose just one. Contingency shrinks to a single point. But as they offer it to *Travelling Show*, they do so knowing it enters an unknown space. The audience member has no control over how the gift will be used by the artists. This act of gifting opens up an unknowable range of possibilities. A depunctualisation of contingency occurs.

In the third performance, ‘They Rolled into Town’ (Glasgow, 18 Dec 2017), this notion of opening and closing becomes a trope within the performance itself. An audience member in Prescott gifted a small door knob. In ‘They Rolled into Town’, the knob takes on magical properties and is used to open doors to unknown realms. This notion is carried through into the moment of gifting at the end of that performance. In the first two performances, gifts were invited from within the world of the performance. On this occasion though, the

invitation involved opening a (metaphorical) door out of the world of the performance, and into something better.

I invite you all to imagine stepping into that Tesco Express [...] scouring the shelves [...] then you find yourself at the till [...] and while you're stood there, struggling with the self-service till, I want you to just picture anything else you could be doing in that moment, anywhere else you could be [...] instead of standing in Tesco Express spending money that you don't need to spend [...] one thing you'd rather be doing in that moment. And that, dear friends, is what we would like you share with us as your gift for our next audience ('They Rolled into Town', The Suitcase Ensemble, Glasgow, 18 Dec 2017).

This might be seen as a restrictive invitation. In the first two performances, we provide a narrative context for the invitation, but ultimately allow audience members to gift whatever they want. In those cases, the narrative context offers a creative trigger to help audience members select something – a memento, an item left on a train – but in this case it is a more specific request for a place or activity. Perhaps this restricts the expansion of the contingent space for action. On the other hand, perhaps it expands it in an unexpected direction. Those early invitations are over-reliant on chance and randomness; audience members can simply offer whatever they have to hand. The invitation above requires a more active consideration that might expand the contingent space beyond the limited range of options presented by the objects in the audience's bags. Here they are guided away from a reliance on chance, and towards the opening up of the imagination. This invitation expands the contingent space in an unknown direction to implicate the audience more directly in the rebirth of the performance.

In the first two performances, the invitation was a means to gather stimulus for the next performance. The invitation did not implicate its audience in opening up a new world. In fact, it could be seen to portray an illusion of structure and stability. In 'By the Light of the Moon', there was an implicit suggestion that the audience's gifted memories, placed into the Moon's suitcase, would be treated *as* memories in the next performance; that the next performance would retain the same broad storytelling structure as 'By the Light of the Moon'. In a post-show discussion, most audience members indicated that they assumed this was our plan. At this stage, we had no plan, and we made it clear during this discussion that anything might happen with the gifts, and that nothing of this world would necessarily remain. However, the dramaturgy of the performance was potentially misleading. In 'They Rolled into Town', there was no need to make such an assurance post-show, because the dramaturgy made clear its intentions – it opened up the possibility of a new world.

Although audience members were asked to write down their wish to be elsewhere, many chose to share an object as well – something they just happened to have to hand. In one case, Sue reached into her bag and saw a packet of coffee. She not only gifted this coffee, but incorporated it into her imagined elsewhere to augment her offering. Here the audience member engages in the same process that the artists go through in their devising phase, finding connections between different offerings and allowing the dialogue between them to

create new imaginative possibilities that would not have existed on their own. This invitation therefore enables deeper engagement with the process of rebirth than previous invitations had. Sue was not guided to engage on this level, but nor was she prevented. The invitation allowed this to happen through what theatre company Action Hero have described as leaving open a portal of possibility (Stenhouse 2014).

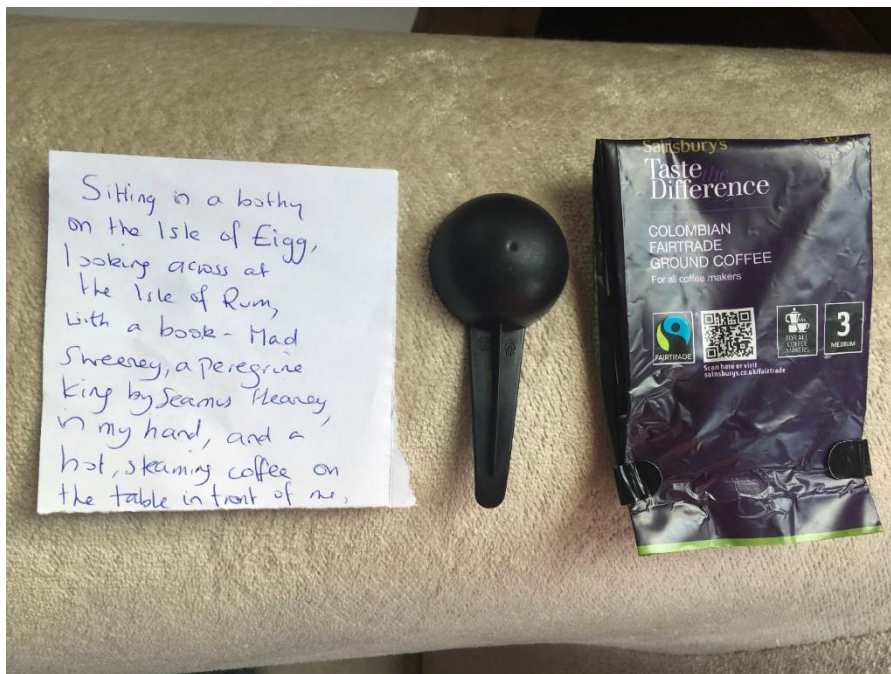


Image 3: Sue's augmented gift

The artists have no predestined plan for how the audience's gifts will be used, how these gifts will coexist in the construction of a new world, or how they will inspire the next invitation to gift. This comes about through engagement with the contingencies presented, rather than by trying to fit events into a repeatable programme. Accessing a hinterland of devising and compositional methodologies, the artists might identify characters, themes, settings or plots among the gifted material, they might employ visual or choreographic principles to compose material in non-narrative sequence, or they might do something else. The approach taken is neither pre-planned nor arbitrary but the result of the contingent combination of many factors: the gifts offered, the personal connections the artists have with those gifts, other recent artistic inspirations encountered, the rehearsal space, the artistic specialisms of the performers, the technical capabilities of the performance space, and consideration of the next audience to be encountered, to mention just a few. Reminders of these contingencies are often emphasised in the emerging performance. Performers present gifts in their 'raw' form, before telling the story they have inspired. The storytelling is peppered with stage asides and direct address to the audience to relay personal stories and explain aspects of the creative process.

This engagement with contingency acknowledges autonomy and planning as illusions (Mackay 2011, p.3), as well as unsettling the idea that reality is 'arbitrary and freely reshapable' (Jain 2009, p.410). Audiences and artists exercise agency in constructing the world of *Travelling Show*, but they also relinquish control – or the illusion of control – to the prominence of a dialogic play of contingency.

### **Conclusion: *Travelling Show* as a Dramaturgy of Utopia**

*Travelling Show* seeks to continually improve its own world. The more of humanity it connects with, the more imaginative energy constitutes it, inviting those it connects with to contribute to its continual renewal. It is not asking audience members to renew themselves, or even a world in which they have a personal future. *Travelling Show* invites its audience to enter a space of contingency where their contributions will renew a world that they constitute on an ancestral level.

*Travelling Show*'s rebirth entails a dialectic of openness and closure, of construction and criticism, of the punctualisation and depunctualisation of contingency, in a collective method that implicates audience and artists in the imaginative creation of new worlds; creation that critically and dialogically engages with the unknown.

In this dramaturgy, utopia is not a subject of representation. It is not a destination or a goal. In *Travelling Show*, utopia is a method of world building that proceeds through the world's eternal rebirth. This is a dramaturgy that continually reconstitutes itself in a method akin to Bakhtin's grotesque body of carnival and Levitas's utopia as method. This dramaturgy of utopia might not rebirth society, but in rebirthing itself it opens spaces of contingency in which utopia becomes more possible.

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## The Welsh Hymn to the Virgin: Transmission and Cultural Identity from the Late Middle Ages to the Present Day

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*The Hymn to the Virgin is a poem thought to have been composed c.1470 in Oxford by the Welsh poet Ieuan ap Hywel Swrddwal in the context of a poetry contest with his English fellow students. A peculiarity of this poem, though, is that while it is written in Middle English, the spelling-system and metre used throughout are Welsh. Its themes, too, are characteristic of wider medieval Welsh literature.*

*The poem is somewhat under-researched, and for a long time was thought to have been written by an Englishman and then transcribed into Welsh orthography. The prologues (in Welsh) appearing in several of the manuscripts tell the story of its composition, and this view is no longer held; however, it can be interesting to study how such a mistake came to be. Indeed, much work has been done on the poem as evidence for the history of English pronunciation (in particular in Dobson's 1954 article entitled 'The Hymn to the Virgin'), but the wider cultural settings of the poem and its subsequent transmission, including in studies of it, have been less studied.*

*This article addresses the ways in which this poem set a precedent in the expression of a Welsh national identity through literature, and how it allows its Welsh copyists to appropriate the English language, through its spelling-system or the metrical form chosen by Swrddwal. This is achieved through a study of the twelve manuscripts of the poem, dating from the sixteenth through to the eighteenth centuries, and of the 1823 printed edition. It inquires how and why it could have been of interest to Welsh scholars, and the reasons for its inclusion in Welsh-language poetry compilations, as well as those for its anglicisation in some of the manuscripts, which led to the confusion in subsequent centuries over its Welsh origins mentioned above.*

**Keywords:** *Anglo-Welsh Literature, English philology, Welsh manuscripts, poetry, transmission*

*The Hymn to the Virgin* is a poem purportedly written around 1470, by the Welsh poet and Oxford University student Ieuan ap Hywel Swrddwal.<sup>5</sup> This work was copied in twelve manuscripts, some of which have one of two versions of a contextualising prologue. These prologues tell how the *Hymn* was composed during a poetry contest, following taunts uttered by English students who were claiming that there was 'neither metre nor alliteration in Welsh' (Garlick 1985, p.7). Swrddwal thus set to prove to them that he could write a poem in English but in a Welsh metrical form that no English-speaker could master. This marks the creation of a whole new genre in Welsh literature, namely Anglo-Welsh literature, defined by Raymond Garlick as:

a convenient shorthand for 'writing in the Welsh language by Welshmen:' a linguistic distinction, implying no reflection upon the Welshness of the writers in question. It is in fact a terminological exactitude – the embodiment in a convenient epithet [...] of the bilingual nature of literary activity in Wales (Garlick 1972, p.9).

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<sup>5</sup> I would like to thank Professor Jeremy Smith, who proofread and encouraged me during the process of writing this paper, which was presented in a shorter version at the University of Bristol's Centre for Medieval Studies Postgraduate Conference in February 2018.

The peculiarity of the poem is that although it was written in Middle English, as promised by Swrdwal, both metre and spelling system used throughout are Welsh. This made the *Hymn* of philological interest, used *inter alia* by Dobson (1995) as evidence for the English sound change known as the Great Vowel Shift, demonstrated by spellings such as ‘*swn* (with Welsh <w> /u(:)/) for ‘soon’ (Old English *sōna*) and *Kreist* (with Welsh <ei> /’i/) for ‘Christ’ (Old English *Crīst*) (Smith 1996, p.89).

However, the poem’s afterlife has been less investigated. Although it was edited by Garlick in 1982 and 1985 and mentioned as the earliest piece of Anglo-Welsh literature in his 1972 introduction to the subject, little has been otherwise done on its origins and textual evolution. One might thus ask these questions: how did it survive to the present day? Who had an interest in preserving this specific work of poetry, and why? What role did it have in the (re-)creation of the Welsh (literary) identity, if it had any?

To answer these, I will first discuss how the *Hymn to the Virgin* was created: that is, the context for its composition, and how it presents itself. Then, we will see how it was re-created through a survey of the manuscripts and printed editions in which it is to be found, and especially so in the copies of the poem which are written with an anglicised spelling.

The prologue to the poem, found in certain manuscripts, relates that it was composed in the context of an argument between a Welsh poet (presumably Ieuan ap Hywel Swrdwal, though he is not named) and his fellow English students at the University of Oxford. The latter pretended that Welsh poetry was non-existent and that if it existed, it was worthless; the *Hymn* is supposed to be the proof that they were mistaken. What resulted is a poem which was originally 100 lines long, of which 96 survive, arranged in 13 stanzas; the first seven appear to be *englynion unodl* union quatrains, and the six other a ‘more intricate structure of 12 lines each’ (Garlick 1972, p.17). The whole is written following the traditional Welsh patterns of alliterations and internal rhymes known as *cynghanedd* (lit. ‘harmony’) and demonstrates all four types of them, often in a single stanza, as may be seen in the first four lines of the poem:

O michti ladi, owr leding / tw haf  
 at hefn owr abeiding:  
 yntw ddy ffest efrlesting  
 i set a braents ws tw bring (Garlick 1985, p. 12).<sup>6</sup>

The first line is a *cynghanedd sain* (‘sound-harmony’), which features two caesuras; the first two parts of the line rhyme together, while the last two use the same consonantal patterns. The second one would be a *cynghanedd groes* (‘cross-harmony’), with its consonants all repeated in both parts of the caesura. The third line provides an example of a *cynghanedd lusg* (‘drag-harmony’) with its last syllable before the caesura

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<sup>6</sup> Translation: ‘O mighty lady, our leading to find / in heaven our abiding / into the feast everlasting / you set a branch for us to bring.’

rhyiming with the penultimate syllable of the last polysyllabic word of the line. Finally, the fourth line of the poem showcases a *cynghanedd groes* again.

This would tend to show that the intention of the poet was to demonstrate the range of Welsh poetic metre to a non-Welsh speaking audience; however, what is most striking when reading the *Hymn to the Virgin* is its spelling. Though the poem from the context given by the manuscripts seems to have been composed for an audience of non-Welsh speakers, it is interesting to note that its spelling ‘may prevent anyone who had no Welsh from being able to simply read the poem, let alone understand it’ (Thuillier 2017, p.13). It raises the question of readership; while it can be argued that the poem was read aloud to its original audience, this does not give the rationale behind the spelling-system employed throughout the poem. To be able to read it, one must know at least Welsh pronunciation, but to understand it, one has to understand at least spoken English too.

No manuscript survives from the time of the composition of the poem, which may shed doubt on who chose to spell the *Hymn to the Virgin* the way it is. However, in his 1955 article, Dobson analyses that the twelve manuscripts in which the poem survives may be divided into two groups. The first one includes the copies made from a lost manuscript he names  $\alpha$ ; the other is made of the copies from a lost  $\beta$  manuscript. Both derive from an archetype  $\chi$ , which would be the original copy of the poem in the hand of Ieuan ap Hywel Swrdwal himself (Dobson 1955, pp.76-77). From that, we can infer that Swrdwal’s own copy most probably was written with the Welsh spelling-system used in later copies, as manuscripts both derived from  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  spell the *Hymn* in that way. Restored versions of the poem, like those of Dobson (1954) and Garlick (1982; 1985) draw upon both groups of manuscripts, and though they can give a quite precise idea of what  $\chi$  might have looked like, these are here to be considered as later copies and re-creations of the *Hymn*, as all the other versions of the poem, both manuscript and printed. Be it in the layout of the poem, or the variant readings, one may say that each copy of the *Hymn to the Virgin* is, in a way, original.

The manuscripts span over a period of over two centuries; for the clarity of the argument, see Table 1 below for their details:

Table 1: Manuscripts containing a copy of the *Hymn to the Virgin*

Name of the manuscript	Copyist	Date	Contents	Spelling of the <i>Hymn</i> in the manuscript	Prologue	MS affiliation (Dobson 1955 pp.76-77)
Oxford, MS. Balliol College 353	Sir John Prise	ca. 1540	Commonplace book (Welsh, Latin, English)	Both Welsh and anglicised spelling		$\alpha$
London, British Library, MS. Additional 1486	David Jones	1587	Welsh-language poetry compilation	Welsh spelling	Short prologue (A)	$\beta$
Aberystwyth, National Library of	Lewis Dwnn	1565-1616	Welsh-language poetry Compilation	Welsh spelling		$\alpha$

Wales, MS. Peniarth 96			(‘The poetical works of Lewis Dwnn’)			
Aberystwyth, NLW, MS. Peniarth 98b	John Davies	1601-1644	Welsh-language poetry compilation	Anglicised spelling		β
Aberystwyth, NLW, MS. Peniarth 111	John Jones of Gelilyfdy	1607-1610	Welsh-language poetry compilation	Welsh spelling	Long prologue (B)	β
Aberystwyth, NLW, MS. Cardiff Free Library 5.44 (‘The Long Book of Llanharan’)	Llywelyn Siôn	1623	Welsh-language poetry compilation	Welsh spelling		α
Aberystwyth, NLW, MS. Llanstephan 47	Llywelyn Siôn	ca. 1630	Welsh-language poetry compilation	Welsh spelling		α
Aberystwyth, NLW, MS. Llanstephan 53	William Maurice	1647	Welsh-language poetry compilation	Welsh spelling		α
Aberystwyth, NLW, MS. Llanstephan 54	Siâms (James) Dwnn	1631-1680	Welsh-language poetry compilation	Welsh spelling		α
Aberystwyth, NLW, MS. Panton 33	Evan Evans	Before 1772	Welsh-language poetry compilation	Welsh spelling	Long prologue (B)	β
Aberystwyth, NLW, MS. Panton 42	Evan Evans	1772	Welsh-language poetry compilation	Anglicised spelling		α
Aberystwyth, NLW, Cwrtmawr 11	David Ellis	1785	Welsh-language poetry compilation	Both Welsh and anglicised spelling	Long prologue (B)	β

While studying each copy of the poem separately is a possibility, it is worthwhile here to see what they have in common. Indeed, one may see that with the exception of Balliol College MS. 353, all of the manuscripts are Welsh poetry compilations and the *Hymn* is often the only English-language material to be found within these, with the exclusion of the odd paratext. This is also true of the first printed edition of the poem in 1823 in *Yr Hynafion Cymreig*, which copies the text from Panton MS. 33, and of the most recent printed copy of the *Hymn*, edited in 2000 in *Gwaith Hywel’s Swrdal a’i Deulu* (‘Work of Hywel Swrdal and family’).<sup>7</sup> It is

<sup>7</sup> The other printed works in which the Hymn to the Virgin survives, which are all written in English, being (in chronological order):

- Furnivall, F.J. & Ellis, A.J. 1880. ‘An English Hymn to the Virgin and a Welshman’s Phonetic Copy of it soon after.’ *Archaeologia Cambrensis*.
- Dobson, E.J. 1955. ‘The Hymn to the Virgin.’ *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*.
- Garlick, R. & Mathias, R. 1982. *Anglo-Welsh Poetry 1480-1990*.
- Garlick, R. 1985. *The Hymn to the Virgin attributed to Ieuan ap Hywel Swrdwal*.

interesting that the poem should survive almost exclusively in such works, since it is, after all, written in English and not in Welsh; moreover, it seems that while the poem has always been of interest to Welsh scholars, it did not appeal to any Englishman before 1880. Why would that be so? The answer may lie in the prologues introducing the *Hymn* in some of the copies. Here follows the full translation of the short prologue ('Prologue A' from then on) of the *Hymn to the Virgin*, as well as part of the long prologue ('Prologue B'), both by Raymond Garlick:

Here is another ode to God and to Mary which a Welshman in Oxford composed while a student, because one of the Englishmen said that there was neither metre nor alliteration (*cynghanedd*) in Welsh. He answered him that he would compose an English poem in Welsh metre and *cynghanedd*, so that neither the Englishman nor anyone of his companions could make one like it in their own language: and he composed it as follows. But since I am writing this book entirely in Welsh orthography this much of English can follow our manner: read it as Welsh (Translation of Prologue A by R. Garlick, *The Hymn to the Virgin attributed to Ieuan ap Hywel Swrddwal*, 1985, p.7).

I shall compose a poem in English, in your own tongue; and if all the Englishmen in England compose such a poem or equal it, revile the Welsh. If you cannot compose it, leave the Welsh the privilege which God has given them. And recognize yourselves that you cannot compete with the Welsh.' And for that reason he composed this English poem ode in *Cynghanedd groes*, which an Englishman cannot compose (Translation of Prologue B by R. Garlick, *The Hymn to the Virgin attributed to Ieuan ap Hywel Swrddwal*, 1985, p.9).

Both prologue-versions underline the fact that Swrddwal had composed the *Hymn*, first, in a language which was not his own and second, 'in Welsh metre and *cynghanedd*' (Garlick 1985, p.7). This may be a way to justify the inclusion of a poem in English in the otherwise Welsh-language compilations in which it survives, reminding the potential reader of the Welshness of the poem. In this context, it is significant that many of the copyists and known readers of the manuscripts happen to be poets themselves; furthermore, they were obviously bilingual and often either worked in English or were worried about its growing importance in Wales. This shows how the *Hymn* may have been perceived in that context: be that at the time of its creation or when it was copied, Welsh poetry was flourishing. Swrddwal himself wrote poems in Welsh, as did his father, and they were contemporaries of the *Beirdd yr Uchelwyr* ('Poets of the Nobility') and renowned poets such as Siôn Cent and Dafydd Nanmor. Within Wales, the value of Welsh literature was known, but it was not in England, to which Wales had been attached in 1282 after the death of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd. The English had gained political power in Wales and settled there, while the Welsh gentry, which was Welsh-speaking before then, became fluent in English (Filpulla *et al.* 2008, p.19). The bards depended on their patrons and kept on composing in Welsh: from what we know of the context for the composition of the *Hymn*, Swrddwal did not need to convince his audience in order for him to make a living. However, in the context of an English domination which kept on growing, while the hopes of the Welsh to be sovereign again had died with Owain Glyndŵr at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Jenkins 2007, p.117), it is interesting that what would create a new élan in Welsh literature, i.e. Anglo-Welsh Literature, should be written in English. The *Hymn*, with

its metre and Welsh spelling-system, provides English speakers at the time with a good example of Welsh poetry, while staying out of their reach if they are not able to read Welsh. Following Swardwal's poem (around 1470), one may see several works written by Welshmen in English, while there are no records of such texts before. Thus, while literature in Wales continued to be written in Welsh after the *Hymn*, this poem seems to have opened a new way for the indigenous writers to follow in order to share their literature with their English neighbours. This is how, centuries after Swardwal's death, poets such as Dylan Thomas have become preeminent in English-language literature, while remaining Welsh in their inspirations, and sometimes in the form of their works. As Garlick puts it:

Does the fact that a man writes in the English language make him English, and a contributor to English literature? 'Despite our speech we are not English': most Anglo-Welsh writers would endorse R.S. Thomas's line (Garlick 1972, p.13).

Though it may be argued that the *Hymn* is not written in one language but two (using the grammar of English but the orthography of Welsh), it still allowed for Welsh poets to create in a language which, though it was their own, was not that of their country nor of their culture. However, in the case of the *Hymn to the Virgin*, the Anglicisation of the spelling in some of the copies proved to be an issue for some earlier readers of the poem.

Indeed, one may see in Table 1 above that there exist four anglicised manuscript copies of the *Hymn*. The oldest example of Anglicisation happens to be in the oldest of the manuscripts too, i.e. MS. Balliol 353, in the hand of Sir John Prise. In that case the transcription of the poem into English spelling is only partial, concerning only its first few lines. It would seem that Prise had intended to make a full transcription of the poem, either for his own use or as a pastime, and did not find the time or motivation to complete his task, and he seems to have planned on writing an anglicised version of the poem twice, one occurring on folio 1r and the other on folio 63r.

The second one is in MS. Peniarth 98b in the hand of Dr John Davies. Davies's main purpose was to 'propagate the faith to the people in their native tongue' (Evans 2004), which meant that some of his works 'were an attempt to provide materials through which English-speaking clergymen could learn Welsh in order to communicate with their Welsh-speaking parishioners'. It might be, then, that his copy of the *Hymn to the Virgin* was used as an example of traditional Welsh poetry accessible to English speakers who had no Welsh.

The third anglicised copy of the poem is in MS. Panton 42, the work of Evan Evans: it coincides with the date of publication of Evans's first poem in the English language, 'The Love of Our Country' (1772), in the introduction to which he coined the term 'Anglo-Welsh'. Given that Evans was preoccupied by the Anglicisation of the church in Wales as well as 'the sorry plight of Welsh culture' (Jenkins 2004), and has been described by his biographer as 'passionately patriotic and Anglophobe', this might come as a surprise. It is possible that the language of the *Hymn*, which is used to praise Welsh poetry (since it was written for a

contest), might have influenced Evans for his own poem, as he was already familiar with the text, having copied it in MS. Panton 33 ‘before 1772’ according to J. G. Evans (1898-1910).

The last of these copies, MS. Cwrtmawr 11, is in the hand of David Ellis, a Welsh priest known for his translations into Welsh of several religious books, and one of a few poems written in English by none other than Evan Evans (Jenkins 1959). His work on the *Hymn* in this manuscript is very careful, each stanza in Welsh spelling-system being immediately followed by its English transcription.

However, the existence of these anglicised copies led to some confusion as to the origins of the *Hymn*. The earliest example for that is Furnivall & Ellis’s 1880 article, ‘An Early English Hymn to the Virgin and a Welshman’s Phonetic Copy of it soon after’. In it, one may find two transcriptions of the poem, one from MS. Peniarth 98b, which is anglicised, and the other from MS. Peniarth 111. The authors, while they recognise that the poet was a ‘well known bard’ (Furnivall & Ellis 1880, p.304), think that the copy in Peniarth 98b is the earliest of the two and that Peniarth 111 was an attempt by a Welshman to transcribe the work phonetically. It is interesting that they should emphasise in their title the fact that the original *Hymn*, to their understanding, is English: it shows that the spelling-system makes a difference in the way the poem is perceived. Without the Welsh letter-values, to the eyes of scholars who needed a guide pronunciation guide to read the ‘Welsh phonetic copy’ of the poem, the *Hymn* was not particularly Welsh; while this may still be an issue to many Anglo-Welsh poets when read by an audience not acquainted to that concept or indeed quite foreign to English and/ or Welsh literature at large, in the case of the *Hymn*, the explanation could lie in its themes. Nevertheless, the view that the Welsh spelling of the poem should have come after its creation has no longer been held since Max Förster’s (1926) major article on the subject.

While the metre and spelling of the *Hymn* are doubtlessly Welsh, it might indeed have passed for an English hymn. As it happens, ‘the body of poems in honour of the Virgin probably forms the largest [...] section of the religious lyric in the fifteenth century’ (Woolf 1968, p.274), during which they also happened to know a ‘sudden copiousness’ (Woolf 1968, p.2). Thus, as its theme was common in the English literary landscape of the fifteenth century, this could explain why Furnivall & Ellis may have thought it had been written in English first; however, the figure of the Virgin Mary makes even more sense and seems far more important in the context of Welsh poetry. The fifteenth century also happened to be a Golden Age for Marian Poetry in Wales. The English Marian lyrics seemed to be either about the Compassion of the Virgin or carols to the Virgin which ‘were designed for a simple audience’ (Woolf 1968, p.283). In Wales the focus would rather be, among other themes, on her role as an intercessor and merciful mother (Cartwright 2008, p.11) – which is the case in Swardwal’s *Hymn*. Indeed, the Virgin is addressed as a mediatrix between the poet, God, and the Christ, as in those lines (21-24; then 75-80):

Help ws, prae ffor ws, preffering / owr sowls;  
 Asoel ws at owr ending.  
 Mak ddat awl wi ffawl tw ffig

iwr swns lwf, owr syns lefing,  
 [...]
 O trysti Kreist tat werst a krown,  
 er wi dei down, aredi dicht  
     tw thank tw thi  
     at te rwt-tri.  
 Dden went awl wi,  
     ddein own, tw licht (Garlick 1985, p.12).<sup>8</sup>

The poem starts with an address to the Virgin to ask for the safety of the poet's soul, but as the lines go from *englynion* to *cywydd*, the address shifts to God and Christ directly, before ending the poem with a line dedicated to the Virgin again ('tw kwin o meicht', line 96; Garlick 1985, p.18). In that regard, Swardwal's poem did not create anything within Welsh literature; he used a theme which was already common in his time, just as he used existing Welsh metre and poetic forms. One might even see in the *Hymn to the Virgin* some hints at the fact that the poet was quite closely following the Gramadegau'r Penceirddiaid (the Bardic Grammars'), which 'provided professional poets with [...] guidance on writing praise poetry consisting of lists of appropriate reasons for praising individual subjects' (Cartwright 2008: p. 43), among which is the perpetual virginity of Mary. Therefore lines 13-14: '[...] owr geiding mwyr, / maedyn notwithstanding'<sup>9</sup> (Garlick 1985, p.12) suggest that, even in its way to approach the genre of praise poetry addressed to the Virgin, this poem seems to be more Welsh than English.

David Jones, who copied the *Hymn* in the BL Additional MS. 14866, might have pointed to that too. Prologue A is found in this manuscript only: it ends with a query on the part of its author, which might well have been Jones himself: 'darllenwch hi val kymbraeg', 'read it as Welsh'. The *Hymn to the Virgin*, despite its Welsh letter-values and poetical devices, is written in Middle to Late Modern English; the spelling system may be confusing when it comes to the actual language in which the poem is written, to the point that it is easy to mistake it for Welsh in a manuscript. What Jones writes is then interesting: do we have to take it in a literal way, reading the poem 'as Welsh', in the sense of 'read it with Welsh letter-values'? Or is it 'read it as a Welsh poem'? BL Additional MS. 14866 is fascinating in that it also is divided into five different parts and everything from the handwriting to the layout of the manuscript shows that this is a well-thought-out compilation. The *Hymn to the Virgin* also is in a prominent position in it, being included in its first section dedicated to 'sacred poetry'. What we can infer from this is that it was not considered as a curiosity by the compiler: it is included among poetry in the Welsh language and has an introductory prologue, which, significantly, is written in Welsh. That, with the query at the end of the prologue, might either point to the fact that the copyist considered the poem to be Welsh already, or that he wanted his readers to see it as a Welsh

<sup>8</sup> Translation: 'Help us, pray for us, preferring our souls; / Absolve us at our ending. / Make that all we receive / your Son's love, our sins leaving;' 'O trusty Christ that wears a crown / before we die down, already dressed / to thank to you / at the root-tree / then went all we, / your own, to light.'

<sup>9</sup> Translation: '[...] our guiding mother, / maiden notwithstanding.'



poem. This can apply to the other manuscripts too, as they compile Welsh poetry exclusively and, much in the same way as in BL Additional 14866, treat the *Hymn* as any of the other pieces of poetry they include: it does not stand out nor apart in any of the manuscripts either in layout or handwriting, nor does it seem to be saved for any particular space.

A detail found in Prologue B, which might shed light on how the copyists (and editors, since this is the version of the prologue introducing the Hymn in *Yr Hynafion Cymreig*) considered the poem in terms of belonging to Welsh or English literature, are the words put in Swrdwal's mouth: 'I shall compose a poem in English, in your own tongue' and 'you cannot compete with the Welsh'. These statements indicate that the *Hymn* was composed for an English-speaking audience, but why the Welsh spelling? Dobson (1954, p.71) suggests that this was required to make the alliterations of the Welsh *cynganedd* evident. This argument seems dubious: alliteration has to do with sounds rather than with spelling, and even so, Middle English was flexible enough for the poet to showcase it with English letter-values if he wished for his alliterations to be visible in writing. It also could be argued that Swrdwal used Welsh letter-values simply because this was easier for him to write so; however, being a student at Oxford, one might assume he mastered the English language as well as its spelling-system and thus, that using the Welsh one was deliberate. It might be useful to remember that this text is a poem: while the spelling might be considered as a simple poetic license taken from the part of the poet, it may be more fruitful to think of it as being part of the *Hymn*'s poeticity. This is more of a literary concern rather than linguistic, but had Swrdwal composed a poem spelled in English, it might have been forgotten. The linguistic interest of the *Hymn to the Virgin*, its peculiar spelling, is also what makes its literary and poetic appeal. There is something consistently elusive in the poem because of that choice made at its creation: it is most of all elusive to its first intended audience. If the poem was meant to be read aloud by a Welsh-speaker to an English audience, its spelling would have been of little importance; if it was meant to be read silently, its spelling system would hinder the comprehension of any English person looking at it. The fact that it should have even been copied while trying to maintain this choice is telling of the stylistic importance of that choice in the eye of copyists. The Welsh letter-values used throughout the *Hymn* would thus be a way to further emphasise the poem's Welsh identity, though it was not *stricto sensu* written in that language.

In that regard, it is safe to say that the ideal reader of the poem would be bilingual. That statement also goes for the copyists themselves, as well as those the manuscripts were written for when this is the case. It is interesting to see, whether they try to keep the original spelling or anglicise it, the copies seem to vary with time, and the copyists seemed gradually more influenced by English, affecting their spelling and even understanding of the poem. See how the third line varies according to each manuscript:

Source	Date	Third line transcription
MS. Balliol 353	ca.1540-1550	yn tw ddei ffest evyrlesting

+ anglicised version		into thy fest everlesting
MS. Peniarth 96	1565-1616	into thee ffeest ever lesting
MS. Additional 14866	1587	in-tw thei ffeest efrlesting
MS. Peniarth 98b	1601-1644	vnto the feast euerlasting
MS. Peniarth 111	1607-1610	yntw ddei ffeest everlasting
MS. Cardiff Free Library 5.44	1623	intw they ffeest ever lesting
MS. Llanstephan 47	ca.1630	intw they ffeast efr leasting
MS. Llanstephan 54	1631-1680	intw they ffeast efr leasting
MS. Llanstephan 53	1647	in too the ffeest ever lesting
MS. Panton 33	before 1772	unto thei ffeast everlasting
MS. Panton 42	1772	unto thy feast everlasting
MS. Cwrtmawr 11	1777	yntw ddei ffeest everlasting
+ anglicised version		unto thy feast everlasting
Garlick, <i>The Hymn to the Virgin...</i>	1985	yntw ddy ffeest efrlesting
+ translation		[...] into the everlasting feast

Table 2: Variant spellings of the third line of the *Hymn to the Virgin*

The line, translated into Present-Day English, reads ‘into the feast everlasting’; however, since the *Hymn* was composed during the Great Vowel Shift, some of the vowels had not yet been raised. This is the case here with the noun ‘ffest’ (‘feast’), which during Swardwal’s time would have been pronounced /fe:st/. Interestingly, one may notice that the manuscript copies tend to reflect the sound-change once it happened. This often takes the form of an involuntary anglicised spelling, with <ea> standing for the sound /i:/. An exception is found in MS. Peniarth 96, which has ‘fffeest’ (pronounced /fi:st/)<sup>10</sup> a spelling which may have been influenced by the English language, as it is rare to find double vowels in Welsh.

The influence of English, however, may be seen in the variant spellings of other words in the line; it sometimes even changed its meaning. Take, for instance, the word spelled ‘ddy’ in Garlick’s version of the *Hymn*: it should be read and understood as the definite article ‘the’, first because the Welsh letter-values call for this reading, <dd> standing for /ð/ in Welsh and <y> being pronounced either as an /i/ or a /ə/ (it consistently stands for the latter throughout the *Hymn*); second, because, as Dobson puts it, ‘it is required by sense; [...] “thy”, though supported by the evidence of most of the MSS., is unsuitable because (a) the Virgin is elsewhere addressed by the formal plural [...], and (b) the eternal feast cannot be described as hers’ (Dobson 1954, p.112-113). Indeed, most of the copyists tend to have understood ‘ddy’ as the possessive pronoun ‘thy’ (spelt ‘ddei’, ‘thei’, ‘they’, or ‘thy’, pronounced /ðai/), which changes the meaning of the line but not enough to hinder the comprehension of the poem. The reason for these misreadings is a confusion between the Welsh and English letter-values of <y>, which would tend to indicate a fluency in English sufficient for the copyists to not pay attention to the way this letter should be pronounced in Welsh. This shows that the second person singular

<sup>10</sup> The spelling ‘fffeest’ might also have been a reflection of Middle English double vowels to show vowel length; however, since Middle English *ē* had already moved from /e:/ to /i:/ by 1500 (Barber *et al.* 2009, p.202).

genitive pronoun had already undergone diphthongisation (Old English ‘þīn’ /θi:n/). Similarly, if the Old English letters <ð> /ð/ and <þ> /θ/ had merged into one spelling <th> at the time, this is not the case in Welsh: /ð/ ought to be written <dd>, whereas <th> stands for /θ/. Nevertheless, some of the copyists, again influenced by the spelling of English, used <th> to stand for /ð/ when <dd> would have been expected when using the Welsh spelling-system. This not only affects the spelling and the pronunciation of the word in this case but also the meaning of the sentence; while here this is a minor change, in other places in the poem the difference is quite important. A word as small as ‘i’, which is to be understood as the second person singular pronoun ‘ye’ transcribed with Welsh letter-values (to be pronounced /ji:/, though the Welsh spelling would call for an /i:/ pronunciation) becomes in the hand of some copyists the first person singular pronoun ‘I’ (which is written ‘ei’ in the language of the *Hymn*, to reflect the pronunciation /ai/), thus changing the meaning of entire lines of the poem. While these could simply be seen as mistakes, the poem still remains understandable, be that the copyists changed other words in the line to correspond to their misreadings, or that the poem continued to make sense despite these. It could be argued, then, that each copy of the *Hymn to the Virgin* which changes even just a passage of the poem with a variant spelling is a re-creation of it. Can we indeed consider it as the same poem, when the meaning has changed?

In that regard, the most recent copies of the *Hymn* are particularly interesting. In the β manuscripts, the ninth line of the poem reads, with variant spellings (here in PDE): ‘our forefather’s father, our feeding, our pope’; in the α manuscripts, ‘our old forefather, our feeding, our pope’: which shows that there has been a degree of re-writing here, though it might have been unconscious from the part of the copyists. However, all of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century editions of the poem read: ‘Owr ffadyrs ffadyr, owr ffiding, owr pop’ – which changes the way the line is read, and re-creating meaning. It might have been edited that way to restore the cynghanedd which was ‘lost’ in the manuscripts (especially in the α MSS), if the poem ever read that way in the copies which are lost to us; it nevertheless creates the poem anew. Thus, would it be possible to think that there is not one, but several, *Hymn(s) to the Virgin* – one for each copy?

To that we might add the political aura of the poem, which each copy carries. M. Wynn Thomas describes Anglo-Welsh literature in these terms:

Ieuan ap Hywel Swrdwal used Welsh spelling and native strict metre forms as a defiant demonstration of his competence in English. Post-colonial *avant la lettre*, this cultural hybrid acts as a fitting prologue to the cultural drama of subsequent centuries, during which several major Welsh-language writers were to try their hand at English for a variety of reasons [...] which paved the way for the more convinced bilingualism and biculturalism of recent decades (Thomas 2006, p.61).

The entry does not mention the context of composition of the *Hymn*, nor anything about Swrdwal as a poet: the fact that it should have been written in both English and Welsh (as the syntax, grammar, and lexis are that of English, and the spelling-system and letter-values those of Welsh) was enough to politicise it: seeing the literary

progeny of the *Hymn* demonstrated by Thomas, it is with good reason. The *Hymn* seems to always have been of political importance, at least as far as Welsh culture is concerned. Each copy of the *Hymn* along with a prologue appears to exist because the compiler was interested in one way or another in Welsh cultural heritage. The Rev. David Jones, for instance, explains in his preface to BL Additional 14866 his view that ‘there was a need to ensure the publication of Welsh books (Roberts 2004), at a time when, after the Acts of Union of 1536 and 1543, this cultural heritage seemed endangered by the very presence of English people in Wales’ (Thuillier 2017, p.14). Even without naming it, the copyists seem to have seized the importance of the *Hymn* as the birth of a literary movement which would protest against the hegemony of English culture, to protect the Welsh.

More precisely, we might say that the creation of Anglo-Welsh Literature coincides, rather than with the composition of the *Hymn to the Virgin*, with the moment when it was copied – and maybe, with each time it was copied. Of course, the rationale behind Swardwal’s work is one interesting point of study: but what has become of this poem, and the role it has been given throughout the years, is arguably what is most important about it. It has philological significance; it also has, as evidenced by its afterlife, taken on cultural capital, allowing for the creation of a new kind of literature bridging the gap between the Welsh and English cultures – and, maybe in some way, for the re-creation of Welsh literature, and the way it is shared and transmitted.

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## Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*: Recreating Paradise Lost as a Narrative of Adolescence

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*This article argues that the children's fantasy trilogy His Dark Materials by Philip Pullman transforms the biblical narrative of the Fall of Man into a coming-of-age narrative. My analysis is guided by contemporary discussion on the uses of fantasy in children's literature and the exploration of adolescence as a liminal stage between childhood and adulthood. His Dark Materials presents the fall as a necessary coming of age in which the transition from the sexual innocence and dependency of childhood to the sexual maturity and self-determination of adulthood is presented as an essential human experience. Pullman's transformation of the fall draws upon the Romantic or Blakean reading of Paradise Lost, in which the exile from the 'paradise' of childhood is a felix culpa, a 'happy fault', and Satan as the tempter is an anti-hero. As well as William Blake's reading of the epic poem, Pullman draws upon Blake's Songs of Innocence and of Experience to frame the fall as wholly necessary.*

*Pullman's engagement with the interpretive debates surrounding Paradise Lost places the trilogy within the genre of theological fantasy and invites comparisons with its predecessors, most notably with C.S. Lewis' Orthodox Christian fantasy series The Chronicles of Narnia. His Dark Materials' subversion of religious orthodoxy – especially in its celebration of the fall – challenges longstanding conventions within the genre and proposes a new un-nostalgic paradigm of adolescence.*

**Keywords:** Phillip Pullman, His Dark Materials, John Milton, Paradise Lost, children's literature, young adult, adolescent, William Blake, C.S. Lewis, Chronicles of Narnia, religion, fantasy, fall of man, genesis, transformation, recreation

...Into this wilde Abyss,  
The Womb of nature and perhaps her Grave  
Of neither Sea, nor Shore, nor Air, nor Fire,  
But all these in their pregnant causes mixt  
Confus'dly, and which thus must ever fight,  
Unless th'Almighty Maker them ordain  
His dark materials to create more Worlds,  
Into this wild Abyss the warie fiend  
Stood on the brink of Hell and look'd a while,  
Pondering his Voyage (2.910-9).

Philip Pullman's adaptation of the fall presents itself as an intensely intertextual endeavour from the outset. In Book II of *Paradise Lost*, Satan looks upon Chaos and contemplates the raw elemental 'dark materials' from which God creates all things. The title of *His Dark Materials* appears to refer to the three instruments of power which provide the structure for the trilogy: *The Golden Compass*, *The Subtle Knife*, and *The Amber Spyglass*. It could also refer to the invisible dark matter known in the series as Dust; the physical manifestation of consciousness necessary for all sentient life. In *Paradise Lost*, the undefined materials which occupy the void are totipotent; they are primary materials from which God may create 'more Worlds' (2.916). In *His Dark Materials*, the existence of 'uncountable billions of parallel worlds' are the result of quantum uncertainty which occurs when 'possibility collapses happen at the level of elementary

particles' (2011, p. 272). According to the Many Worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics first suggested in 1957 by Hugh Everett, this splitting happens every time anything in the quantum world is faced with a choice (Gribbin & Gribbin 2007, p.91). Choice, or free will, is crucial to Pullman's rewriting of the epic and is also the conceptual basis by which Milton is able to present his 'great Argument' (1.24) and 'justify the Wayes of God to men' (1.26).

This article aims to explore the ways in which *His Dark Materials* engages intertextually with the work of John Milton and William Blake to transform the narrative of Genesis into a coming-of-age narrative by engaging in its critical tradition. The temptation of Eve, and humanity's subsequent exile from paradise, are refigured as a necessary coming of age in which the transition from the sexual innocence and dependency of childhood to the sexual maturity and self-determination of adulthood is represented as a vital part of human experience. Reading *His Dark Materials* as a re-imagination of the fall in *Paradise Lost* as a 'fortunate fall' or *felix culpa* is well-established among its critics. My analysis aims to expound upon this reading by framing this transition from the prelapsarian existence of paradise to the postlapsarian state of exile as allegorical for the similarly necessary transition from the paradise of childhood to the exile of adulthood. Within this framework, the fall and exile from paradise is a transitory period analogous to adolescence; one in which the individual is removed from the safety of childhood and must find their own way in the world.

Naomi Wood writes that 'Pullman stages Lyra and Will's "fall" into adulthood as a positive gain in contrast with the Romantic discourse of childhood that emphasises loss and diminishment as essential components of maturation' (2011, p.545). Kristine Moruzi argues that Pullman 'reworks the fall of humanity into an ascent' and that he rejects 'nostalgic impressions of children and childhood', rather '[insisting] on a more realistic portrayal' (2005, p.55, 59). Positioning himself against C.S. Lewis, Pullman stated in an interview that he wanted to 'represent the fall as entirely *good*. It is good for people to know things, to grow up, to become sexual beings' (Waldman). The positive approach to child and adolescent sexuality in *His Dark Materials*, as I will show, draws upon the Romantic reading of *Paradise Lost* in which the fall of man is interpreted as a necessary gain of experience. This reading is closely associated with the philosophy of William Blake. In this way, *His Dark Materials*' recreation of the fall becomes a creative form of engagement with the critical tradition of *Paradise Lost*.

Because of the centrality of the coming-of-age narrative, *His Dark Materials* has been marketed towards a young adult audience. Adolescent (or young adult) fiction as a distinct genre is a relatively new development within Anglophone literature, and contemporary critical approaches to young adult fiction often focus on defining the cultural phenomenon. Adolescence, writes Vandana Saxena, is an extension of childhood that emerged as the partial result of social changes during the Industrial Revolution which 'delayed the entry of an individual into the productive workforce'; located around the teenage years and characterised by a crisis of identity and role confusion (2012, p.19). Pullman's trilogy, as a work of adolescent fiction, is characteristically concerned with young adulthood as a stage of development in which individuals must define



their place within society. It is a liminal stage situated between childhood and adulthood in which the individual must negotiate their own place within ‘networks of domination and repression’ (Saxena 2012, p.25). Fantasy fiction becomes a medium through which this negotiation can occur, as fantasy, like adolescence, is liminal. The otherness of fantasy, which pushes back against stable categories and fixed identities, is a framework through which the expectations of the child and adult can be transcended. Fantasy’s ‘break from order’ and suggestion of ‘other orders of reality’ embraces this otherness (Saxena 2012, p.18). With reference to Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, Matthew Grenby similarly observes that fantasy narrativises the experience of growing up by ‘transporting its characters into a past time or new world where all is strange and perplexing’ and suggests that ‘this mirroring of their own daily experience helps to explain why children relish fantasy so much’ (2008, p. 166). *His Dark Materials*, like *Alice in Wonderland*, is a portal fantasy in which the protagonist is transported to an unfamiliar land. In both cases, the unfamiliarity of the land and the challenges it brings are used to spatially evoke the individual’s journey into adulthood.

Because of Pullman’s connection with Oxford University, his writing is often considered as a continuation of the subgenre of religious fantasy established by the Oxford Inklings. *His Dark Materials* is in part a response to C.S. Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia*, which presents an equally overt religious philosophy, but generates far less negative criticism because of its adherence to orthodoxy. Bernard Schweizer comments that *His Dark Materials* occupies the same ‘hybrid genre of religious fantasy novel’ as *Lord of the Rings* and the *Chronicles of Narnia*, however, where Tolkien and Lewis ‘affirmed the basic tenets of Christianity [...] Philip Pullman, on the other hand, chips away at the very basis of Christian doctrine’ (2005, p. 160). Other critics comment upon the antithetical relationship between the series: Alan Jacobs argues that Pullman’s revisions of Lewis present an atheistic ‘Anti-Narnia’ that reveals Pullman’s ‘hatred not only of Lewis but of the Christianity Lewis represents (2000, p.41); while instead of the ‘hatred’ Jacobs posits, Burton Hatlen suggests that Pullman offers a secular alternative to Lewis’ ‘Christian fantasy’ (2005, p.82). Pullman’s protagonist Lyra is antithetical to Lewis’ Susan Pevensie, who in *The Last Battle* is denied entry into heaven because of her sexuality and attachment to the material world. Pullman has publicly condemned Susan’s fate:

I just don’t like the conclusions Lewis comes to, after all that analysis, the way he shuts children out from heaven, or whatever it is, on the grounds that the one girl is interested in boys. She’s a teenager! Ah, it’s terrible: *Sex—can’t have that* (Waldman).

Pullman’s positive approach to sexual maturity challenges what Saxena calls ‘normative assumptions regarding the “asexuality” and “innocence” of the child’ (2012, p.169). Lyra, in direct opposition to Susan, embraces adulthood by embracing her own sexuality. She rejects heaven and instead chooses to build the Republic of Heaven on earth. Her choice is strongly rooted in a rejection of Christian doctrine exemplified by the Magisterium, who wish to keep all humans in a permanent state of innocence.

The Magisterium's resemblance to the early-modern Catholic Church is a point of contention among critics who are concerned with how 'appropriate' the series is for young readers. David Gooderham argues that *His Dark Materials*' treatment of religion is inappropriate for children as Pullman uses direct and more specific 'ecclesiastical discourse' which 'ties the reader too closely to the conventions of realism' unlike the veiled religious analogies as seen in C. S. Lewis (2003, p.159). Gooderham is critical of Pullman's apparent refusal to use heavier allegory to obscure the links to Christianity and the Catholic Church. Pullman's inclusion of the archangel, Metatron, and Satan as characters, and his direct references to historical figures such as Augustine and John Calvin are, for Gooderham, uncomfortably real. This argument, however, fails to explain why a layer of allegory is necessary when approaching religious debates in children's fantasy. Moreover, it could be argued that Lewis' use of allegory to depict biblical figures – Jesus as Aslan and Satan as the White Witch – discourages active questioning of the series' deeply embedded Christian doctrine. It is far more likely that critics such as Gooderham are uncomfortable with Pullman's challenge to the religious orthodoxy as seen in Lewis's writing. Pullman's 'daring heresy' is not the overt use of religion, but rather the challenge presented in rewriting the fall 'as if it were an emancipation' (Hitchens 2001, p.178). Far from indoctrinating young readers into atheism, Pullman respects the ability of young readers to elucidate his narrative and encourages them to form their own interpretations of the text based on their own experiences and wider reading.

Chantal Oliver praises the ability of the series to encourage young readers to interrogate their own ideas about God and organised religion, and contends that this process of interrogation can be an empowering experience. Pullman 'encourages the reader to question not only what "God" actually means and to whom, but equally by what process; a question which in turn 'suggests to the reader how and why meanings might be socially and linguistically constructed in everyday reality' (Oliver 296). *His Dark Materials* challenges culturally embedded ideas about the intellectual capacity of the young mind that often shape the subjects considered 'acceptable' for children's literature. Although Pullman's novels are often philosophically challenging, 'children who make the intellectual journey in reading Pullman gain substantial education through a rich non-condescending story line' (Smith 2005, p.145). In *His Dark Materials*, the protagonists Lyra and Will re-enact the fall, and in doing so, prevent the destruction of innumerable sentient beings across countless worlds. The awareness of self that came with the original fall is preserved, and the Magisterium's plan to return humanity to a prelapsarian state of unconscious innocence is thwarted. Despite Pullman's 'ambition of his rewriting of one of the grand narratives, the myth of the fall, which in its articulation in *Paradise Lost* is far from accessible', Pullman's popularity speaks for itself (Matthews 2005, p.125).

*His Dark Materials* draws upon the subversive Romantic reading of *Paradise Lost*, which interprets the exile from Paradise as a necessary loss of innocence and gain of experience, and thereby allows Pullman to reframe the fall into a positively charged coming-of-age narrative for young readers. The Romantic reading is often attributed to Milton's internal conflict; he 'edges nervously around the heretical idea that

the fall might have been a good thing' (Hatlen 2005, p. 89). Despite the unorthodox implications of this idea however, Milton uses Adam as a mouthpiece to express the possible goodness of the fall. In Book XII of *Paradise Lost*, after Adam and Eve have eaten the fruit and been cast out of Eden, Raphael comes to Adam in a dream and tells him that humanity will be redeemed by Christ. Adam's response is a contemplation as to whether his sin was indeed evil if it will lead to good:

O goodness infinite, goodness immense!  
 That all this good of evil shall produce,  
 And evil turn to good, more wonderful  
 Then that which by creation first brought forth  
 Light out of darkness! Full of doubt I stand,  
 Whether I should repent me now of sin  
 By mee done and occasion'd, or rejoice  
 Much more, that much more good thereof shall spring,  
 To God more glory, more good will to Men  
 From God, and over wrought grace shall abound (12.469-78).

Adam articulates the problem which troubled the Christian Father Augustine of Hippo: the problem of evil. In the fourth-century treatise *Des libero arbitrio*, translated as *On the Free Choice of Will*, Augustine argues against the Manichaean accusation against early Christianity which asserts that since evil exists, God cannot be both all-powerful and entirely benevolent. Augustine's free-will defence, the notion that 'all or much evil is to be explained as the consequence of man's freely willed sin' is widely accepted as a canonical explanation for the problem of evil (Berthold 1981, p.535). The free-will defence 'argues that it is better for there to be creatures with free will and the consequent ability to do both good and evil' since 'if God were to stop us doing evil we would not be free, and therefore would be unable to do good' (Willows 2014, p.256). It is Augustine's view that good only has meaning when it exists in opposition to evil; if it were the universal state of all things, good would have no meaning, nor would good deeds. His use of free will to explain the compatibility of the existence of evil with a benevolent Creator-God is the 'great Argument' (1.24) Milton refers to in his grand attempt to 'justify the Wayes of God to men' (1.26). Augustine's theodicy allows Milton to present the fall as necessary, if not good in itself, and end on a note of celebration of God's gift of free will. *His Dark Materials* goes even further by transforming the fall from the theodicy attempted by Milton into a message that prioritises a life lived fully over divine subservience.

Towards the end of the first book of the trilogy, Lord Asriel reads to Lyra the in-universe revision of Genesis, which incorporates dæmons and links them to the presence of Dust:

He turned to Chapter Three of Genesis, and read: 'And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: 'But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.  
 'And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:  
 'For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and your dæmons shall assume their true forms, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

‘And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to reveal the true form of one's dæmon, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

‘And the eyes of them both were opened, and they saw the true form of their dæmons, and spoke with them.

‘But when the man and the woman knew their own dæmons, they knew that a great change had come upon them, for until that moment it had seemed that they were at one with all the creatures of the earth and the air, and there was no difference between them:

‘And they saw the difference, and they knew good and evil; and they were ashamed, and they sewed fig leaves together to cover their nakedness....’ He closed the book. ‘And that was how sin came into the world,’ he said, ‘sin and shame and death. It came the moment their dæmons became fixed’ (2011, p.268-9).

The prelapsarian Adam and Eve are childlike in their lack of shame and oneness with ‘all the creatures of the earth and the air’. Their unfixed dæmons are indicative of their sexual immaturity, as is the case with all of the children in Lyra’s world. After they eat the fruit, they are granted knowledge of good and evil, knowledge of their bodies, and see the ‘true’ form of their dæmons, signifying adulthood. However, this knowledge means that they must leave the protection of Paradise and live independently. On his expedition to the North, Lord Asriel discovers that the invisible Dust ‘sticks’ to adults but is absent around children and from this evidence deduces that Dust is a remnant of Original Sin. He believes that Original Sin is the cause of shame, pain, and death, and conveys this knowledge to the Magisterium. The term ‘Dust’ is likely derived from a later part of Genesis in which Adam and Eve are cast out by God, who reminds them of His ability to destroy what he has created: ‘In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return’ (Genesis 3:19). Mortality, as a postlapsarian condition, is signified by Dust in *His Dark Materials*, as is sexuality and shame; however, it is inextricable from consciousness or free will. The angels who rebelled against heaven with Satan were ‘structures [or] complexifications of conscious dark matter who, 30,000 or 40,000 years ago intervened in human evolution for vengeance’ (2011, p.563), that is, they gave humans consciousness. Dr Mary Malone links this time gap to the time during which the human brain became the ideal vehicle for this amplification process: ‘suddenly we became conscious’ (2011, p.554). Dust is therefore indicative of Experience in the Blakean sense: independence, agency and sexual maturity. Through the metaphor of Dust and settled dæmons, *His Dark Materials* defines the previously ‘evil’ postlapsarian condition as the essence of adulthood, and transforms the so called ‘fall’ of man into a narrative of maturation in which a condition of adulthood is free will.

When Lyra hears of the prophecy of her temptation she learns that she will face the same temptation as Eve did, and that her choice will affect all of humanity. Although her temptation is prophesised, the outcome is not. Freedom of choice, therefore, remains a central theme in Pullman’s subversive rewriting of *Paradise Lost*. Mary plays the role of the serpent and tells a twelve-year-old Lyra about her own first sexual experience after leaving the convent, emphasising the importance of a life fully lived on one’s own terms. As it was with Satan

and Eve, Mary's temptation of Lyra is with knowledge. The following day Lyra offers Will a fruit and they share a kiss, becoming 'the true image of what human beings always could be' (2011, p.1046). The Dust which had been leaking into the abyss once again finds its home in sentient beings, preserving consciousness. Pullman's representation of Mary as a compelling Satan, whose temptation of Eve ultimately changes humanity for the better, draws upon Blake's insistence that Satan is the anti-hero of *Paradise Lost*. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake writes in a note:

The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it (1987, p.10).

Blake suggests that Milton's Satan is so compelling because Milton sympathises (however unconsciously) with both Satan's rebellion against heaven and with Eve's desire to be 'like God, knowing Good and Evil' (Gen. 3:4 NIV). Milton provides his own interpretation of biblical themes in his own context of seventeenth-century England, while 'Blake also interprets Milton's interpretation, and Pullman reflects and re-creates them all', culminating in a 'triumph of intertextuality, with text quoting text and image quoting image in a metaphorical reflective hall of mirrors' (Scott 2005, p.96). The act of 'falling' condenses the entire human experience of maturation into one act which offers an allegorical comparison of the prelapsarian Adam and Eve as children and postlapsarian as adults. The knowledge that came with the fall is represented as not just necessary but a defining part of human experience: Lyra and Will are 'children-no-longer-children' (2011, p.1046), signifying their coming-of-age. Within this paradigm, children are innocent, sexually inexperienced, dependent on external authority figures and providers, and lack the agency necessary for making decisions, while adults are sexually experienced, independent, and have free will, for better or worse.

Pullman's paradigms of childhood and adulthood – and indeed the subversive Blakean reading of Milton – are inextricable from Blake's unsentimental vision of childhood as expressed in the 1794 volume of poetry *Songs Of Innocence And Of Experience*. Drawing upon Blake's poetry, Pullman 'promotes the maturity that accompanies [Lyra's] sexual awakening' and 'explores the positive implications of experience and its implications for consciousness' (Moruzi 2005, p.60). As Jennifer Waller explains, a Blakean vision of childhood is one in which the child is 'no longer just the passive recipient of moral commonplaces' and the childhood fantasy is 'not a world of idyllic escapism but of combined vulnerability and creativity' (1977, p.134). Pullman, like Blake, refuses to look upon childhood nostalgically. His engagement with Blake is evident in the use of an extract from 'The Little Girl Lost' from *Songs Of Innocence And Of Experience* as an epigraph for the first chapter of *The Amber Spyglass*:

While the beasts of prey,  
Come from caverns deep,  
Viewed the maid asleep (2011, p.645).

In Blake's poem, the girl Lyca is carried away by beasts while her parents weep for the loss of her innocence. For Grevel Lindop, the poem is an expression of the transition from the 'spontaneous, imaginative Innocence of childhood' to the 'complex and mature (but also more dangerous) adult state of Experience' (1973, p.36). At this point in the novel, Lyra's mother, Mrs Coulter, has kidnapped her and is keeping her in an artificial sleep in a cave. This is to prevent her from repeating the fall and protect her from the Magisterium, who intend to kill her and prevent her from temptation. Will, who has been travelling with Lyra across worlds, looks upon the cave and devises a plan to free her. Norma Greco's reading of the poem's symbolic structure as an initiation into womanhood is useful here (1983, p.144). According to Greco, initiation is 'a mystical process of spiritual transformation in which the initiate suffers a symbolic death and is reborn into a more sacred self' (1983, p.145). Lyca's sexual initiation into womanhood is conveyed through the act of being carried away by lions while her parents mourn her lost innocence, however, unlike Lyca's parents, Mrs Coulter actively 'intervenes to try and keep the child from knowledge, including knowledge of her own sexuality' by kidnapping and drugging her (Matthews 2005, p.127). Will's actions mirror those of the beasts taking Lyca's virginity, as Will later accepts the fruit that catalyses Lyra's 'fall' into sexual maturity.

*His Dark Materials* breaks from the expectation that children's literature must 'impose a moral dictate on interdependent and often unclear terms like good and evil' exemplified by C.S. Lewis (Gurley 2009, p.9). For Pullman, the oppositions of paradise and exile, God and Satan, child and adult and innocence and experience are no longer respectively desirable or undesirable; they are two facets of human experience which always occur. Pullman 'emphasises the error in a conventional contemporary Christian belief: good and evil are diametrically and irrevocably opposed' (Gurley 2009, p.2). Mary believes that 'good and evil are names for what people do, not for what they are [...] People are too complicated to have simple labels' (2011, p.1024). Her rejection of this fundamental moral binary presents a direct challenge to that which has long been an assumed 'truth' in children's writing; Pullman intertextually engages with Milton, Blake and the Bible to 'reinterpret the ontology of humankind's moral and ethical universe' and 'redefine humankind's quest for a meaningful purpose in life' (Scott 2005, p.95). A life well-lived on one's own terms is privileged over a life sacrificed for a greater power.

Philip Pullman's ambitious recreation of the fall of man actively participates in the critical tradition surrounding *Paradise Lost*, both by aligning itself with William Blake's 'subversive' reading of the fall as *felix culpa*, and by adopting his unsentimental view of childhood. *His Dark Materials* transforms the fall into a coming-of-age narrative for all humankind in which children are equated to the innocent prelapsarian Adam and Eve, and their fall from the 'paradise' of childhood is represented as necessary part of the human experience. Adolescence is therefore constructed as a liminal stage during which the independence and knowledge of adulthood come to replace the obedience and servitude of childhood.

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## ‘This Tiny Rivulet’: (Re)creating the female voice in Classical epic

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*This paper examines the ways in which three modern texts, *Cassandra* (Christa Wolf, 1983), *The Penelopiad* (Margaret Atwood, 2005) and *Lavinia* (Ursula K. Le Guin, 2008), recreate three cornerstones of Classical epic (the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*) from a female perspective, amplifying the voices of female characters in Homer and Virgil. These female authors pose a challenge to the male-dominated master narratives of the ancient world, engaging with the ongoing feminist movements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This paper is interdisciplinary, combining modern literary theory and criticism with the study of Classics. Using a chronological approach to the novels, the first section examines how Wolf, through the Trojan princess and prophetess Cassandra, brings a female perspective to the *Iliad*, but also to male-dominated narratives of war. The second section analyses *The Penelopiad*, Atwood’s counter-narrative to the *Odyssey*, told by Odysseus’ wife Penelope. The narrative is shared with her twelve maids, whose fate highlights the intersection of gender and class-based oppression. The third section explores Le Guin’s relationship with Virgil in her novel *Lavinia*, presenting the titular Lavinia, Aeneas’ Latin wife, as a female speaker whose voice is unauthorised by Virgil. Finally, this paper concludes that retelling ancient epic from a female perspective is a feminist act: each author engages with her predecessors, developing an alternative, female literary tradition out of the patriarchal master narratives at the heart of Western culture.*

**Keywords:** *Female voice, epic tradition, patriarchy, feminism, modern retelling*

Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (both dating to the 8th century BCE) and Virgil’s *Aeneid* (c. 19 BCE) are cornerstones of Western literature, inspiring countless other works both ancient and modern. In his inaugural address to the Virgil Society, T. S. Eliot called the *Aeneid*, itself inspired by Homer (Kerns 1992), ‘the classic of all Europe’ (1944, p.31), indeed the embodiment of ‘central European values’ (p.7). However, the epic tradition inherited from Homer and Virgil has been ‘historically defined and confirmed by male critics and poets’, rendering ‘women and epic mutually exclusive terms’ (Schweizer 2006, p.1). The traditionally masculine values espoused in these narratives, warfare and imperialism prominent among them, leave little room for women.

These epics have thus been described as ‘master narratives’, defined as ‘any male-authored text that has received, transmitted, and influenced the traditional male-centred system of representation’ (Gold 1993, p.84). Though women have historically been excluded from Western master narratives and their creation, recent works of literature by female authors have combated the erasure of the female voice and experience. Christa Wolf’s *Cassandra* (1983), Margaret Atwood’s *The Penelopiad* (2005) and Ursula K. Le Guin’s *Lavinia* (2008) all recreate Greco-Roman master narratives from the perspective of female narrators. Each is a work of ‘minor character elaboration’, defined as ‘the conversion of literary characters from canonical literary texts into the protagonists of new ones’ (Rosen 2016, p.2), told from the perspective of a woman from ancient epic: Cassandra (the *Iliad*), Penelope (the *Odyssey*) and Lavinia (the *Aeneid*). As Adrienne Rich describes female ‘re-

vision' as 'an act of survival' (1972, p.18), thus Atwood, Le Guin and Wolf breathe new life into female characters denied agency, independence or any voice at all in Classical epic.

### ***Cassandra***

Christa Wolf was one of the preeminent writers to emerge from the former German Democratic Republic. In one of her many obituaries, the *New Yorker* writes:

When Wolf published a book in the GDR, everyone read it. [...] She was looked to as a kind of prophet [...] I didn't envy her that (McGrane 2011).

Perhaps it is unsurprising, then, that Wolf chose Cassandra, the Trojan prophetess doomed to be disbelieved, as the subject of her 1983 novel. Written in German (I refer here to Jan Van Heurck's English translation), *Cassandra* retells the events of the *Iliad* from Cassandra's point of view. Unlike Penelope and Lavinia, Cassandra is not married to the hero of her source material; nor does the title of the *Iliad* point to a single hero, referring instead to Troy itself. While Wolf includes a love story of her own creation (that of Cassandra and Aeneas), it is Cassandra's turbulent relationship with Troy that is at the novel's heart. Just as Penelope and Lavinia are bound to their epic husbands, Cassandra is shackled to the fate of Troy.

Wolf's depiction of life within the besieged city is seemingly informed by her own experiences in Cold War-era East Germany (Schelbitzki Pickle and Wolf 1986), 'a world dominated by two armed camps' (Graves 1986, p.945). Both Wolf and Cassandra live in an insular community, literally walled off from the outside world. By evoking the climate of fear and uncertainty in post-war Europe in ancient Troy, Wolf does not so much recreate a single master narrative as reclaim a female perspective on war that resonates through time and space.

Cassandra narrates her tale as she awaits her execution by Clytemnestra, wife of Agamemnon, her captor since the fall of Troy. As her death approaches, she imagines supplicating to Clytemnestra for remembrance:

Send me [...] a young slave woman with a keen memory and a powerful voice. Ordain that she may repeat to her daughter what she hears from me. That the daughter in turn may pass it on to her daughter, and so on. So that alongside the river of heroic songs this tiny rivulet, too, may reach those faraway...people who will live in times to come (Wolf 1984, p.81).

Wolf's novel embodies this 'tiny rivulet' running parallel, but separately, to 'the river of heroic songs': an alternative, female-centric tradition. Unlike *The Penelopiad* and *Lavinia*, however, *Cassandra* spans the events of not only one text (the *Iliad*) but also the wider Trojan cycle of myth. Wolf's Cassandra is directly inspired by Aeschylus' *Oresteia*; upon reading *Agamemnon*, Wolf '[saw] Cassandra at once' (1984, p.144). Wolf places her Aeschylean heroine in an Iliadic setting, imbuing Homer's one-dimensional Cassandra (she appears only twice in the *Iliad*, at 13.365 and 24.699) with a more eloquent voice and prophetic powers, which seemingly belong to a later tradition (*OCD*, under *Cassandra*). The *Iliad* itself is notoriously male-dominated (Butler

1922, p.6); the women, sequestered in the Trojan domicile, are marginalised from the main action of the poem (Farron 1979, p.15). In *Cassandra*, however, Wolf focuses on the power struggle within the walls of Troy rather than on the plain below. By the end of the war, the women have established their own matriarchal community, separate even from the increasingly patriarchal city, where wartime politics ‘are no longer the concern of women’ (Wolf 1984, p.92).

Cassandra is one of the slighter female characters in the *Iliad*, though she is tasked with announcing the return of Hector’s body to Troy (Hom. *Il.* 24.702-6). This heraldic role plays into her mythical role as seer: Cassandra ‘perceives’ (24.700) Priam before anyone else, and instructs the Trojans to ‘behold’ Hector (24.703), imparting her vision; they hear her and obey (24.707-9). Cassandra’s prophetic voice is, however, continually denied by the men around her, both in Wolf’s novel and non-Homeric myth. After the death of her brother Troilus, Cassandra ‘insisted on being heard in the council as a witness’ (Wolf 1984, p.75), armed with the authority of sight. Yet, when ‘[she] demanded that this war be ended at once,’ the men, ‘aghast,’ accuse her of madness (p.75). Here Cassandra does not so much predict the future as display superior foresight: if the war continues, more destruction will befall Troy. Priam, however, accuses her of ‘[speaking] for the enemy’ (p.75). Cassandra’s voice, far from wielding authority, is denounced as traitorous.

Wolf does, however, make occasional reference to Homer. Remembering the atrocities ‘Achilles the brute’ committed against her family, Cassandra wishes that ‘every minstrel who dared sing of Achilles would die in torture on the spot’ (p.79). The ‘minstrel’ Homer, characterised in legend as ‘a blind, begging singer’ (Latacz 1996, p.29), famously sings of Achilles in the *Iliad*. Elsewhere, Cassandra admits to giving ‘a crack on the mouth to that minstrel who went on singing the glory of Priam until the end’ (p.13). Wolf’s depiction of the noble Priam as ‘a ruin of a man’ by the war’s end (p.125), not to mention the establishment of an opposing literary ‘rivulet’, might indeed constitute ‘a crack on the mouth’ to Homer.

Wolf draws more explicitly from Aeschylus, who likewise elaborates Homer’s Cassandra in *Agamemnon*, the first play of the *Oresteia*. The majority of *Agamemnon*’s dialogue is shared between Clytemnestra, Cassandra and the chorus. Wolf states that, on reading Aeschylus, she ‘believed every word [Cassandra] said’ (p.145), despite her curse; though the chorus ‘forbid[s] the unauthorised foreign woman to speak’ (p.147), Cassandra refuses to be silenced, even when reduced to exotic chattel. Wolf’s Cassandra also reclaims narrative authority, despite her loss of material autonomy. However, where Wolf’s Cassandra regards her captor as a ‘weakling’ (p.9), Aeschylus’ Cassandra laments the ‘noble lion’ (Aesch. Ag. 1259) Agamemnon’s fate along with her own (1313-4). Aeschylus’ Cassandra reserves her opprobrium for Clytemnestra instead, repeatedly calling her a man-slaying monster (1231-6) with whom there can be no solidarity. The women who feature in *Agamemnon* cannot understand each other; Clytemnestra concludes that they speak different languages (1050-1). Wolf’s Cassandra, meanwhile, understands Clytemnestra perfectly through gesture alone:

She indicated to me with a shrug of her shoulders that what was happening had nothing to do with me personally. In different times nothing would have prevented us from calling each other sister (Wolf 1984, p.41).

Aeschylus resists this notion of solidarity, as Wolf observes: ‘the male poet chooses to see these women [as] vindictive, jealous, petty toward each other’ (p.179). Wolf takes pains to contradict this in *Cassandra*. Throughout the novel, Cassandra craves female relationships. She ‘courted’ the love of her loyal maidservant Marpessa (p.12), and she is initially hurt to hear about the women’s cave-dwelling community: ‘so they were living. Without me’ (p.118). She even feels ‘pain that fate did not put [her] on the same side’ as her soon-to-be-murderer Clytemnestra (p.42). It is only when she is accepted by ‘the women in the caves’ (p. 122) that Cassandra experiences feelings of belonging: ‘there at last I had my “we”’ (p.124).

Wolf makes abundantly clear why this women’s community, peacefully protesting the masculine precepts of ‘killing and dying’ (p.118), is necessary: almost all of the women named in *Cassandra* are victims of male violence. Cassandra is raped by Ajax the Lesser during the sack of Troy (p.137). Of the Amazon queen Penthesilea’s violation by ‘Achilles the brute’, Cassandra says ‘we felt it, all of us women’ (p.120), suggesting a collective consciousness shared between these female casualties of war. Sexual assault is an ugly feature of warfare throughout history, including mass rape during the Allied occupation of Germany at the end of World War II – particularly in the Soviet-occupied east (Bevor 2002). Cassandra’s prophecies of doom entail estrangement from her body, itself a common response to sexual assault (Coy 2012, p.110), wherein a disembodied voice ‘forced its way through [her]...and set itself free’ (Wolf 1984, p.59). The voice is not her own; as prophets are traditionally messengers for a higher power, thus Cassandra is a mouthpiece for Wolf, obliquely proclaiming Wolf’s feminist and pacifist ideals (Graves 1986, p.945). Or perhaps each is a mouthpiece for the other: as Cassandra’s voice is revived through Wolf’s novel, so Wolf preaches to East Germany (and beyond) through Cassandra and her cast of female characters, who, in turn, speak through Cassandra’s narration. *Cassandra*, therefore, emphasises a female experience of war of which Homer offers us merely a glimpse.

At the beginning of Wolf’s novel, Cassandra asks herself: ‘Why did I want the gift of prophecy, come what may?’ Her answer: ‘to speak with my voice: the ultimate’ (1984, p.4). Here we return to her desire to create a ‘rivulet’ of female songs, passed down by ‘a scribe, or better yet a young slave woman with [...] a powerful voice’ (1984, p.81). Cassandra’s desire is not selfish: her voice will bolster the ‘powerful’ voices of future generations of women to begin this alternative poetic tradition – as yet ‘tiny’ (1984, p.81) but tenacious. Wolf, the ‘scribe’, does the next best thing, immortalising Cassandra’s voice in the pages of her novel. Wolf recreates a prophetic female voice which promotes the voices of other women and, informed by her own experiences of living between ‘two armed camps’ (Graves 1986, p.945) illuminates a stream of female voices stemming from the master narratives of war.

### *The Penelopiad*

In *The Penelopiad* (2005), Margaret Atwood retells Homer's *Odyssey* from the perspective of Penelope, Odysseus' circumspet wife. While Atwood's writing has often been touted as feminist (Tolan 2007), Atwood herself is resistant to this label (Atwood 2017). In a 2009 interview, Atwood said of *The Handmaid's Tale*:

You could tell *The Handmaid's Tale* from a male point of view. People have mistakenly felt that the women are oppressed, but power tends to organise itself in a pyramid. I could pick a male narrator from somewhere in that pyramid. It would [be] interesting (Akbar 2009).

Atwood's feminism 'appears to focus on more humanistic concerns' (Akbar 2009), as opposed to the unequivocal oppression of women by men. Nevertheless, *The Penelopiad* certainly reads as a feminist recreation of the *Odyssey*. In her introduction, Atwood states her intention to produce a female-centric version of Homer's epic, giving 'the telling of the story to Penelope and to the twelve hanged maids' whom Odysseus executes as punishment for sleeping with Penelope's suitors (Hom., *Od.* 22.464), and by whom Atwood has 'always been haunted' (2005, p.xv). In the original text, the twelve maids function as a moral lesson on loyalty and hospitality as opposed to characters in their own right. They are, we are told, disobedient, 'shameless' (Hom., *Od.* 22.426) and ultimately one-dimensional. With the exception of the outspoken Melantho (19.47), they are also voiceless. There is, however, a hint of sympathy in Homer's description of their deaths: the maids are compared to 'thrushes or doves', helplessly caught in a snare (22.468-9). In the *Penelopiad*, however, it is revealed that the maids 'had been with [Penelope] all their lives' and 'helped [her] to pick away at [her] weaving'; Penelope says they 'were almost like sisters' (2005, p.112-114). Yet when some of the maids are 'unfortunately raped' by Penelope's suitors, the suitors' actions are considered criminal because they 'helped themselves to the maids' in Odysseus' absence. Their crime, it seems, is 'thievery' (p.116), not rape itself. We are reminded that, despite their personal connection to the aristocratic Penelope, the maids remain property. The maids themselves, who appear as choric interludes in Penelope's narration, emphasise this congenital disadvantage:

We too were children. We too were born to the wrong parents. Poor parents, slave parents, peasant parents, and serf parents (p.13).

The hanged maids are casualties of not only the patriarchy but the class system. In repeatedly highlighting the injustice of the maids' lot, Atwood returns to the notion of a 'pyramid' of power, emphasising that all women are oppressed, but poor women bear the brunt of this oppression. Atwood's inclusion of the maids as narrators thus incorporates an element of intersectionality into *The Penelopiad*, positioning the women who are marginalised by this aristocratic cycle of myth centre stage. In doing so, Atwood prompts a more critical examination of the original poem.

The eponymic title of *The Penelopiad* denotes Atwood's intention to recreate the *Odyssey* from Penelope's point of view, though her story is, it transpires, considerably shorter and written mostly in prose, eschewing the epic conventions in which male dominance is enshrined. The novella purports to be concerned with the truth: the long-dead Penelope prefaces her tale with the statement that 'many people have believed that his version of events was the true one' (p.2): that is, the *Odyssey*, much of which is narrated by Odysseus himself as he recounts his exploits to the Phaeacians. Now 'it's [Penelope's] turn to do a little story-making' (p.3). However, she later describes both Odysseus and herself as 'proficient and shameless liars of long standing' (p.173). Even as she implies that Odysseus' version of events is *not* 'the true one', Penelope thus discredits her own account. Hearsay weighs heavily on the narrative, whether regarding Odysseus' outlandish adventures or Penelope's chastity, about which circulates 'scandalous gossip' (p.3). One of Penelope's first statements is that everyone arrives in the Underworld 'with a sack [...] full of words – words you've spoken, words you've heard, words that have been said about you' (p.1). This emphasis on spoken word pervades *The Penelopiad*. The maids' narrative interludes often take the form of an imagined performance, perhaps a nod to the lingering presence of oral tradition in Homeric literature, which first existed 'as audible story-performances' (Foley 2007, p.2). Atwood evokes the subjectivity of oral storytelling in her repeated references to different 'versions' of the story. In her foreword, she refers to varying 'mythic material', both oral and local, with which she has supplemented the 'inconsistencies' of the *Odyssey* (2005, p.xiv-xv). Toting her sack of words in the Underworld, Penelope realises that the enigmatic 'they' are 'turning [her] into a story, or into several stories' (p.3). The notion of multiple stories behind one narrative, written and unwritten, is at the heart of minor character elaboration: Atwood tells not the *whole* story, but Penelope's version. There is no empirical truth to the *Odyssey*, merely different interpretations thereof.

Penelope also casts aspersions on Odysseus' more outlandish adventures. The Cyclops, it is implied, 'was only a one-eyed tavern keeper', while Circe is the 'Madam' of 'an expensive whorehouse' (p.83-4), and so on. According to Penelope, 'the minstrels took up these themes and embroidered them considerably' (p.84), alluding (like Wolf above) to Homer. Atwood also makes earlier reference to the master-narrator's humble origins: 'it's a low art, tale-telling. Old women go in for it, strolling beggars, blind singers, maidservants, children' (Atwood 2008, p.3). The suggestion that the minstrels 'embroidered' Odysseus' story is particularly significant, recalling Penelope's intention to 'spin a thread of [her] own' (p.4) as well as the time-honoured link between weaving and invention, particularly that of stories (Kruger 2001, p.22-23). Weaving is ironically designated as women's work, something that Penelope cleverly exploits to put off her suitors. Now, in the *Penelopiad*, Penelope weaves her own story into the master narrative of the *Odyssey*. Again, however, we recall that Penelope is a self-professed liar. Her intention to 'do a little story-making of [her] own' suggests proficiency in the same fabrication of which she accuses Odysseus. Within Penelope's version of events, therefore, is another untold story: that of the twelve maids. It is significant that Penelope's maids help her unpick her work by night, simultaneously facilitating Penelope's scheme and unravelling her story, as when

they interrupt *The Penelopiad* to tell *their* version. Rosen describes Penelope and the maids as ‘dueling [sic] narrators’ (2016, p.2): if Penelope poses a challenge to Odysseus’ version of events, the maids challenge Penelope’s.

Penelope is ultimately complicit in the maids’ deaths. In their first appearance, the hanged maids sing a ‘rope-jumping rhyme’, emphasising their innocence:

we are the maids  
the ones you killed  
the ones you failed (Atwood 2005, p.5).

While the second line suggests that they are addressing Odysseus, the third is seemingly directed at Penelope, who ‘failed’ to protect them from either the suitors or Odysseus because she was asleep, indirectly responsible for their deaths through her inaction. The remorseful Penelope is, like Atwood, ‘haunted by the hanged maids’, who are (she says) ‘the daughters [she] never had’ (p.181). She confronts them in the Underworld for driving Odysseus away from her: ‘[the maids] make him nervous. They make him restless. They cause him pain’ (p.189). Yet it is seemingly she who is tormented:

‘What more do you want from him?’ I ask them. By this time I’m crying. ‘Just tell me!’ (p.189).

Nevertheless, throughout the novella, Penelope allows the maids to speak. She observes that ‘they had lovely voices [...] and they had been taught well how to use them’ (p.114). Who do we suppose taught them, if not Penelope herself, who ‘trained them [...] in everything they would need to know’ (p.113)? While Penelope and the maids may ‘duel’ for supremacy, Penelope does not (or cannot) stifle them; rather, her aristocratic privilege, affording her a speaking role in the *Odyssey*, is used as a platform for the maids’ voices. The maids certainly get the last word: the novella closes as the maids ‘sprout feathers, and fly away as owls’ (p.195), reversing the maids’ comparison in the *Odyssey*, at the moment of their execution, to ‘thrushes or doves’ (Hom., *Od.* 22.468-9). Thus, they are freed from the deadly ‘snare’ of their Homeric master narrative. Though they lose their voices, their refrain devolving into ‘too wit too woo’ (p.195), through Atwood, and Penelope, their story is passed on.

In *The Penelopiad*, Penelope exerts specifically female autonomy by embroidering her story into a narrative dictated by men, creating it anew. Atwood’s Penelope is no ‘edifying legend’ (p.2) but an ‘accomplished liar’; Odysseus is not a hero but a lying murderer; the maids are not silently executed in a mere seven lines, but vengeful co-narrators, testifying against their treatment by Homer. Indeed, Penelope’s account is undermined by the maids, who serve to remind us that her privileged agency is misused. Nevertheless, the maids are relegated to the periphery of Penelope’s narration. They are, besides Homer’s outspoken Melantho, nameless, faceless (‘we had one face / one face the same’, p.195), and without individual voices with which to plead their case. The maids cannot attain Penelope’s selfhood, mirroring the treatment of

prominent, privileged women in feminism versus those who struggle to be heard, and whose individual experiences are often erased. In drawing attention to precisely this, Atwood transmits her own experience: the reader, too, is haunted by the hanged maids.

### *Lavinia*

In *Lavinia* (2008), Ursula K. Le Guin recreates the world of the *Aeneid* from the perspective of Aeneas' Latin bride, Lavinia, who appears but never speaks in the latter half of Virgil's Roman epic. Yet *Lavinia* is rather different in tone to *The Penelopiad*, something Le Guin elucidates in a 2009 interview:

[Virgil] simply doesn't seem to have much of that prejudice against women. This is not like Atwood's thing with Penelope [*The Penelopiad*], where she's kind of telling Homer off: 'you didn't really let Penelope tell her side of the story!' That's not what I was doing (Grossman 2009).

Instead, *Lavinia* is an 'act of gratitude to the poet, a love offering' (Le Guin 2008, p.273). Virgil also features as a character in the novel, appearing to Lavinia in spirit as he nears death in his own time. The two interact in 'a place out of time' (Cox 2011, p.247), allowing Lavinia to challenge her meagre portrayal in the *Aeneid* directly whilst forming a poignant relationship with her creator. As Lavinia says:

I am not the feminine voice you may have expected. Resentment is not what drives me to write my story (p.68).

The resentful 'feminine voice [we] may have expected' in a female retelling of the *Aeneid* is perhaps Virgil's own Dido, the sympathetic protagonist of *Aeneid* 4. Yet this is precisely why Le Guin chooses a different path:

[What attracted you to Lavinia as a subject for a novel?] Just reading the *Aeneid* [...] but then finding this character that has no voice, and kind of wondering a little bit why Virgil, who's good with women – look at Dido, and so on – why he didn't do anything with her (Grossman 2009).

Virgil gives Dido a persuasive voice (she has 182 speaking lines in *Aeneid* 4 compared to Aeneas' 39) where Lavinia has none. The poet failed to fill Lavinia's name with life, 'as [he] filled Dido's' (Le Guin 2008, p.63), leaving Le Guin to give a voice to the voiceless.

While Atwood is sceptical of Homer and disdainful of Odysseus, Le Guin remains highly sympathetic towards both Virgil and Aeneas. Lavinia also forgives Virgil's slights: 'even a poet cannot get everything right' (p.262). Virgil, for his part, seems genuinely contrite as he straddles the boundary between life and death, ready to take a torch to his 'classic of all Europe'. He calls his characterisation of Lavinia 'stupid, conventional, unimagined' and laments that he 'thought [she] was a blonde' (p.58). In the *Aeneid*, Lavinia's hair is one of her few significant traits: her 'long hair' ominously catches fire (Virg. *Aen.* 7.73), foretelling her fame and fortune, but also war for her people (7.79-80) – yet, according to Le Guin, Lavinia's hair 'has always been dark' (2008,



p.262). Nevertheless, Lavinia refers to Virgil as ‘the author of all [her] being’ (p.68). Their interactions recall an apologetic father reaching out to an estranged daughter whom he barely knows, the ‘child [he] never had’ (p.68). Moreover, the poet dies in his own time and disappears from Lavinia’s shortly before her marriage, relinquishing his role of care to Aeneas as a father ‘gives away’ his daughter. The relationship between Virgil and Le Guin is also seemingly filial in nature. Bloom discusses ‘the genealogy of imagination’ in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1997, p.139), contending that authors are inevitably haunted by the works of their literary precursors. He envisages a metaphorical battle for supremacy between father and son: ‘later visions cleanse themselves at the expense of earlier ones’ (1997, p.139). Le Guin’s connection to Virgil, however, does not fit this masculine model. Le Guin, like Lavinia, collaborates with Virgil instead, producing a ‘love offering’ from a literary heir to her father.

Virgil’s view of his relationship with Lavinia is echoed in Lavinia’s response to her miscarriage later in the novel: she is the ‘child [he] never had’, whom he created but never brought to fruition, as Lavinia’s miscarried child is her ‘daughter who might have been’ (p.270). Virgil’s metaphorical ‘miscarriage’ is, however, reversible. While Lavinia’s depiction in the lines of the *Aeneid* cannot be changed, Le Guin salvages her character, forging from Virgil’s poem a reality in which Lavinia, ‘one of the slightest and most overlooked characters from the *Aeneid*’ (Cox 2011, p.247), is the eloquent protagonist, whose first-person narration dominates the tale. Like *The Penelopiad*, *Lavinia* operates within the constraints of Virgil’s master narrative. Le Guin does not purport to change the events of the *Aeneid*, nor the tradition that surrounds it. In shifting the perspective to Lavinia, Le Guin, like Atwood, merely shows that there are multiple ways to tell the same story. The fact that Lavinia can converse with Virgil, who gave her no voice, attests to the existence of these divergent realities. Lavinia is Virgil’s ‘unkept promise’, his ‘life ungiven’ (Le Guin 2008, p.63), the ‘child [he] never had’, yet she exists: a fundamentally paradoxical condition that can only make sense if we accept the reality of Le Guin’s Lavinia alongside, and in spite of, Virgil’s. True to her science fiction roots, Le Guin posits the existence of alternative realities: *Lavinia* is a distorted reflection of the *Aeneid*, wherein Lavinia, not Virgil, has narrative authority. While Virgil and Lavinia mourn the unfulfilled potential of their creations, literary and physical, Le Guin makes flesh and blood of Virgil’s own ‘daughter who might have been’.

Nevertheless, Lavinia is fundamentally aware that her existence is conditional upon the poet: ‘I remember, always, that I am contingent’ (p.68). She is sure that Virgil’s manuscript will not burn, because ‘[she] would have burned with it’ (p.173). There is a conflict inherent in Lavinia’s identity: on one hand, she is self-made, given ‘nothing but a name’ which she has ‘filled [...] with herself’ (Le Guin 2008, p.262); on the other, Virgil may have given her mere scraps, but it is on these scraps that Lavinia’s entire existence is contingent. Lavinia defends her existence to the poet in Albunea, accusing him of cowardice when he threatens to burn his poem, and her with it (p.58). Yet the story does not always add up. Lavinia says that ‘before [Virgil] wrote, [she] was the mistiest of figures, scarcely more than a name in a genealogy’ (p.3), indicating that her name preceded Virgil. If she was already ‘scarcely more than a name’, and Virgil gave her ‘nothing but a

name' that already existed, Lavinia's contingency on Virgil is seemingly overstated. Lavinia is more truly contingent on Le Guin, the female author who has given her life and voice, than the male poet who did not.

Le Guin regards *Lavinia* as a collaborative effort nonetheless, calling the novel 'a translation [of the *Aeneid*] into a different form' (p.273). Unlike *The Penelopiad*, which vies with the *Odyssey* for authority and authenticity, *Lavinia* embraces its debt to the *Aeneid*, a female-centric 'love offering' to Virgil as opposed to a feminist critique. Atwood's Penelope contends that the *Odyssey* is not the true story; Le Guin's Lavinia knows that '[her] poet always speaks the truth' (p.10). Nevertheless, Le Guin does not recreate Lavinia in the same demure image as Virgil does. Le Guin's Lavinia is embodied (or embodies herself) from Virgil's voiceless 'half-lines' (p.3) as an eloquent, autonomous woman. More than two decades before writing *Lavinia*, Le Guin made a comment on generic convention that is strikingly apropos in hindsight: 'that's how hero stories worked; they were about men' (White 2008, p.99). In *Lavinia*, however, Le Guin successfully recreates a heroic master narrative, giving its telling to a woman who exists and speaks unsanctioned by, and in spite of, male authority.

## Conclusion

*Cassandra*, *The Penelopiad* and *Lavinia* naturally invite comparison: all three are works of minor character elaboration, all recreate works of ancient Greco-Roman literature, and all elevate the female voice out of male-dominated antiquity. Just as Wolf, Atwood and Le Guin recreate ancient epic in a new, female image, each of their heroines undergoes metamorphosis during the course of their tale. Death, or its absence, has a transformative effect in *The Penelopiad* and *Lavinia*. Penelope's shade is physically defeminised, moulded into a 'state of bonelessness, liplessness, breastlessness' (Atwood 2005, p.1), yet still her voice is stifled: 'when I try to scream, I sound like an owl' (p.2). Lavinia, meanwhile, is 'all but certain' that she 'won't die' (Le Guin 2008, p.3). She knows that she is 'too contingent [on Virgil] to lead to anything so absolute as death' (p.3) – as long as the *Aeneid* survives, so will Lavinia. Later, she remarks that 'one must be changed, to be immortal' (p.271): she, like Penelope, takes the form of an owl. Lavinia's voice, however, is also compromised by her metamorphosis:

Sometimes I call out, but not in a human voice. My cry is soft and quavering: *i, i*, I cry: go on, go (p.272).

This cry – a clever incorporation of the Latin singular imperative *i*, 'go' – reflects Lavinia's role as mother of the Romans, urging them on to their illustrious future. Le Guin expresses her anxiety that 'with the true death of his language, Vergil's [sic] voice will be silenced at last', and so she has translated the *Aeneid* 'into a different form' (p.273) so that it, too, might 'go on' – for 'one must be changed, to be immortal'. Penelope's maids likewise 'sprout feathers, and fly away as owls' (Atwood 2005, p.195). While Penelope's metamorphosis

obstructs her story, the maids find freedom in their transformation, exchanging their indentured female bodies for ones that can ‘fly away’ from captivity and servitude. Their voices, like Lavinia’s, fade into an owl’s call, ‘too wit too woo’, with a similar promise to ‘follow *you*’ into posterity (p.195). Indeed, they successfully haunt Atwood and, by extension, her readers.

*Cassandra*, too, subscribes to an avian motif. Wolf likens Cassandra’s soul to a ‘beautiful bird’, which flies when its owner is sleeping (Wolf 1984, p.78). Later, in a dream, Cassandra flies joyfully towards a shining island: ‘yes, I was flying!’ (p.124). Cassandra’s bird-soul flies freely in her sleep; awakening is a ‘headlong fall’, followed by her incarceration in Troy. It follows that death (that is, eternal sleep) transforms Cassandra, too. In Mycenae, present-Cassandra watches a ‘bird who flies soundlessly and far away across the sky’ (p.97), a striking contrast to her own predicament. This bird, too, is voiceless. It seems that silence is the price one pays for freedom, as Cassandra discovers when, refusing to ‘keep silent’, she is imprisoned. Perhaps this is also the reason for Penelope’s botched transformation: haunted by the maids, she can never truly shed her oppressive female form.

The metamorphosis of women as narrative resolution is common in Greco-Roman myth (Lyons 1997, p.67-8), exemplified in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Yet the presence of this bird motif in all three novels is, perhaps, indicative of an alternative literary tradition, one which subverts patriarchal narratives by recreating them from a female perspective: the ‘tiny rivulet’ of women’s stories running alongside ‘the river of heroic songs’ (Wolf 1984, p.81). While this river seemingly threatens to drown out the rivulet, the rivulet also owes a debt of life to the river from which it stems, just as Lavinia claims to be contingent upon Virgil, and Atwood begrudgingly acknowledges Homer. The ‘river of heroic songs’ remains the dominant tradition from which these works of recreation were forged. Yet the continuing trend of refocusing master narratives around women (Madeline Miller’s *Circe*, released in April 2018, is one recent example) may bolster this rivulet until it becomes a river in its own right.

There is evidence of interaction between Atwood, Wolf and Le Guin, suggesting familiarity. The English translation of Wolf’s *Medea*, another feminist recreation, is introduced by Atwood: ‘[Wolf’s] attack is head-on and original’, she contends, praising the novel’s contemporary resonance (Atwood 1996, p.xii). It is not implausible, then, that Atwood wrote *The Penelopiad*, strikingly contemporary in tone, with Wolf in mind. Le Guin, in turn, consciously engages with Atwood, forming her Lavinia in the negative image of Atwood’s Penelope. Following Le Guin’s death in January of this year, Atwood wrote a moving obituary in which she mentions ‘talking to [Le Guin] in [her] head’, not unlike Lavinia talking to Virgil, her supposed creator, in their ‘nowhen space’ (Cox 2011, p.247). These interactions embody the inheritance of an alternative tradition, as Wolf’s Cassandra imagines, through literary generations of women (Wolf 1984, p.81). It is important to note, however, that Penelope, Lavinia and Cassandra do not present a *universal* female perspective. All are aristocratic, though Wolf and particularly Atwood explore issues of class. Moreover, Wolf, Atwood and

Le Guin are all white. This ‘rivulet’ of female tradition would undoubtedly be strengthened by more diverse voices, offering a range of perspectives on the female experience.

Atwood, Le Guin and Wolf wrestle the female voice from the grasp of patriarchal narratives by metamorphosing their source material: immortality, as Lavinia finds, requires adaptation. However, we see Cassandra achieve neither metamorphosis nor freedom. She never flies joyfully away from the city walls with Aeneas: ‘I am staying behind’, she tells him (Wolf 1984, p.200). Lavinia, meanwhile, is forced to ‘go on’. Both are trapped, whether consigned to Trojan myth or lingering in obscure Italian genealogy. Drawing on Platonic and Virgilian models of the afterlife, wherein souls could be reborn only after drinking the waters of the river Lethe and thereby forgetting their past lives, Atwood gives Penelope the opportunity to leave the Underworld: ‘if we wish to, we can get ourselves reborn’ (Atwood 2005, p.186). Yet she chooses to stay and retain her memories, once again resisting transformation in order to tell her story: ‘I don’t want to take the risk’ (p.188). Voluntarily or not, all three protagonists are unmoving, mirroring their source material. At the heart of the *Iliad*, Cassandra stays behind in the ruined city, immortalised by its destruction; Penelope exists in purgatorial limbo, as does the errant Odysseus for much of the *Odyssey*; Lavinia, like Aeneas at the end of the *Aeneid*, goes on to an uncertain, unfinished future. These iconic works of ancient literature are thus recreated in a new form. They are, to borrow Le Guin’s term, contingent on their master narratives. Yet even *Lavinia* is not entirely deferential to Virgil, but draws on Lavinia herself, that ‘mistiest of figures’ (Le Guin 2008, p.3) who exists in the nebulous realm of myth. Atwood likewise employs local myth to flesh out her Penelope, and Wolf subscribes to traditions absent from Homer. These female voices have been there all along, behind master narratives or in lesser-known tradition: it is only now, through these eminent female amanuenses of the modern age, that they are being heard. If the works of Homer and Virgil have had a defining effect on Western literature, their recreation by women is a revolutionary act against the diminishment of female voices in Classical epic and beyond. If we need to ask whether this is a feminist act, the answer is, surely, a resounding yes.

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## (Re)Creating Boundaries: ‘Going Native’, ‘Indianness’ and Heroic Masculinity in *The Revenant* (2015)

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*This paper will consider the frontier hero within film narrative, with specific reference to *The Revenant* (Alejandro G. Iñárritu, 2015). This paper will illustrate how contemporary Hollywood film maintains settler-colonial relations and dispossession of the Native American through containment and appropriation.<sup>11</sup> *The Revenant* follows in the tradition of earlier Westerns, such as *Davy Crockett: King of the Wild Frontier* (Norman Foster, 1955) and *The Last of the Mohicans* (Michael Mann, 1992), as well as more contemporary versions, such as Taylor Sheridan’s 2017 *Wind River*. Each of these films reference a culture and national identity predicated on frontier-hero mythology. The frontier, as a space where identity is formed through a re-engagement with nature, is a self-perpetuating metaphor in American history and culture; notably deployed by Abraham Lincoln, emulating the outdoorsman and presenting a robust vision of masculinity. This paper demonstrates why ‘Going Native’ is central to hegemonic cultural ideals, concurrently creating an essential American identity whilst reproducing colonialist paradigms, via *The Revenant*’s spatial-temporal structuring of the hero and an imagined ‘Indianness’.*

**Keywords:** Colonialism, frontier, identity, indigeneity, masculinity.

### Introduction

In *The Railsplitter*, an 1860 painting by an unknown artist, Abraham Lincoln is depicted with his sleeves rolled up, wielding a rail-splitting maul, displaying characteristics not commonly associated with a lawyer, politician and (future) president of the United States. The painting is representative of Lincoln’s campaign-era image as a rustic everyman physically contributing to the progress of American civilisation with his own bare hands. These qualities demonstrated Lincoln’s aptitude for the position of the presidency, prior to his later image as war leader and ‘emancipator’.<sup>12</sup> Reproduced in David Herbert Donald’s *Lincoln, The Railsplitter* is accompanied with this note:

This [...] suggests the mythic qualities that helped elect Lincoln president. Forgotten here are Lincoln’s highly successful law practice and his career in politics in order to stress, in a frontier setting, the homely virtues of physical strength and hard manual labour (1995, [opposite to page] 222).

The painting’s embedded notion of self-determination would be a driving ideal to anyone who had the courage to grasp the mettle, and, through interaction with frontier hardships, recreate themselves as ‘American’. The discourse of the frontier and westward expansion is a fundamental part of U.S. mythology. The frontier is

<sup>11</sup> This paper follows contemporary American studies and indigenous scholars in using Native American to refer to the indigenous peoples within the U.S. ‘Indianness’ is deployed to refer to the concept as suggested by Jodi A. Byrd as the remaking of indigeneity as racial ‘Indianness’, an ontological grounding which is metonymic with U.S. settler-colonialism (2011, xix).

<sup>12</sup> These traits associated with Lincoln’s early political career have been buried under the weight of history - his latter career has contributed more to his myth and to historical memory. Lincoln is more commonly seen as America’s greatest president, not only for his signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, but his leadership throughout the Civil War.

an ideal that forms a key part of America's grand narrative. The ideology of Manifest Destiny – the notion that white settlers were predestined to populate the entire continent – is presented as historical momentum, as opposed to imperialism, through such figures as Frederick Jackson Turner (Carter, 2014, 1-20). Jodi A. Byrd sees the U.S. conception of the frontier as imperialist discourse that seeks to reconceptualise space and history whilst simultaneously obscuring settler-colonialism and indigenous diasporas (2011, xx). Richard Slotkin argues that the idea of the frontier is a formative and hegemonic part of the American experience and imagination. Those who conquered the wilderness (and the continent's inhabitants) became American through this process. However, the triumph of 'civilization' over 'savagery' reinforced a continual tension between the dominant society and its interpretation of indigeneity (1973, 14-24).

The frontier in *The Revenant* forms what Kevin Bruyneel refers to as a spatial-temporal frontier of U.S./indigenous relations. This boundary is implicit with notions of empire and Manifest Destiny, which continue to encompass and define indigeneity (2009, xv). Byrd develops this by suggesting that designs of 'Indianness' are the basis on which U.S. settler-colonial discourse reproduces itself. The reiteration of such imperialist 'pioneer logic' continues to contain and deny indigenous peoples through the cultural mode of 'Indianness'. For Byrd, 'Indianness' is fundamental to colonial discourse because it allows the imperial settler to 'make Indian those peoples and nations who stand in the way of U.S. military and economic desires'. Furthermore, the 'Indian' becomes the subject of invasion and violence that is underpinned, not just by maps and scientific racism, but by Enlightenment discourse at the heart of the U.S. Constitution (2011, xx). Byrd continues:

The non-discriminating, proto-inclusive 'merciless Indian Savage' stands as a terrorist, externalized from 'our frontiers,' and functions as abjected horror through whom civilisation is articulated oppositionally (ibid, xxi).

Drawing from these ideas, it is possible to establish a settler-colonial narrative in *The Revenant*. This is evidenced by negative connotations, such as stereotypes of savage violence and lack of civilisation, being applied to those of racial difference. Moreover, Native Americans manifesting the wilderness are further undermined by the perception of feminine qualities deemed pejorative. The cultural construction of 'Indianness' underpins a frontier space bound by United States settler-colonial discourse. A constructed 'Indianness' perpetuates the frontier as a spatial-temporal boundary. As in Sherman Alexie's words: 'it is also the place where the Native American lingers, destined to lurk, in the dark, behind the bluffs of frontier America' (cited in Slethaug, 2003, 130).

Throughout *The Revenant*, the director Alejandro G. Iñárritu's focus (and camera) remains largely on Glass, played by Leonardo DiCaprio. This film is an example of how contemporary Hollywood narratives deploy tropes of 'Indianness' in order to complement the white hero. *The Revenant* imitates recurrent imaginations of indigeneity that have occurred in earlier Western eras by characterising Glass with an imagined



'Indianness'. Shari M. Huhndorf argues that mainstream (white) America envisions Native Americans as idealised versions of themselves. 'Going Native' is described as a fantasy which ultimately obscures the violence of Manifest Destiny (2001, 4-6). 'Going Native' is used to describe many white interlopers on the American frontier, such as Kevin Costner's John Dunbar in *Dances with Wolves* (Costner, 1990) and Daniel Day-Lewis' Natty 'Hawkeye' Bumppo in *The Last of The Mohicans* (Mann, 1992). Whilst the films referenced as comparison offer examples of how 'Going Native' helps establish the frontier hero, neither is exclusive or exhaustive, but to illustrate how the contemporary Western maintains this trope.

*The Revenant* provides a central case study of mainstream filmmaking that continues to deny Native American representation by perpetuating audience association with stereotypes and racial tropes through narratives that recycle an imagined 'Indianness'. These Byrd calls a 'cacophany' of interpretation that silences the indigenous voice and naturalises settler-colonial hegemony. Of course, not all of Hollywood's interpretations of Native Americans are deserving of such criticism. Courtney Hunt's *Frozen River* (2008) being a case in point, with a narrative that presents indigenous people as larger-than-life modern day human beings. Again, *Frozen River* still suffers for maintaining the core white-centred narrative. Whilst much work has been done on the so-called 'Hollywood Indian' (Rollins and O'Connor, 1998), the persistence of such mawkish and outdated presentations in cinema is a cause for concern. As Byrd observes importantly, colonisation matters to indigenous peoples and indigenous studies (2011, xiii). Whilst historical structures need to be resisted, mindsets also need to change, and the power of film cannot be underestimated on both counts.

### **'Going Native'**

The frontier was considered central in shaping American national identity. Frederick Jackson Turner stated that through frontier interaction the European was 'reborn' as an American (1893, 2). Consequentially, frontier mythology has informed American culture, for example, through the literature of James Fenimore Cooper and Henry David Thoreau, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Shows, Dime novels and the cinematic 'Wild West'. Likewise, the frontier hero has been part of the American imagination, whose genesis can be traced back to the early decades of the Puritan Colonies. Colonial literature featured both male and female protagonists, with Mary Rowlandson representing one of the first truly 'Americanized' characters in *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682). Captured by an Algonquian tribe, Rowlandson is forced to adopt survival techniques required for the American continent (MacNeil, 2005, 625).

Such skills are also present in twentieth century representations of the American hero. Chad Allen points out that the Lone Ranger and Tonto use 'western skills' in the 1995 graphic novel, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto*. 'Western skills' were a narrative device utilised in the early *The Lone Ranger* radio and television serials to establish his and Tonto's character. The Lone Ranger and Tonto complement one another by fusing an important blend of whiteness and 'Indianness', including problem solving skills

that, ultimately, set the heroes apart from the rest of frontier civilisation (1996, 616-617). This illustrates the essential significance of a constructed 'Indianness' that galvanised fictional protagonists and contributed an ideal type to the American cultural imagination. This is also evident in *The Revenant* where, for example, Glass' horseback riding and sharpshooting complement Fess Parker's interpretation of the frontier hero/scout in *Davy Crockett: King of the Wild Frontier* (Foster, 1955). Furthermore, the performance of *The Revenant*'s hero is augured by such nuance. Glass' 'Indianness' acts as a device that establishes his character. It measures his intelligence and acculturation, distinguishing Glass from the monosyllabic and bellicose villain, John Fitzgerald (Tom Hardy), and the rest of the party of fur trappers. In addition, Glass' 'Indianness' offers him an advantage when interacting with the Pawnee and Arikara he encounters. As Huhndorf argues, 'Going Native grants the hero the ability to form frontier relations, informing and solidifying historical representations of the Native American, thus perpetuating them' (2001, 5).

This is also true of more recent films, such as *Wind River* (Sheridan, 2017), again set in an unforgiving and harsh landscape that intersects the Native American reservation. *Wind River* depicts Cory Lambert (Jeremy Renner) as a game tracker who discovers the body of Natalie Hanson (Kelsey Asbille). That Lambert has also lost his daughter Emily in similar circumstances provides the emotional backdrop for his involvement in this instance. This loss also explains the breakdown of his marriage to Wilma (Julia Jones), but he remains close to her parents, Alice and Dan Crowheart, played by Tantoo Cardinal and Apesanahkwat. Lambert utilises his knowledge of the Wind River Reservation, its residents and landscape, to find Natalie's killer and redemption for his daughter's death. In a similar fashion, as will be shown, *The Revenant* also uses the dead Native American as a transient. That is the logic of settler-colonialism, whereby the Native American, through the evocation of 'Indianness', is designated a 'present absence' to the white settler. Referring back to Slotkin, for example, it is possible to determine how this transition forms an essential detail of the American constitution of identity; one which replaces indigeneity and wilderness with the settler and civilisation. In this notion is the redemption of the hero and the root of his Americanisation (Byrd, xx). However, this continues the 'derealization' of the Native American, and the hero's performance again dependent on a presumed erasure of Native people, and via film, the normalisation of America's settler-colonial history (Byrd, 44).

Michael Mann's *The Last of The Mohicans* presents Hawkeye, adopted son of the Mohawk Chingachgook (Russell Means), as the quintessential American hero through a portrayal that emphasises his 'Indianness' as well as his masculinity. As Chad A. Barbour explains, Hawkeye draws on this aforementioned frontier hero mythos. His Mohawk accomplice, Uncas (Eric Schweig), on the other hand, is an example of strength and beauty. He complements the white frontiersman while also highlighting the natural hierarchy that exist between them – the same way in which Tonto legitimises the Lone Ranger's authority (2016, 35-59). Comparably, Leonardo DiCaprio's Glass is foreshadowed by earlier American heroes, and Iñárritu maintains the contemporary framing of the frontier hero as masculine in *The Revenant*. The

film upholds racialised and gendered tropes attributable to western designs of indigeneity which, in this instance, is constructed around the Native American male warrior guise. This is established by the fact director Iñárritu spends a lot of screen-time focusing on a set of very specific skills that are analogous with earlier film interpretations of frontier heroes/scouts that have been framed by their ‘Indianness’.<sup>13</sup>

Similar to the multi-lingual Hawkeye, Glass’ mastery of Pawnee offers him an ‘Otherness’, what Armando Jose Prats calls the ‘repository of Indianness’. Glass’ ‘Indianness’ underscores his hegemonic status in the film as a cultural mediator between Native Americans and white settlers. In this way, Iñárritu enables Glass to speak for and circumscribe the Native American. For comparison, in *Dances with Wolves*, Ten Bears, the stoic Sioux chief played by Floyd Red Crow Westerman, ‘bestows honor, authority and authenticity’ upon Dunbar – a device synonymous with Glass’ nameless wife (Grace Dove) who appears in dream sequences to succour the hero (2002, 193). This trope can be seen in *Pocahontas* (Gabriel and Goldberg, 1995) and *The New World* (Malick, 2005). Similarly, these depict the stereotypical ‘princess’ who functions as corollary to the white, heterosexual male form and embodies a typical hyper-gendered imagining of a Native American woman (Barker et al, 2017, 1).

This is further substantiated by Glass’ interaction with the Pawnee refugee, Hikuc (Arthur Redcloud). As with Glass’ wife he appears as a device to aid the hero, as evidenced by his subsequent quick disposal. After offering Glass food, shelter and his medicinal expertise, Hikuc leaves him to heal. However, in the next scene Glass finds Hikuc hanged from a tree, with a sign around his neck displaying: ‘On est tous des sauvages’, which translates as ‘We are all savages’ (1:24:37). Certainly, in the bleak wilderness portrayed in *The Revenant*, it appears all men require a degree of savagery to function and succeed. How that is preserved and how it is viewed is certainly skewed against the Native American, by the repetition of stereotypical designs of indigeneity.

### ‘Pioneer Logic’

A key scene that illustrates *The Revenant*’s settler-colonial narrative is when Glass confronts a grizzly bear and her cubs (0:23:21). Crucially, this scene symbolises Glass’ moral authority over a racialised and gendered wilderness. It is relevant to note that the ‘bear attack’ scene was subject to scrutiny in reviews and designated as sexual assault (Sales, 015; Kryiazis, 2016). Additionally, Leonardo DiCaprio lent this scene extra controversy when he referred to the ‘intimacy between man and beast’ during an interview with the Australian

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<sup>13</sup> Significant scenes in the film are referred to using a time card in parentheses within the body of the text, or footnote, e.g. (0:12:34) denoting hours, minutes and seconds at which time the scene occurs. For illustration of Glass’ skills in *The Revenant*: he first speaks Pawnee at: (0:00:59); kills an Arikara warrior positioned in a tree with one shot: (0:08:46); eats bone marrow: (1:00:36); heals neck wound with gunpowder: (1:04:23); discovers edible wild roots: (1:05:51); swims in white water: (1:08:28); catches fish with his bare hands: (1:17:39); outmanoeuvres the Arikara on horseback and then drives his pony off a cliff: (1:45:41); builds shelter from its carcass: (1:46:54); fights Fitzgerald with tomahawk: (2:13:03).

Broadcasting Corporation (Child, 2015). The suggestion of sexual assault endows the wilderness with an anthropomorphic alterity, and this is emblematically significant as a challenge to the hero, his masculinity and Manifest Destiny. By contrast is the rape of Powaqá (Melaw Nakehk'ó). The Arikara Chief's daughter has been taken captive by – presumably – competing French-Canadian trappers who Elk Dog (Duane Howard) has made a poor bargain with, resulting in the abduction of his daughter. (A possible case of mistaken identity is behind the Arikara's assault on Glass' party.) This scene juxtaposes significantly with the grizzly bear scene. Inárritu does not stay with this scene, not that such voyeurism is necessary, but it does beg the question as to why he lingers on the bear attack and Glass' injuries. Of course, the corporeal endurance which Glass demonstrates could function as vehicle for the frontier ideology of exceptional white male, whilst the 'invisible' indigenous, those that can be transgressed against with impunity, are positioned historically as victims. This follows Byrd's theory of 'Indianness' that allows U.S. imperialist discourse to conceive a dominant discursive narrative of indigeneity as subjects and is fundamental to 'pioneer logic' (2011, xx).

Moreover, as a result of the grizzly bear attack, Glass becomes more heuristic as Inárritu presents a large bulk of his 'western skills' after this scene. However, the scene does not only demonstrate the ubiquitous influence of the frontier which forces Glass to 'Go Native'. The bear represents aspects of the wilderness that are incompatible with Euro-American civilisation and must be battled. Naturalisation and animalisation render the wilderness and its inhabitants as the 'natural enemies to civilized frontier' (Trafzer, 2013, 46). Dehumanising and 'Othering' the Native American by metaphor in *The Revenant* positions indigenous people, by spatial-temporal association, as part of the wilderness. This trope has been repeated in countless John Ford movies, for example, *Stagecoach* (1939), *Fort Apache* (1948) and *Rio Grande* (1950), and evident in more recent titles such as Joe Johnston's *Hidalgo* (2004) and Gore Verbinski's *The Lone Ranger* (2013) that extend a discourse of 'Going Native' to become civilised, the essence of Captain Ahab's folly in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851).

This equates the 'Indian' with the 'uncivilized savage' which is diametrically opposed to American civilisation. This can be further expressed by contemporary films such as Russell Friedenberg's 2014 *Wind Walkers* which presents indigenous people as blood-lusting zombies. S. Craig Zahler's 2015 *Bone Tomahawk* also follows this theme, rendering the Native American as the savage - and in this instance - cannibalistic/zombie enemy. The zombie trope functions as a metaphor for alterity in a similar fashion to the bear-as-wilderness/civilising metaphor that dehumanises the indigenous 'Other'. *The Revenant's* bear attack dramatises the wilderness and any inhabitant that confronts or impedes the frontier hero – the symbol of whiteness, masculinity and American conquest – as restricting the movement of white settler society, and U.S. civilisation. This subsequently aligns the grizzly bear and the Arikara as Glass' 'uncivilized' enemies, in doing so moralising Glass' quest as one of settler-colonial advance in the face of adversity and not, as will transpire, simply to seek revenge on Fitzgerald.

Grizzly bears aside, *The Revenant*'s dearth of female characters means that those presented as the 'Other' also assume the feminine, through the denigration of racial difference. Again, this reflects the artistic decision Iñárritu has made in relegating women in the film to figurative occurrences and victimhood. To clarify, Glass' son Hawk, played by Forrest Goodluck, is condemned as a 'savage', a 'half-breed', and a 'girly little bitch' (0:16:20 – 0:16:29/2:12:58). By Fitzgerald's vilification, contravening a single or even binary ranking characteristic is the basis for his prejudice, however, 'half-breed' in this instance leads to more wide-reaching ambiguity. Hawk, after defending himself against Fitzgerald's criticisms, is further emasculated by Glass who chastises: 'they don't hear your voice, they just see the colour of your face' (0:17:55). Iñárritu's choice of dialogue in *The Revenant* gives Hawk no respite. The Pawnee boy is admonished by his father. This relationship is representational of historical notions of the 'Great' White Father – the American Government – equally undermining Hawk's and Native American autonomy (Barbour, 2016, 59). The decision to treat the young boy this way restates *The Revenant*'s ingrained settler-colonial ideology, and seeming end goal of emphasising white designs of civilisation. The project of Manifest Destiny is underlined here, underscoring white male hegemony in Glass' rebuke, and implicitly pre-empting Hawk's demise and Glass' redemption as metaphor for white and Native American relations.

This is further emphasised by considering the name 'Hawk' – which suggests keen sight – stressing his stereotypically innate and animalistic disposition; particular to a Native American character supporting the 'white savior' (FitzGerald, 2014, 11-13). However, unlike his namesake, Hawkeye in *The Last of the Mohicans*, Hawk is given no autonomy outside of his interaction with Glass' character or the party of trappers. Rather Hawk offers an ironic analogue to the defeated Sioux at the end of *Dances with Wolves*. Hawk is unable to 'see' the 'inevitable' white advance, not living long enough to predict such a traumatic future (Huhndorf, 2001, 4-5). What is interesting is the judgmental nature employed here in *The Revenant*. While Glass and his peers embody an 'Indianness' that provides them with the 'western skills' to navigate the frontier, Hawk and the half-Pawnee boy signify the racialised and gendered Native American.

Iñárritu's treatment of Hawk's ultimately undermines the character's heritage, maintaining stereotypical designs of indigeneity and obvious hierarchical relations based on socially constructed terms. Hawk legitimises and serves Glass' 'Indianness', but ultimately, by the end of *The Revenant*, does not impede Glass' whiteness, masculinity or potential Americanness; the privilege of the white pioneer.

### **Heroic (Re)Creation**

The notion of the frontier hero is preserved in *The Revenant* by making a clear distinction between Glass and the criminal constituent of Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald exemplifies what Glass must not become. As Barbour stresses: 'the white renegade challenges the notion of the white male playing Indian' and of course, the 'threat of savagery' if Glass does not keep his 'Indianness' in check with his white American peers. Glass transcends the

frontier, unlike Fitzgerald who ultimately takes a fall and ‘succumb[s] to the evil temptation of the wilderness’. This also provides a warning to Glass that ‘flirtations with Indian-ness must not become romances’. Ultimately, the function of Fitzgerald’s antagonist is to lend value to the hero’s narrative (Barbour, 2016, 35-61).

Furthermore, Fitzgerald represents the degraded European society that America has physically and symbolically left behind. Importantly, the hero’s (potential) Americanness is never undermined by his hatred of Fitzgerald or even his own adopted ‘Indianness’. As Prats confirms: ‘the power to become the Other confirms his sameness’, as fundamentally, Glass’ appropriation does not affect his ‘unimpeachable whiteness’ (2002, 191). Moreover, Glass

Negotiates the fine line between heroic appropriation and the threat of perdition in the wilderness. [...] The hero [...] capable of assimilating the Indian’s culture yet remain unequivocally and essentially white (ibid, 200-201).

Glass walks (and partially crawls) the higher path in *The Revenant*, as demonstrated by his final virtuous act in sparing Fitzgerald’s life, whilst Elk Dog can do what Glass chooses not to at the end of the film and pass retribution on Fitzgerald. This final act maintains frontier discourse that only those who are worthy of a place in American civilisation transcend the wilderness, and simultaneously denies the ‘uncivilized’ their humanity (2:24:37).

Again, derivations of past Western films are evident in this scene, as *The Revenant*’s finale parallels the ending of *Dances with Wolves* and *The Last of the Mohicans*. However, Glass’ hero is even more unadulterated as his metamorphosis is never named, unlike *Dances with Wolves* and *Hawkeye*. But as Prats observes, it is the audience that gives Glass this consent to ‘Go Native’. This is because it is embedded within the dominant culture through the ‘pioneer logic’ of U.S. empire (2002, 192-3). The white hero replaces the Native American with a regenerated American inheritor of a disappearing indigeneity (Huhndorf, 2001, 6).

## Conclusion

By ‘Going Native’, the hero transmits a very robust image of masculinity whilst endorsing American exceptionalism, progress and the creation of an essential American identity. Also, at the heart of his characterisation, is the repetition of an idealised design of ‘Indianness’ that perpetuates colonialist discourse. *The Revenant* reduces Native Americans to stereotypes distinguished by their violence or savagery that ultimately disrupt the hero’s quest. However, those that assist his journey – his wife, Hikuc and Hawk – are also subject to racialised and gendered designs of ‘Indianness’ that constitute the ongoing denial of indigenous representation in Hollywood film. *The Revenant*’s narrative extends frontier space and its inhabitants, as subjects of invasion, with Glass’ hero reaffirming ‘pioneer logic’ by his successful negotiation of the frontier, and creation of the ‘American’ along the way.

Whilst this reading of *The Revenant* recognises the repetition of the white hero 'Going Native', there is scope to consider the dissident potential within Hollywood and to subvert the meaning of mainstream film by utilising contemporary scholarly work on identity, gender and sexuality. Furthermore, the ongoing development of independent film and documentary by indigenous and activist filmmakers present protest narratives as a site of agency and contingency to counter colonial expression. However, it should not simply be the task of indigenous films to offer greater representation. *The Revenant*, in maintaining the dispossession of indigenous peoples within Hollywood film, is an uncomfortable twenty-first century reminder of the continuing presence of settler-colonial narratives within mainstream cinema.

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# Humanity is Dead, Long Live Humanity!: From Posthumanism to Postcapitalism via Hegel

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*A vast range of scientists, philosophers, and commentators from across the political spectrum are becoming increasingly anxious about advancements in biotechnology and artificial intelligence, and the threat they might pose to 'human nature'. In this essay, with Hegel and Slavoj Žižek as my interlocutors, I will oppose this prevailing opinion, by proposing that this 'human nature' we are supposedly leaving behind with the dawn of 'posthumanity' is in fact a retroactive illusion. What it means to be human is and always has been defined by its attempts to go beyond itself; to overcome its inherent limitations, and recreate itself, with technology. While acknowledging that there are legitimate concerns and dangers regarding this 'cyborgisation' of humanity – this merging of humanity with technology – I will contend that it is not the posthuman as such which is a threat to humanity, but the mapping of the posthuman onto a neoliberal model of the individual and economy. I will finish by suggesting that the posthuman, if effectively deployed by the Left, may embody the structural limitation of capitalism itself, and facilitate our transition into postcapitalism.*

**Keywords:** Posthumanism, postcapitalism, Hegel, Slavoj Žižek

*Par pitié, par amour pour l'humanité, soyez inhumains!*<sup>14</sup>

With varying degrees of excitement and anxiety, a vast range of scientists, philosophers, and political commentators have all argued that we are entering a posthuman age.<sup>15</sup> Although many of them disagree what this means precisely, they all agree that radical advancements in biotechnology and artificial intelligence are fundamentally changing and challenging what it means to be human. While there has been much speculation about what this figure of the posthuman might be like, and its philosophical, ethical, and political consequences, there has been little discussion about what notion of 'the human', specifically, is being left behind. When the prefix 'post-' is applied to the word 'human,' what idea of the human are these thinkers appealing to? In this essay I will approach this neglected question through the lens of Slavoj Žižek's Hegelian inflected dialectical materialism.

My argument will proceed in two halves. In Part I, I will propose that the figure of 'the human' we are supposedly leaving behind is in fact a retroactive illusion, and that what it means to be human is always-already marked by an inherent structural limitation which we attempt to compensate for with technology. In short, we are never 'fully human' because in order to be 'human' we are dependent on something which is not human: technology. I will then argue that it is this constitutive failure of humanity to be 'fully human' which drives it forward and leads it to become something other than itself – that is, *posthuman*. The dawn of the posthuman does not entail the human's final destruction, but another phase in its endless (re)creation. In

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<sup>14</sup> 'Out of pity, out of love for humanity, be inhuman!' A petition from the Parisian Commune to the National Convention, during the French Revolution (1789-1799), quoted in Arendt 2006, p.89.

<sup>15</sup> I am grateful to Regenia Gagnier, Josh Jewell, and two anonymous reviewers for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

Part II, I will argue that, while there is a legitimate cause for anxiety regarding the ‘cyborgisation’ of humanity – the ever-closer merging of human biology with artificial technology – it is not the posthuman as such that is a risk to the survival of humanity, but the mapping of the posthuman onto a neoliberal model of the individual and economy. I will finish by suggesting that the posthuman, if effectively deployed by the Left, may embody the structural limitation of capitalism itself, and facilitate its own recreation as postcapitalism.

## I

One prevalent thinker strongly opposed to the possibility of posthumanity is Francis Fukuyama. The crux of his opposition is that biotechnological advancements constitute a grave threat to ‘human nature’, which he defines as the ‘sum of the behaviour and characteristics that are typical of the human species, arising from genetic rather than environmental factors’ (2003, p.130). This definition is very dubious. It misses the basic point that genetic and environmental factors are irrevocably entangled and interdependent. As Jason W. Moore has shown through his concept of ‘the web of life’, ‘humans make environments and environments make humans’ (2015, p.3) – each are inevitably imbricated with the other. If we follow Fukuyama’s logic to its end and attempt to strip away all ‘environmental factors’ – including the most rudimentary technology such as, for example, clothing, cooking, and shelter, and the most basic cultural norms and values – then what we are left with is primitive, animalistic, and, in a sense, profoundly *subhuman*: totally opposed to Fukuyama’s implied, liberal idea of what it means to be human.

Therefore, Fukuyama’s vague conception of human nature (as a pure origin, untouched by environmental factors) is not only an illusion, but what we might call, in Hegelian terms, a retroactive illusion. Humanity, in reality, is inconsistent and heterogeneous, fluid and changing, with no essential ‘nature’ which can be categorically identified. It is only with the ‘threat’ of technological augmentation or usurpation that we as humans appeal to some past, pure, but fundamentally illusory notion of what it means to be human in the first place. In other words, a notion of human nature as a stable concept or origin only emerges retroactively by being challenged or negated: it emerges from its own loss, but crucially, *it was not there before the loss*. This does not mean that we should appeal or aspire to this retroactively imagined origin (as Fukuyama does). Instead, we should recognise that it is illusory as such, and therefore fundamentally inaccessible. This has crucial political implications. With this realisation, one is able to

let go of the identity sustained by this loss itself, *to lose the loss* [...], to operate a *withdrawal* which constitutes the opening for a field of experimentations for alternative identities and societies (Hamza 2015, p.173).

The prefix ‘post-’ in the word ‘posthumanism’, therefore, operates by acknowledging the loss of ‘human nature’, but ‘loses this loss’ itself. It does not represent an aspiration to return to this (imagined, fictitious) original nature, but instead performs as a proleptic, pointing to future, as yet unknown possibilities for

humankind. This is why I argue that Hegel would have embraced the opportunities brought by the posthuman. As he writes, truth is ‘not an *original* or *immediate* unity as such’, it is ‘the essence consummating itself through its development’ (1977, §20). In other words, there are no inherent criteria for what ‘the human’ is; it is nothing other than what it is in this process of change.

On the other side of the debate to Fukuyama, most theorists who are enthusiastic about posthumanist developments concede that ‘the human’ is a diverse and historically contingent social construct, rather than something that can be categorically defined with reference to an idea of ‘human nature’. Building upon the theories of thinkers like Althusser, Foucault, and Lacan, these theorists aim to delink the human from universalist and essentialist discourses, and focus more on the economic structures, ideological superstructures, and (what Foucault might call) the ‘regimes of truth’ that determine it. For example, N. Katherine Hayles understands the traditional notion of ‘the human’ as an individualised, free, rational agent, as resting on a number of assumptions about technology, culture, and embodiment, which find their origin in the Enlightenment and the concurrent emergence of industrial capitalism (1999, p.132); conversely, she argues that ‘the posthuman’ is the new subjective identity which we have assumed to account for the techno-scientific developments which leave the Enlightenment conception of ‘the human’ lacking. Similarly, Rosi Braidotti backdates this construction of ‘the human’ to the *Vitruvian Man* (1490), Da Vinci’s famous drawing which displays the ideal physical proportions of a human being – an ideal which was then established as a hegemonic cultural model (2013, p.13-14).

However, despite the validity of this approach – conceiving of the human as a construct, rather than a natural or essential being – it is ultimately insufficient for the primary reason that it does not register that if we strip away all these constructed elements of ‘the human’, what we are left with is the radical reduction of subjectivity to its primordial, fundamentally subhuman or inhuman core. In her *Cyborg Manifesto*, Donna Haraway describes the posthuman as an ‘ironic’ being, going on to say that ‘[i]rony is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, [...] [and] the tension of holding incompatible things together’ (2004, p.7). While she is speaking about the ironic contradiction and juxtaposition between the human and technology, I argue that the true irony here, or the true irresolvable contradiction, is the irony and contradiction of humanity itself, due to the insurmountable gap which separates its empty subhuman form from the ‘human’ content which ‘fills it up’. It is this residual emptiness, this inherent negativity at the core of what it means to be human (what we get if we strip away humanity’s environmental, cultural, and technological factors) which leads us to progress, change, and exceed ourselves. As Hegel writes, ‘the *unfilled negativity* of the self, changes round in its Notion into absolute positivity’ (1977, §594). The immanent negativity of humanity is correlative to a surplus: a compulsion of humanity to (re)create itself. This is why Anthony Miccoli is right to argue that technology, especially that which works to enhance the ostensibly deficient human body, is an expression of pain (2010, p.8-12): the continual drive to develop new technology is an attempt to compensate for and transcend the unthinkable subhuman core of humanity, which lies beneath all the constructed ‘human’ content.

If we accept this proposition, then we must also accept that, in a sense, what we call ‘the posthuman’ is not a radical departure from being-human, but a logical continuation, sublation, and (re)creation. This is true on two counts. On the one hand, historically, the supplementation of the organic human body with inorganic parts in order to overcome its limitations has been occurring for millennia. Clothing, for example, was worn by Neanderthals, who became extinct 40,000 years ago. Eyeglasses, for another example – another supplementation of the organic human body with an inorganic prosthesis – were invented in the 13th century. But there is also a more philosophical (but not altogether unrelated) point to be made. Humanity is always-already both prehuman and posthuman: it is defined by a simultaneous inability to be ‘fully human’, but in its attempt to compensate for this lack it is also defined by an inherent excess, that is, technology. Without this technology we would not be ‘human’. We would be just another animal. But with our complete existential dependence upon technology, we cannot be described as fully human either. The dawn of the posthuman, then, does not necessarily herald the end of humanity; instead, it is the extreme case that highlights the fact that humanity has always been afflicted by a disturbing simultaneous lack and surplus.

Perhaps this is why, in science fiction, the human who has had their physical and intellectual capabilities artificially enhanced is presented as emotionless, cold, calculating, and amoral – think of *RoboCop* (1988), or the Cybermen from *Doctor Who* (1963-present) – but the most advanced, purely artificial intelligences are presented as displaying intensely ‘human’ characteristics – such as David, the humanoid robot child from Steven Spielberg’s *A.I.* (2001); HAL 9000, the sentient, malfunctioning computer from Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968); or Samantha, the computer operating system, and love interest of the protagonist in Spike Jonze’s *Her* (2013). The paradox (or, more properly, the dialectic) which presents itself is that the most perfect human becomes like a machine, but the most perfect machine becomes like a human.

## II

To briefly summarise my argument so far, those opposed to biotechnological and artificially intelligent scientific advancements often contend that they constitute a threat to human nature. I have contested this claim by arguing that any idea of a pure human nature is a retroactive illusion. What we get if we strip away the environmental, cultural, and technological factors of ‘the human’ is not ‘human nature’ but something fundamentally subhuman. The threat to so-called human nature, therefore, is not a sufficient ground for rejecting these scientific advancements. What it means to be human is and always has been defined by its attempts to go beyond itself, overcome its inherent limitations, and recreate itself, with technology.

However, this does admittedly present some undeniable practical issues, especially in recent times. As Jean-Pierre Dupuy asks,

How are we to explain that science became such a ‘risky’ activity that, according to some top scientists, it poses today the principal threat to the survival of humanity? (qtd. in Žižek 2016, p.23).

This is certainly a new phenomenon. It was Descartes who wrote that the sole aim of human progress is that we might ‘make ourselves [...] masters and possessors of nature’ (1977, p.78). The surprise situation which we find ourselves in is that what was our means of mastering and possessing nature – that is, science and technology – has now become autonomous and superseded our mastery and possession. Heidegger anticipated this very scenario in his essay *The Question Concerning Technology*, in which he argued that, although technology is primarily thought of either instrumentally, as a means to an end, or anthropologically, as a human activity, these limited perspectives miss the essence of technology as ‘enframing’ [*Ge-stell*] – as something which structures the way we relate to and interpret reality. The dangerous paradox is that, the more advanced these technologies become, the greater the likelihood that ‘this mode of enframing [will] pose a danger to enframing itself’ whereby the world becomes a place opposed to our very existence, with ‘the human reduced to an object of technological manipulation’ (Žižek 2014, p.31), possibly without us even being aware of it. As Heidegger phrases it,

the rule of enframing threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth (2008, p.287).

This is the exact threat that many, including advocates of posthumanism, have envisioned: that intelligence is uncoupling from (human) consciousness; that the former is no longer exclusive to the latter; that there is a considerable danger that this new artificial intelligence will not allow us access to its ‘insight’; that it will exclude us from its ‘frame’; and that it will be indifferent, if not actively hostile, to our fate. Even Elon Musk, the billionaire investor and inventor behind some of the most comprehensive attempts to merge technology with human biology, has speculated that artificial intelligence poses the ‘biggest existential threat’ to humanity. For example, he said that Alphabet Inc., the parent company of Google, may have perfectly good intentions but still ‘produce something evil by accident,’ such as, for example, ‘a fleet of artificial intelligence-enhanced robots capable of destroying mankind’ (qtd. in Dowd 2017).

Despite these risks, I would like to offer some suggestions for why the Left should not succumb to the conservative position of categorically rejecting such biotechnological advancements, whether they are in the guise of biological engineering (from growing organs and tissues through regenerative medicines to genetic modification), cyborg engineering (the combination or supplementation of organic life with non-organic technology), or the engineering of artificial life or intelligence (which might automate work and industry, and organise society and the economy). Firstly, never before in the history of humanity has a scientific movement been completely stamped out by sheer political opposition. Consider for example, the English Romanticist’s opposition to the ‘dark Satanic mills’ (Blake 2000, p.319) of the Industrial Revolution, the Catholic Church’s opposition to the contraceptive pill, or the anti-nuclear movement. But secondly, and more importantly, the dawn of ‘posthumanity’ comes with unique political opportunities which we cannot afford to

neglect. Although these new technologies also come with profound ethical and existential dilemmas and risks, it should be the task of critical theory not to merely reject or curtail these advancements, nor even to dictate how they should be developed and applied, but to negotiate and reframe the problem itself, for, as Žižek says:

The task of philosophy is not to provide answers, but to show how the way we perceive a problem can be itself part of a problem, mystifying it instead of enabling us to solve it (2011a).

I argue, therefore, that the problem with posthuman developments is not the posthuman as such, but what Hayles has described as the ‘grafting’ of the posthuman onto the neoliberal model of the individual, within the context of a broader neoliberal ideology (1999, p.287). This is similar to what Žižek has argued by proposing that ‘maybe the problem is not biogenetics itself, but rather the context of power relations within which it functions’ (2003, p.4). Neoliberalism is the subordination of all values to market values, and therefore the ideal neoliberal subject is he or she whose potential as a capital resource is maximised: an end to which digital-, cyber-, and bio- technologies have proved to be an incredibly effective means. There is no doubt that they have aided the establishment of a perpetually distracted, pacified, and atomised population. But this does not mean that the Left cannot take advantage of the technology and infrastructure that capitalism has provided us with. As Donna Haraway writes, on a similar note:

The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism [...]. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins (2004, p.10).

This is analogous to what Paul Mason argues in his book *PostCapitalism* – that, although capitalism has a remarkable capacity to adapt, it has reached its limit of adaptation with information technology: a product of capitalism which is ‘unfaithful to its origins’. Due to information technology’s potentially infinite abundance and zero marginal cost, ‘its spontaneous tendency is to dissolve markets, destroy ownership, and break down the relationship between work and wages’ (2016, p.xiv) – in short, although it is a product of capitalism, its very logic is fundamentally opposed to it. Capitalism can try to contain it ‘through info-monopolies, through allowing the wage relationship to weaken, and through the irrational pursuit of high-carbon business models’ (2016, p.143), but, Mason prophesies, these attempts will ultimately prove futile. What we are witnessing here is another example of what Hegel called the ‘disparity of the substance with itself’ (1997, §37). Capitalism, like all things, is afflicted by an antithesis (i.e. information technology) that is not external, but wholly immanent; an internal contradiction which leads to its own (re)creation, its own demise and replacement, that is, with the postcapitalist economy. Like the figure of the posthuman, what this postcapitalist economy might look like is heavily contested – but it is widely agreed that it will be produced through the immanent antagonisms within capitalism itself.

While Mason's account comprehensively discusses these antagonisms that capitalism has developed with itself in terms of economics, he only touches upon how the transition from a human to a posthuman subjectivity, brought on by information technology, might be the catalyst or driving force for the transition from capitalism to postcapitalism. However, this process was clearly anticipated by Karl Marx. Marx is traditionally conceived of as arguing that consciousness is simply economically determined and constructed. Indeed, the *Communist Manifesto* clearly states that all 'ideas are but the outgrowth of conditions of your bourgeois production and bourgeois property' (87). However, his fragment on Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production finds Marx at his most Hegelian. Here he documents how

Labour is torn out from its primordial immersion in its objective conditions and, because of this, it appears on the one side itself as labour, and, on the other side, the labour's own product, as objectified labour, obtains against labour a completely autonomous existence as value (qtd. in Žižek 2011b, p.219).<sup>16</sup>

This presents the subject, not as being irrevocably chained to their objective conditions, but in a perpetual process of separation from them. It is this disjunction, this forced alienation from one's economic and political situation, which provides 'the full material conditions for the total, universal development of the productive forces of the individual' (Marx 1973, p.515). As Žižek writes, this separation is in itself already their liberation, 'since it creates pure subjectivity, exempted from all substantial ties, which only has to appropriate its objective conditions' (2011, p.219). Of course, Marx was writing about the emergence of the proletariat. However, this model and process of alienation maps perfectly onto the emergent construction of the globally networked posthuman. Of course, as a product of neoliberal capitalism, the characteristics of today's archetypal, young working individual are profoundly ambivalent: their identity is unstable, they network spontaneously, they develop multiple online and offline personas, their ties to jobs and places are weak, they are often apathetic, and disengaged with traditional party politics, but they are also deeply resentful. However, this historical figure, despite being a product of the neoliberal economy, displays many characteristics which are totally opposed to a neoliberal dynamic. André Gorz, in the late '80s, drew the depressing conclusion that the post-war, post-industrial work place can

never produce that working-class culture, which together with a humanism of labour constituted the great utopia of the socialist and trade union movements up until the 1920s (1989, p.55),

implying that, with the loss of the traditional, unionised, working class, the hope for an authentic anti-capitalism had disappeared. This apocalyptic conclusion has, I believe, since been proved premature. As Mason writes in one crucial passage of *PostCapitalism*,

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<sup>16</sup> Original German in Marx 1976, p.431.



These networked movements are evidence that a new historical subject exists. It is not just the working class in a different guise; it is networked humanity [...] In the past twenty years, capitalism has mustered a new social force that will be its gravedigger, just as it assembled the factory proletariat in the nineteenth century (2016, p.212).

The social and political networking possibilities provided by the internet have diminished the need for hierarchical work structures, and potentially the need for work at all, as well as defying the logic of paying for information and digital goods. They have also provided a new medium through which opposition and dissent can be rallied and organised, with global examples ranging from the anti-austerity marches in London, to the anti-Islamist protests in Gezi Park, to the general strikes in Rio and São Paulo. Robocops and humanoids aside, this new, politically galvanised, networked humanity is a palpable, if latent, manifestation of the posthuman: a manifestation which is radically at odds with the hierarchies of capitalism.

And yet, the radical Left today are still not taking full advantage of this figure of the posthuman, nor the possibilities that information technology, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and social networking provide for global collectivisation, organisation, and resistance, as well as new forms of socialist politics, governance, and societal configurations. Just as Fukuyama is guilty of retroactively projecting an illusionary figure of human nature, the left today is guilty of appealing to what Nick Srnicek & Alex Williams have called ‘folk politics’:

Under the sway of folk-political thinking, the most recent cycle of struggles – from anti-globalisation to anti-war to Occupy Wall Street – has involved the fetishisation of local spaces, immediate actions, transient gestures, and particularisms of all kinds. [...] The utopian potentials inherent in twenty-first-century technology cannot remain bound to a parochial capitalist imagination; they must be liberated by an ambitious left alternative (2016, p.3).

Folk politics has rejected the opportunities posed by posthuman developments and retreated into archaic visions of ideal societies characterised by localisation and direct democracy, overlooking that this vision of an idealised, purer form of pre-capitalist society is an illusion: a state of affairs which was negated by capitalist globalisation, and through negation, was posited backwards as a romanticised temporal point of pure origin. Other factions of the Left have altogether accepted the hegemony of global capitalism. The case of Syriza in Greece proves this point: they are one of the most globally prominent left-wing parties, and yet their former finance minister, Yanis Varoufakis, claims that the job of Marxists today is to ‘save capitalism from itself’ (2015), a position that Marx would certainly never have advocated.

In this essay I have argued that, by redirecting our sights towards what Hegel describes as the ‘negative [that] appears [as] the disparity of the substance with itself’, we can understand the posthuman, not as a threat to some imagined human nature, nor, even, as a radical departure from the history of human development, but as an opportunity for the Left to exploit and extrapolate global capitalism’s immanent antagonisms. There are, as I have argued, many risks. But if the Left does not claim the future for itself, then the forces of neoliberalism will continue to do so for their own ends.

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# An Exploration of the Notion of Sound (Re)Production Through Media Archaeological Creative Praxis

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*Since the invention of sound reproduction technology in the late 19th century, the technological mediation (recording and transmission) of sound has been variously criticised. American bandleader and composer John Philip Sousa (1906, p.278-279) wrote shortly after the invention of the phonograph that it threatened to ‘reduce the expression of music to a mathematical system of megaphones, wheels, cogs, disks, cylinders, and all manner of revolving things, which are as like real art as the marble statue of Eve is like her beautiful, living, breathing daughters’. Acoustic ecologist R. Murray Schafer coined the term ‘schizophonia’ in *The New Soundscape* (1969, p.46) to describe the ‘alienating’ effect of hearing sound reproduced (and abstracted) independently from its source. Although these responses could be criticised as merely technophobic, they share a contention that is sharply relevant to my sound practice - that there is a quality (or perhaps ‘qualia’) in the direct, acoustic experience of sound that can’t be adequately reproduced or transmitted. These qualia, associated with an unmediated experience of sound, are particularly relevant to the current post-digital condition defined by Florian Cramer amongst others as one which re-engages the material, analogue world in tandem with the digital, transcending mediation, and returning to the tactility of pre-digital media.*

*This paper explores the dual notions of production and reproduction at play in my work as a sound artist, with particular reference to my recent sound installation *Eigenfunction*.<sup>17</sup> This (re)production duality is situated across three sites in the work: a media archaeological exploration of past media as stimulus, the use of existing sound reproduction technologies to produce an acoustic (and visual) effect and the performative mediated encounter at play in my video documentation. Each of these are examined in turn as media archaeological sites of (re)production and the work is then framed within a broader post-digital context.*

**Keywords:** Sound art, postdigital, media archaeology

## 1. Criticisms of Sound Reproduction and the Case for ‘Sound Qualia’

In the following discussion, the concept of media archaeology is central, both as a critical approach and a description of my artistic methodology. Jussi Parikka defines media archaeology as a field ‘interested in excavating the past in order to understand the present and the future’ and ‘a way to investigate the new media cultures through insights from past new media’ (Parikka, 2012, p.2). Applied as an artistic methodology, it describes a concern with the materiality of media and a historical approach to media cultures and their technologies.

The technologies that are generally grouped under the category of ‘sound reproduction’ concern the capturing of air pressure waves (sound) using microphones, storing those waves on mechanical, electronic or digital media and then converting this media back into air pressure waves using loudspeakers. It is notable, however, that the use of the word ‘reproduction’ in describing these technologies leads us into a particular conceptual trap when thinking about recorded sound. We tend to think in terms of an original sound being

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<sup>17</sup> Documentation of the artwork can be seen here: <https://vimeo.com/67657134>

‘captured’, ‘stored’ and then ‘recreated’ or ‘reproduced’ and these notions are underscored by the often-touted aspirations of sound reproduction technologies towards faithfulness and transparency (Sterne 2003, p.256). The experience of listening to recorded sound underscores this way of thinking, as Damrosch describes:

The listener who hears a symphony or string quartet through his loud-speaker loses little that is essential. His impression of the work is nearly, if not quite, as vivid and complete as if he were seated in the concert hall (1935, p.93).

From a media archaeological perspective, however, the original sound and the ‘reproduced’ sound are entirely different in their material conditions. Although the impression one has is of a sound ‘captured’ and ‘reproduced’, in reality when listening to a recording it might be more accurate to say that we are listening to the media itself – we are listening to microphones, storage media (whether mechanical, electronic or digital) and loudspeakers. Eck states:

When listening to one of Bach’s Six Suites for Unaccompanied Violoncello through loudspeakers, most people would probably regard what they are hearing as the music performed by a violoncello, and not by a piece of cardboard, moving forwards and backwards to produce sound waves (2017, p.42).

In the above example would it be more accurate to say we are listening to a cello or vibrating cardboard? Rather than recreation or reproduction, perhaps a better terminology would be that of *translation*. Sterne alludes to this interpretation when he defines sound reproduction by the use of transducers, which turn sound into ‘something else’ and vice versa:

Every apparatus of sound reproduction has a tympanic function at precisely the point where it turns sound into something else – usually electric current – and when it turns something else into sound. Microphones and speakers are transducers; they turn sound into other things, and they turn other things into sound (2003, p.34).

Roelof Vermeulen’s description of microphones and loudspeakers as ‘acoustical motors’ (1937, cited in Eck 2017 p.33) is also helpful in reframing these technologies as primarily concerned with the transformation of electrical energy into mechanical energy (and vice versa). Wolfgang Ernst extends this thinking further by referring to the reproduction of sound as a ‘transubstantiation’:

When physically propagated sound is being technically transduced, this is not simply a linear translation but it changes its essence from sound to signal. Within a telephone line or when stored as magnetic charges on a tape, a media epistemological transubstantiation of sound has happened (Faculty of Arts, Aarhus Universitat 2016, 00:34:37).

Conceptualising these technologies as reproducing original sounds, then, ignores the role the reproducing media has in the process. As Stanyek & Piekut state: ‘Media is not merely a connective technology between agencies,

but is itself an effective agent' (2012, p.320). Thinking of sound reproduction as *transformation*, *translation* or even *transubstantiation*, speaks to the agency of the media involved, the mechanical aspect of these 'acoustical motors' and allows us to think beyond terminologically restrictive ideas of 'capturing' and 'reproducing' original sounds.

An exploration of the sounding potential of electromagnetic media (including loudspeakers) has been a recurring theme in my sound practice which seeks to engage with the physical nature of sound. Although my artworks are designed to be exhibited in gallery contexts as sculptures, they could equally be described as 'sound instruments' – they are developed with their sounding potential as the primary catalyst. Some have involved the sounding of physical objects via electromechanical actuators whilst others have involved the manipulation of existing sounding objects. They all could be said to produce (rather than reproduce) sound acoustically where the sounds heard are physically linked to their apparent sources.

In electroacoustic music studies, consideration of the significance of the separation of sounds from their physical sources (as in sound reproduction) has been conceptualised as either emancipatory or reductive (or both), and focus has centred around the seemingly opposing theories of acousmatic composers and acoustic ecologists. The term *acousmatic* (from the French *acousmatique*) was coined by French musique concrète pioneer Pierre Schaeffer to describe sound where the cause of the sound heard cannot be seen. Schaeffer equated the experience of listening to recorded sound to that of Pythagoras' students hearing him teach from behind a curtain and introduced the term *reduced listening* to describe the resulting experience of heightened concentration. Eck traces this privileging of the sonic above all other senses to the emergence of musical forms such as the *Konzertreform* in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century where the performers were hidden from the audience behind a curtain and 'it had [...] become common to think of sound as being the only desirable component of a musical performance' (Eck 2017, p.30). Schaeffer's term *objet sonore* conceptualises the separating of sounds from their physical sources as an emancipatory act, later described by Stockhausen as a desire to free music of the 'dictatorship of the material' (2004, p.371).

Acoustic ecology stems from the work of Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer and is concerned with a sense of responsibility for the sonic environment. Acoustic ecologists have taken an altogether different view of the new sonic environments afforded by recording technologies, framing the separation of sounds from their physical sources as unnatural and even disordered. Schafer introduced the term *schizophonia* in *The New Soundscape* (1969, p.46) to describe the 'cutting free of sound from its natural origins' as an 'aberration'. His view has been criticised as idealistic by acousmatic composers such as Francisco López (1997, p.1) since it assumes an impossible wholeness of 'natural' sonic environments where sounds and their sources are not just interconnected but ontologically identical. Sterne argues:

Acousmatic or schizophonic definitions of sound reproduction carry with them a questionable set of prior assumptions about the fundamental nature of sound, communication, and experience. Most

important, they hold human experience and the human body to be categories outside history (2003, p.20-21).

Stanyek and Piekut expand on the idea of the schizophrenic with their neologism *rhizophonia* in an attempt to sidestep the oppositional approaches outlined above, critiquing the idea of the primacy of interpersonal immediacy of the acoustic ecologists while acknowledging the material nature of sound:

Schizophrenia describes sound itself. All sounds are severed from their sources - that's what makes sound sound. Rhizophonia is our term for taking account both of sound's extensity and the impossibility of a perfect identity between sound and source (2012, p.309).

This extensity (or spatiality) has also been a key issue in a number of philosophical theories of sound perception (Casati & Dokic, 2014). A defining feature of these theories is their concern with the location of sounds, conceived variously as situated in the sounding object (distal), the listener (proximal) or the space between listener and object (medial). From a media archaeological perspective, the location and identity of the sounding object in recorded sound are even less clear. Rhizophonia acknowledges this ambiguity around the 'where' of recorded sound and instead suggests a multiplicity of locations 'where sounds and bodies are constantly dislocated, relocated, and co-located in temporary aural configurations' (Stanyek & Piekut 2012, p.309).

Despite the above criticism of schizophrenic theory, its motivating idea – that there is a quality in the direct experience of acoustic sound that can't be adequately reproduced or transmitted – is sharply relevant to my work as a sound artist since this unique unmediated quality is a defining aspect of my work. Walter Benjamin described the particular character of unmediated phenomena as its 'aura' and referred specifically to spatial characteristics in his definition that 'aura [is] the distance of the gaze that awakens in the object looked at' (1999, p.447). According to Benjamin:

Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be (1969, p.220).

Although Benjamin made almost no reference to aura as it relates to sound reproduction, his contemporary Theodor Adorno referred to the loss of sound's aura and its transformation when separated from its physical source through broadcast media. As applied to sound, Benjamin's 'aura' could be defined as a quality of the direct experience of sound in physical space and time, which is destroyed by reproduction (or broadcast). Although he disagreed with Benjamin's privileging of the material uniqueness of unmediated experience, Adorno did argue that sound reproduction brought with it a loss or reduction of some aspects of direct experience; that the 'authenticity, or aura [was] vanishing in music because of mechanical reproduction' (Adorno 2009, p.141-142). Goodman writes:

Adorno argued that radio transformed music as well as disseminated it and that the experience of listening to radio music was profoundly different from the experience of listening in the concert

hall. To this extent, Adorno agreed with Benjamin that there was an aura about the live concert performance that was lost when people listened at home - but he lamented the loss (2009, p.42-43).

Dutch multimedia artist and theorist Dick Raaijmakers characterises this loss of aura through sound reproduction as a ‘reduction of three-dimensional, spatial music to a narrow, one-dimensional, electric current’ (Eck, p.33). Raaijmakers states:

Music causes vibrations in the air. Microphones are designed to pick up these vibrations from the air and [...] obtain] an electric equivalent of the music. However, that electrical equivalent is not spatial, as music is, but one-dimensional. The music is reduced to a thin electric current, which flows through the one-dimensional, equally thin and pointed wire of the coil. Only through this reduction from space to point it becomes possible to disconnect the sound from the sound source. [...] The sound no longer possesses a substantial quality (2008, p.256).

In reference to my artistic practice, I offer the term *sound qualia* to describe this spatial, experiential aura, which is unique to the local encounter with my work. The philosophical concept of qualia (borrowed from psychologist William James) refers to the idea that our experiences have subjective, qualitative aspects to them that are distinct from the properties of objects.<sup>18</sup> In his essay ‘The Mental and the Physical’ (1967) Herbert Feigl used the term *raw feels* to describe this idea of perception in and of itself and *cooked feels* to describe perception seen as existing in terms of its effects. In performance studies these terms have been used by Miller & Whalley to describe the intersubjective encounter between performers and audiences:

The uncertain space in between the performance and the audience can be framed as a qualic exchange. [...] We consider the qualic exchange as a process which embraces the strangeness of an encounter that is not fully real, while allowing the potential for affect to emerge. [...] The qualic exchange is an attempt to give value to the experiential in spectatorial practices (2017, p.91).

I propose that, like Benjamin’s aura, *sound qualia* are unique aspects of our subjective experience of sound in acoustic space that are lost or at least fundamentally changed through its technological mediation (reproduction and broadcast). Extending the *sound qualia* concept further I propose the term *raw sound* to refer to this unmediated, direct and spatial experience of acoustic sound, which is a defining characteristic of my artistic practice. My sound practice involves the creation of electronically actuated physical objects and assemblages that produce *raw sound*. It stands in contrast to acousmatic sound work by using technologies of sound reproduction as acoustical motors which produce sound rather than as transparent media which carry it. It involves the sounding of objects and materials in acoustic space and concerns itself with opening the acousmatic curtain (to paraphrase Eck 2017, p.37) by using the technologies of sound reproduction (e.g. electromagnets, speakers) in order to create sound installations that exist in temporally and spatially localised instances. A

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<sup>18</sup> The term qualia has been used in reference to sound previously by Patton (2007, p.123), however, this work referred specifically to the qualic aspects of electroacoustic ‘sound objects’ and is distinct from the neologism sound qualia presented here.



crucial characteristic of my work is its ability to produce the *raw feels* of sound qualia in a local audience through the experience of unmediated acoustic sound.

To summarise, the examination of critiques of sound reproduction above have helped frame my concept of *sound qualia* and its significance to my practice. The following section will explore situations and techniques in my artistic practice where there is a tension between notions of production and reproduction. The contronym *(re)production* will be used to refer to these sites of conceptual duality. In examining the role of this duality in my work as a sound artist I will focus on three sites of (re)production in the creation my sound sculpture *Eigenfunction*: First, the manual recreation of past media as stimulus for the work, second, the use of extended techniques for existing sound reproduction technologies in order to produce an acoustic (and visual) effect and third, the performative, mediated encounter at play in my video documentation.

## 2. Eigenfunction — Three Sites of Media Archaeological (Re)Production

*Eigenfunction* is a durational sound sculpture comprising six small loudspeakers suspended from six larger loudspeakers via different lengths of string. Each speaker is vibrated independently via sine waves to create standing waves and related effects in the strings, rendering a visual representation of the sounds heard. The sound produced is directly related to the physical apparatus, as the sine tones are based on the first fundamental frequency of each string (dictated by its length and the weight of the lower speaker). These fundamentals are then multiplied, layered and abstracted in order to create multiple nodes and effects such as pulsing and distortion.<sup>19</sup>

The arrangement of the piece is controlled via software (a Max patch) that outputs audio to each of the twelve speakers separately. The patch loops every seven minutes with a large amount of variability built into the composition. Both the individual frequencies and the order in which they appear, as well as the order and timing of each section, is randomly varied each time the composition loops. The work is designed for a gallery context and to be installed for an extended period with each audience member able to dictate the length of their encounter with the work by their physical presence.

### 2.1. A Media Archaeological Exploration of Past Media as Stimulus

The initial concept for this piece was drawn from the historical development of wave theory – specifically French physicist Louis De Broglie’s ‘wave particle duality’ theory, which formed the basis of wave mechanics and proposed that all matter has wave properties. This wave-like nature of all matter was also proposed by the philosopher Henri Bergson who wrote:

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<sup>19</sup> Documentation of the artwork can be seen here: <https://vimeo.com/67657134>

Matter thus resolves itself into numberless vibrations, all linked together in uninterrupted continuity, all bound up with each other, and traveling in every direction like shivers through an immense body (1991, p.208).

All sound is, of course, comprised of waves and it could, therefore, be said that these theories argue the sound-like nature of matter, a neat reversal of the exploration of the material nature of sound that has been a recurring theme of my artistic practice. This vibrational nature of matter displays what Wolfgang Ernst calls ‘implicit sonicity’, a term he uses to describe phenomena that exhibit ‘temporal processuality’ – i.e. inaudible phenomena which are structurally similar to sound. Ernst contrasts this implicit sonicity with ‘explicit sound’, which he describes as ‘sound unfolding in time’ (Ernst 2016, p.22). A popular demonstration of wavelength theory was developed by the German physicist Franz Melde and involved the exhibition of longitudinal waves on a weighted string via a vibrating needle. I based my initial experiments around this demonstration, replacing the needle with motors and then speakers in order to set up an audiovisual relationship driven from the same source of vibration. *Eigenfunction*, then, could be seen as an attempt to reverse engineer Melde’s experiment through media archaeological (re)production and make the implicit sonicity of his apparatus explicit.

## **2.2. The Use of Electromechanical Technologies of Sound Reproduction as Tools for Acoustic Sound Production**

The attaching of objects to loudspeakers can be compared to the use of extended and prepared techniques for musical instruments where, for example, objects are placed on the strings of the piano in order to disrupt its normal operation and (it could be argued) to reveal something about the character of the instrument itself. Seen this way *Eigenfunction* could be said to instrumentalise the loudspeaker through extended techniques. Indeed, Moore stated: ‘the true instrument of our age is not the lute or guitar or piano or drum or organ or even the electronic synthesiser – it is the loudspeaker’ (1980, p.214). Instrumentalising, according to Keep ‘seeks to discover the performability, intrinsic sonic palette and possibilities for sonic manipulation of objects’ through their ‘creative abuse’ (2009, p.113) which is characterised as any action on a sounding object other than its intended function. Likewise, Patteson uses the term ‘media instruments’ to describe the optical sound film experiments of composers in the 1920s, which ‘treated media not as a means of capturing performances but rather as a novel instrument capable of uniquely technogenic effects’ (2015). By extending and preparing the media of sound reproduction, disrupting their normally transparent operation through creative abuse, *Eigenfunction* could be seen as a ‘media instrument’ which instrumentalises the loudspeaker and draws attention to its mechanical nature.

Similarly, Raaijmakers’ sound works included the use of extended techniques that could be said to instrumentalise sound reproduction media. In his piece for microphones, *Intona* (1992) the performer destroys a number of microphones by subjecting them to a variety of ever more violent treatment. His *Ideofoon*

installation series (1971) involved arrays of prepared loudspeakers with various objects such as tubes containing ball bearings and sheet metal suspended by wire attached to their surfaces. In discussing Raaijmakers' sound works Eck references Pythagoras' curtain (and by extension the Schaefferian acousmatic veil of recorded sound) suggesting that these techniques are akin to 'opening the curtain': 'Raaijmakers opens the curtain, which in stereophony hides the loudspeakers. By opening this curtain he searches for their true nature' (Eck 2017, p.37). Eck is suggesting that just as the use of extended techniques in music can provide insight into the nature or character of musical instruments, extended techniques such as Raaijmakers' can advance our understanding of the character of sound reproduction media itself. John Pigott characterises the use of these techniques as addressing a historical tendency in sound practices involving speakers to focus on the content of sound rather than the mechanical nature of reproduction media:

An aesthetic and musical focus on electromechanical technology may therefore usefully be aligned to a notion of media archaeology [...] the prepared loudspeaker and other extended electromechanical interfaces seek to redress the balance of creative focus between electrical and mechanical energy in music and music technologies, and in doing so they reassert their power as the final gatekeeper in the signal chain of the electronic music system (2011, p.86).

By opening the acousmatic curtain through extended techniques for sound reproduction media, *Eigenfunction* draws attention to this balance between the electrical and the mechanical nature of the loudspeaker and its dual role as a media of (re)production.

### 2.3. The Performative Mediated Encounter at Play in my Video Documentation

As discussed above, a crucial aspect of my sound practice is the *sound qualia* associated with an unmediated encounter with sounding objects in physical space. This raises a number of issues when considering how to document my work. How can the spatial, durational and qualic aspects of the work be adequately captured? Should an attempt be made to mitigate the absence of these elements through techniques of documentation or should their absence be emphasised in order to draw attention to the role of the document as an incomplete rendering of the artwork? Should work that is meant to be experienced locally be documented at all? These questions are not easily resolved, and documentation of work such as mine remains inherently problematic. However, my approach to date has been to document my sound sculptures through the creation of videos in which I perform an encounter with the work from the point of view of an imagined audience member. I use this approach in order to try to recreate as faithfully as possible the experience of an encounter with the work in physical space whilst acknowledging that these documents will always fall short of such an encounter. This performative approach is what Auslander categorises as *theatrical* documentation (2006, p.1); the performance is for the benefit of the document and no other audience. Because these video documents are readily distributable, the online audience of my work is considerably larger than its physical audiences. For many, video

documents are the only way my work is accessed and thus become the definitive versions of my works by default.

The video documentation for *Eigenfunction* follows the approach outlined above and is similarly problematic as it frames the work in a number of ways that reduce and undercut aspects of the direct experience of the work. Although the work has been exhibited in both gallery and concert settings the document gives no such context; the sculpture is seen suspended in black space. The visual perspective changes over the course of the document showing the work in detail from a variety of positions while the aural perspective remains static, recorded as it was in stereo from a single location. The result is a fiction where the raw feels of the local, spatial encounter are replaced by a virtual spatiality of layered visual perspectives and stereophonic sound. By dictating a start and endpoint onto a durational work, the unique subjective aspect of each audience member's encounter becomes predetermined. The video document also flattens characteristics of the work that differ over time (both as a result of random elements programmed into the work and the unpredictability of the physical materials involved) by solidifying a singular version. Most importantly the video document is problematic because it is a (re)production – it mediates the artwork, flattening the spatial and temporal qualic aspects of the physical encounter.

### 3. Post-Digital Context and Concluding Remarks

The preceding discussion of sound qualia and (re)production can be considered part of a wider post-digital context within which I wish to frame my practice more generally. The 'post-digital' was first defined separately in 2000 by American composer Kim Cascone (2000, p.12) and Australian media artist Ian Andrews (2000) who each used the term in opposition to what they saw as a cultural obsession with digital purity and progress. Florian Cramer has since defined it as 'the messy state of media, arts and design after their digitization' (2015, p.19) and as 'a media aesthetics which opposes [...] digital high-tech and high-fidelity cleanness' (2015, p.16). A defining feature for many proponents of the post-digital is a return to the tactility of pre-digital media and the combination of old and new (which are taken to mean analogue and digital) technologies. Cramer states:

'Post-digital' eradicates the distinction between 'old' and 'new' media, in theory as well as in practice [...] the term 'post-digital' usefully describes 'new media'-cultural approaches to working with so-called 'old media' (2015, p.20-21).

The central methodology of my artistic practice fits this paradigm since it involves the sounding of physical, analogue objects with electromagnetic media via digital control methods. Allen & Gauthier describe the post-digital as a 'media archaeology of the present', which reveals, 'that which is left after and behind the digital' (2014, p.18). The post-digital, then, addresses the perceived deficiencies of digital media. By focussing on the qualic *raw feels* of the direct experience of sounding objects and in defining my artistic practice in opposition

to digitally mediated or reproduced sound I see my work as having a post-digital aesthetic focus on elements that are lost in digital sound media.

To conclude, I submit that my artistic practice, and my sound sculpture *Eigenfunction* in particular, have been helpful in framing an important discussion around established notions of reproduction in sound media and how they relate to the post-digital context. I have outlined the media archaeological methods used in developing my work and have offered new terminology to highlight the importance of the physical co-presence of audiences and sounding objects in this field. I have explored the problematic nature of documenting work such as mine and have explored some approaches I have established in order to address this. This work is ongoing; further experimental research into documentation methods suitable for this type of work would be necessary to more fully understand possible strategies and their implications.

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## The Editorial Team

**Adriana Alcaraz (General Editor)** is an MPhil student in Philosophy at the University of Glasgow. With a BA in psychology and a MA in cognitive science, her research lies in the intersection between psychology and philosophy. Her thesis investigates the nature of consciousness and the experience of selfhood by drawing on dream experiences and meditative practices.

**Grace Birrell (Secretary and Editor)** did her undergraduate at NYU, majoring in memory and language and minoring in German language and literature. Grace is now studying at the University of Glasgow for her MLitt in English literature: Modernities. The focus of her Master's study is incommunicability in the works of Thomas Bernhard and Samuel Beckett.

**Carlos Fernandez (Editor)** is an MLitt student in Victorian literature at the University of Glasgow. With a BA and MA in English literature, he has finished his MPhil research on archetypal criticism in Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* (1912). His research interests include cultural studies, science fiction, literary criticism, postcolonial studies and nineteenth-century literature.

**Alexandra Foulds (Peer Review Coordinator and Editor)** finished her PhD on 'Gothic Monster Fiction and the "Novel-Reading Disease", 1860-1900' at the University of Glasgow while working on this issue of eSharp. Her thesis scrutinised the relationship between sensation fiction and Gothic fiction in the second half of the nineteenth century, analysing that the former, imagined as pathological, was described as having infected the latter and that this infection is evident in representations of monsters in fin de siècle Gothic fiction.

**Joseph Saunders (Social Marketing and Editor)** is currently a history MPhil student at the University of Glasgow, where he also received an undergraduate degree in history last year. His research is on the book trade in early seventeenth-century Britain. In particular, Joe is interested in the personal and professional networks of the printers and booksellers of 1630s England and is using social network analysis to uncover these.

**Natalie Shore (Events Organiser)** is a Canadian student who will graduate from the University of Glasgow's MA English literature program in Autumn 2018. Her work revolves around the search for common themes that emerge among academic, personal, social, and professional experiences, with the idea that a critical exploration of those themes may help us (re)evaluate our motivations and (re)connect with a deeper sense of home in the world.



**Sarah Thomson (Treasurer and Editor)** is currently studying for an MLitt in American studies at the University of Glasgow and will begin an AHRC-funded PhD in History at the University of Edinburgh in September 2018. Her main research interests lie in American political and presidential history, and her Masters and PhD dissertations both examine different aspects of Ronald Reagan's presidency and political legacy.

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