# Nadia Lucchesi

---Artist's Statement---

Nadia Lucchesi is a Glasgow-based artist who works across various disciplines, including digital art and printmaking. With an enduring interest in illustrating the written word, she has for some years been chief illustrator for Scottish Left Review Press, and her relief printing, most recently showcased in a Featured Artist exhibition at Glasgow Print Studio (2019), has a strong figurative style with a narrative approach.

In her response to the prompts 'Estrangement' and 'Reconciliation' Nadia wanted to convey estrangement as not simply the absence of someone, but as an experience of distance and isolation. The image of the sea came to her immediately. The use of jigsaw pieces for 'Reconciliation' describes a resolution, a completion of something that was not quite whole. The timeless symbolism of two hands, and its suggestion of touch, felt especially profound to her in the current context of social distancing.

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# Estrangement and Reconciliation

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# Contributors

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**Theo Fenerty** graduated with a degree in English Literature and Film Studies in 2019 from Manchester Metropolitan University. He started an MA in Film, Photography and Media at the University of Leeds in September 2020. His research interests are contemporary cinema, with a particular focus on gender, race, adoption and critical theory.

**Sarah Fissmer** is a third year PhD candidate at the University of Bonn, Germany, and a doctoral research associate at the University's Institute for English, American and Celtic Studies. She teaches BA and MA students in the fields of English Literary and Cultural Studies, mainly focusing on the First World War and its commemoration as well as on Shakespearean theatre. Her doctoral thesis addresses the role reconciliation plays in today's British Great War remembrance.

**Steven Harvie** (University of Glasgow) is a PhD student researching the work, the writing practices and the critical recaption of Muriel Spark. The nature of his research is collaborative, relying and heavily based on the extensive Spark archive collections held at the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh. With access to this resource Steven uses manuscripts, typescripts, correspondence and other supra-textual materials to investigate the development of Spark's novel writing from conception to completion; reevaluate the critical primacy of Spark's novels over her poetry; and finally, explore her rarely straightforward relationship with the publishing industry.

**Lars Johnson is** a current MLitt student at the University of Glasgow studying English fantasy literature. His research interests include gender and sexuality studies, neomedievalism, eco-criticism, and epic fantasy.

**Emily L. Pickard** is a thesis pending PhD researcher in the Scottish Literature Department. She studies motherhood in Willa Muir's life and writings, specifically through a feminist and socialist framework.

**Sonakshi Srivastava** is a final year postgraduate student of English Literature at the University of Delhi, India. She has published two academic articles and has presented papers at the National Congress of Social Sciences, the International Renaissance Conference held at Jadavpur University, Kolkata, and the international conference "Language and Violence in the Anthropocene" in Vigo, Spain. Her areas of interest include postcolonial literatures, anthropocene literatures, memory and trauma studies, and Indian writing in English.

**Claire Yi Zhi Tan** is an MA English Literature student at Anglia Ruskin University. She did her BA in Education with English at the University of Cambridge and subsequently taught literature in a Malaysian school, where she became interested in the intersection between English literature and the lived realities of postcolonial contexts. Her research interests are in contemporary and postcolonial literatures, with a particular focus on Malaysian literature in English.

# Editors' Introduction

The theme for the 28th issue of *eSharp* was chosen in late 2019, against the backdrop of a fresh general election in the United Kingdom and the looming spectre of Brexit. The editorial board was also aware of the continuing issues of immigration around the world, especially the needs and experiences of refugees and asylum seekers. In this context, we reached out for the ideas of 'Estrangement and Reconciliation' as a means of recognising the former as it was brought into sharp focus in the world around us, and perhaps hope that the latter could be achieved not only in our own small realities, but perhaps also in the world at large.

Little did we know how much more appropriate this theme would become, with the arrival of COVID-19 on the world stage in early 2020. As cities around the world shut down in an attempt to protect their citizens from what continues to prove a dangerous and often lethal virus, our sense of estrangement from our own realities and loved ones has become heightened, and our yearning for the reconciliation that we are yet to experience seems only to grow. In addition to affecting our personal lives, COVID-19 has further affected the ability of the editorial board to hold necessary meetings, as well as contributors' access to research premises and vital sources housed in libraries and archives. This completed issue is a testament to our contributors' dedication.

This theme was further selected for its ability to encourage work from a wide field of disciplinary backgrounds and subject interests, which allows for many types of estrangement and reconciliation to be considered by the works included. We see this breadth of interpretation made manifest through explorations of international relations, minorities in society, the relationship between society and the environment, gender, and more.

In her article, **'Estrangement and Reconciliation in the Culture Clashes of Science Fiction: Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed'*,** Claire Y. Z. Tan contrasts the aforementioned texts' different engagement with the concept of 'cognitive estrangement'. As strategic representations of cultural clash, Tan argues that both novels demonstrate the importance of change and uncertainty in any process of reconciliation.

Emily L. Pickard, author of **'Yearning to Belong: Willa Muir's Struggle with the Motherland'**, explores the contrast between estrangement and reconciliation in the autobiographical and literary works of Willa Muir. Pickard focuses on Muir's relationship with Scotland from a gender, cultural, and linguistic perspective, while also illustrating the role played by family, feminism, nationality, and the fluidity of home in contouring both the author's place in Scottish Literature and in the wider European landscape of women's writing.

Andrea Di Carlo's article, **'The Self-Analyst and the Doctor: Montaigne and Browne in Dialogue'**, explores how the early modern writers Michel de Montaigne and Thomas Browne reconciled their beliefs and themselves with a world fraught with socio-political upheaval. In doing so, Carlo compares the two authors to Paul Ricœur's 'Masters of Suspicion' and concludes that both Montaigne and Browne were able to reach reconciliation with their society through self-analysis and doubt.

In **'The Great War and the Western Front: Lieux de Mémoire as Symbols for Reconciliation'**, Sarah Fissmer analyses three sites in Northern France dedicated to the memory of the Great War. Fissmer concludes that the three chosen '*lieux de mémoire*' show that national perspectives on the First World War do not necessarily have to insist on distinguishing attributes between countries. Instead they can be interwoven into a common narrative that emphasises the importance of peace, reconciliation and international cooperation in today's world.

In his article, **'Gender, Race, and Participatory Neomedievalism in *Dungeons & Dragons'*,** Lars Johnson examines the convergence of the popular modern tabletop game and the concept of Participatory Neomedievalism. Johnson further uses this concept to discuss the

ways in which players of *Dungeons & Dragons,* through their constant creation of neomedieval worlds, estrange themselves both from accurate portrayals of the medieval past as well as constructions and experiences of race and gender in the modern world.

In **'The Male Gaze, Gender Dynamics and Narrative Control in Muriel Spark's Reality and Dreams'**, Steven Harvie focuses on the regularly overlooked Muriel Spark novel *Reality and Dreams* to examine how literature and cinema offer ways of seeing which can alienate us from ourselves and disturb our sense of reality. Through analysis which draws on Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze, Harvie finds *Reality and Dreams* has much to say to the contemporary #MeToo movement, suggesting that Spark's style of ironic satire has the potential to dismantle patriarchal modes of looking and being looked at.

Theo Fenerty's article, **'Masters and Sons: Reconciling the Family in *There Will Be Blood*, *The Master* and *Phantom Thread*'**, approaches the works of Paul Thomas Anderson through the lens of Trauma and Critical Adoption Studies. Fenerty explores the parallelisms, boundaries, and convergences between the biological and adoptive families portrayed in these films in an attempt to understand the experience of estrangement suffered by their members and to reflect on the (im)possibility of reconciliation.

In **'The [E]strange Case of Han Kang's *Vegetarian* and Her Discontents'**, Sonashki Srivastava gives a detailed analysis of Kang's novel in the context of both Korean religious history and the theoretical writing of American feminist and animal rights activist Carol J. Adams. Srivastava argues that Yeong-hye, the novel's protagonist, experiences severe estrangement from her family and from mainstream patriarchal society after adopting vegetarianism, but has achieved reconciliation both with her sister In-hye and with the natural environment by the end of the novel. She discusses how both sisters experience utopian visions that are both rooted in Korean shamanism, and highly relevant to international debates on social and environmental justice.

The *eSharp* Editorial Board

# Estrangement and Reconciliation in the Culture Clashes of Science Fiction: Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*

Claire Y. Z. Tan (Anglia Ruskin University)

**Abstract:**

This article explores the representation of culture clash in Aldous Huxley's 1932 *Brave New World* and Ursula K. Le Guin's 1974 *The Dispossessed*, two well-known works of science fiction typically seen as representative of different sub-genres and seldom brought into conversation. I propose that despite their differences, both texts share an interest in interrogating cultures through staging a culture clash, a theme that recurs throughout the genre (Shippey 2016). The novels' characters are strangers in strange places, estranged from their own societies; I examine the ways in which this opens up conditions of epistemological and moral uncertainty, unsettling attempts to obtain knowledge, or defend deep-rooted values. Drawing on Darko Suvin's concept of 'cognitive estrangement', in which readers are made to see their own world differently by being plunged into a new and unfamiliar world, I suggest that this is even more pronounced as the characters themselves undergo a form of cognitive estrangement and readers doubly so.

Comparing the seemingly divergent endings of both novels, I suggest that they point to the same idea: that cultures need to be open to change and uncertainty in an ongoing process of estrangement and reconciliation, or face the inevitability of self-destruction. *The Dispossessed* simultaneously reconciles the uncertainties faced by its protagonist while embracing uncertainty itself as a necessary condition for meaningful cultural encounter and progress. Conversely, *Brave New World* remains starkly unresolved, with its protagonist's suicide underscoring the destructiveness of culture clash when the cultures cannot or will not accommodate the possibility of change. This, indeed, has profound implications for how we approach real-world cultural encounters, pointing to the revolutionary potential of 'learning from other worlds' in science fiction which, like all literature, is 'always a potentially political act' (Parrinder 2000, p.6).


**Key Words**: *culture, science fiction, epistemologies*

In a 2016 essay, Tom Shippey puts forward the argument that one of the defining characteristics

of science fiction, and a significant reason for its enduring appeal, is its interest in *cultures*:

> not just in science – as the term 'science fiction' suggests – but in *cultures*. Note that the word just used is plural. It used not to be […] by about 1800 it had come to mean something like 'the intellectual and artistic side of (Western) civilisation': *it was always singular, and it was always civilised.* Later on in the century, though, the meaning was extended […] it began to be used in the *plural*, and was taking on the meaning [of] 'the whole complex of learned behaviour […] of some body of

people' […] *The main point about 'cultures' used as a plural is that it means [they] can be compared, and so critiqued* (p.90, my emphasis).

Shippey points out that science fiction stories are often rich with radical interrogations of culture, with many stories revolving around 'culture clash, cultural alteration, the relativity of cultural values' (2016, p.94). Exploring communities shaped by technological change, they frequently unsettle readers' realities through 'cognitive estrangement', in which 'by imagining strange worlds we come to see our own conditions of life in a new and potentially revolutionary perspective' (Parrinder 2000, p.4). This effect, I would argue, is especially pronounced in texts which foreground cultures coming into dialogue or conflict with each other, bringing the 'relativity of cultural values' into sharp focus.

This article examines two science fiction novels which are highly successful and widely analysed but not often considered in conversation. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1994) is considered a leading work of twentieth-century dystopian fiction and a satire of American consumer capitalism; meanwhile, Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (2002), often considered the "centrepiece" of the utopian renaissance of the 1970s, has attracted much interest for its portrayal of an anarchic society (Booker & Thomas 2009, p.80). Nonetheless, both novels employ a similar device – culture clash – around which the action of the novel is organised. *Brave New World* begins in London, a part of the technologically advanced World State: it follows Bernard and Lenina's visit to the Savage Reservation, and then shifts to focus on the experiences of John the Savage, who is brought back to London in what is framed as a clash between 'Savage' and 'civilization'. *The Dispossessed* juxtaposes the poor, anarchic society on the planet Anarres with the wealthy, capitalist state of A-Io on the planet Urras through the eyes of the protagonist, Shevek, whose experiences in both cultures are contrasted through chapters alternately set on each planet.

This article explores how the experience of estrangement in culture clashes introduce conditions of epistemological uncertainty, unsettling attempts to obtain knowledge or defend deep-rooted values. Focusing particularly on the endings of the texts, I outline how *The Dispossessed* resolves some of the uncertainties, but ultimately embraces epistemological uncertainty as a desirable condition of life and necessary for cultural encounter, opening up an uncertain but optimistic vision of the future. In contrast, *Brave New World* leaves the uncertainties starkly unresolved. John's self-destruction at the end presents a dire warning about the consequences of denying change and its uncertainties, both at an individual and societal level.

**Huxley's *Brave New World***

An encounter between cultures creates the double challenge of attempting to understand a foreign culture's way of life, while at the same time having to justify the values that one considers axiomatic. This opens up a space of epistemological and even moral uncertainty about *what* one knows about the foreign culture and one's own, and *how* one can know either. The epistemological question is summed up in the *The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* (2002): 'How do we know what we know?'. As Parrinder (2000) writes, cognitive estrangement involves:

> first, the moment of ontological apperception of something posited […] as external, independent and strange. But, practically inseparable from this, there is the epistemological labour of bringing-to-knowledge, involving a dialectic of analogy and difference (p.6).

Cognitive estrangement, which describes the effect of science fiction on readers, also describes the effects of culture clash on the characters within the texts, who are depicted experiencing an epistemological uncertainty which creates an unstable space with the potential for change.

The 'singular' and 'civilised' definition of culture, outlined by Shippey and suitably applied to Huxley's London, is problematized and made plural with the introduction of the 'savage' community, opening up a space of uncertainty, comparison, and possible critique. The first half of the book is set in London, enabling readers to settle into the norms of this technologically advanced society, which upholds 'the virtues of passive obedience, material consumption and mindless promiscuity' (Bradshaw 1994, p.xvii). Entrenched cultural norms are represented by hypnopaedic teachings, beliefs embedded in children's minds through thousands of aural repetitions played during their sleep. These form the basis for supposedly self-evident cultural norms, as expressed by Lenina when she and Bernard visit the Reservation:

> "But cleanliness is next to fordliness," she insisted.
> "Yes, and civilization is sterilization," Bernard went on concluding on a tone of irony the second hypnopaedic lesson in elementary hygiene. "But these people have never heard of Our Ford, and they aren't civilized. So there's no point in…"
> "Oh!" She gripped his arm. "Look." (Huxley 1994, p.94).

Here, the singular narrative is disrupted, an apparently axiomatic truth repositioned as a relative cultural value that is dependent on what one has 'heard' – in a sense quite literally, via

hypnopaedia. The norms of 'civilized' society come into conflict with a second source of knowledge, that is, *seeing*. Lenina's insistence on 'cleanliness' is unsettled by the visual spectacle before her eyes: 'the piles of rubbish, the dust, the dogs, the flies' (Huxley 1994, p.94). This resonates with what Parrinder refers to as the initial 'ontological apperception' of difference. The 'epistemological labour of bringing-to-knowledge', however, is complicated, as seeing is not necessarily understanding. Peat (2015) notes that Huxley 'emphasizes the gap between seeing and knowing', denying readers the 'God's eye view' of the novelist who knows the minds of all; instead, he positions central characters – and by extension, readers – as 'anthropological participant-observers [who] struggle to understand both other worlds and themselves' (p.47).

Interpretations of reality are contested even between Bernard and Lenina; Peat (2015) points out that their 'jostling divergent viewpoints disallow a comfortable or stable perspective' (p.46), with Bernard attempting to construct the Reservation as 'an othered space of cultural difference' (p.45) while Lenina insists on highlighting the uncomfortable proximities between the Reservation and the World State, reflecting what Parrinder calls the 'dialectic of analogy and difference' in the process of cognitive estrangement. Verbal communication only partially extends the limited epistemology of seeing. Despite witnessing the religious ritual of self-flagellation with their own eyes, Bernard and Lenina's incomprehension is evident; Lenina reacts with 'sobbing', which shifts to 'astonishment' when John tells them in English that yes, shockingly, he '*wanted* to be hit with that whip' (Huxley 1994, p.100). Knowledge, though extended, is still partial, highlighting the limitations of 'civilized' epistemologies when confronted with a different culture.

The entire construct of 'civilization' is called into question by the characterization of Linda, John's 'civilized' mother who was left in the Savage Reservation by accident. Using Shippey's definitions, Linda's 'singular' and 'civilized' cultural norms are revealed to be a 'whole complex of learned behaviour' entirely dependent on hypnopaedic sayings, inculcated in childhood and reinforced by concomitant societal structures. She lacks the epistemological tools to understand the basis of her own culture, which in turn makes it impossible to explain herself or comprehend the culture she finds herself in. An ironic example of this is when she complains to Lenina:

> "Civilization is Sterilization," I used to say to [the Savages] […] as though they
> were children. But of course, they didn't understand. (Huxley 1994, p.104).

Linda quotes the same hypnopaedic phrase that Lenina does earlier, further undermining its status by echoing Bernard's earlier words, 'they aren't civilized. So there's no point in…' (Huxley 1994, p.94). The irony is that Linda, calling them 'children', fails to realise that she is the childlike one, having lived an adult life encouraged to be 'infantile' (Huxley 1994, p.84). The superiority she assumes over the Savages is thus unsettled, opening up a possible reading of a subverted civilized-savage dynamic. The disruption of the civilized-savage binary is also embodied by Linda herself, whose proximity to both makes her an unsettling figure to the 'civilized' Bernard and Lenina.

Hypnopaedia, a central pillar in the World State's culture, further contributes to the depiction of Linda's weak epistemology. 'Homely hypnopaedic wisdom' (Huxley 1994, p.46) comes across as a bizarre replacement of traditional folk wisdom handed down through the family unit, which no longer exists. It can be read as Huxley's critique of real-world uncritical absorption of cultural norms, questioning the potential irrationality of handed-down family wisdom. On the other hand, this disembodied construction further problematizes this construct of 'civilization'. Unlike folk wisdom, which can at the very least be attributed to specific individuals known to the recipient, hypnopaedia lacks even this epistemological basis; whereas folk wisdom is often transmitted in a dialogic, personal relationship, hypnopaedic transmission is opaque and one-way, therefore almost impossible to investigate epistemologically. It has no discernible source and is disembodied in origin, emanating from a 'loud-speaker' (Huxley 1994, p.21) at the touch of a switch in a 'soft, insinuating, indefatigable voice' (Huxley 1994, p.23). Linda's parrot-like repetition of hypnopaedic sayings only underscores how indefensible and relative these cultural norms seem to be, again casting doubt on the title of 'civilized' that she continues to stake as hers.

John is an embodiment of this epistemologically uncertain space created by the interaction between cultures. A strange hybrid of three cultures, John lacks a deep understanding of any one as he is estranged in significant ways from each. While growing up, he is unable to understand much of what Linda tells him about the 'Other Place' (Huxley 1994, p.110), partly because of his lack of exposure to its material realities, and partly because of Linda's inability to explain her knowledge or make sense of its relation to Savage culture:

> "But how do you make chemicals, Linda? Where do they come from?"
> "Well, I don't know. You get them out of bottles." (Huxley 1994, p.113).

The phrase 'I don't know' occurs over and over, often in despair. When John asks why the women punish her, she replies, 'I don't know. How should I know? […] They say those men are *their* men.' (Huxley 1994, p.109). Linda not only lacks knowledge, but lacks the ability to know *how* to know, making her unable to pass down her cultural norms: 'I never *could* make him understand that [being promiscuous is] what civilized people do.' (Huxley 1994, p.105). Ultimately, John turns to Savage culture: 'Linda never seemed to know. The old men of the pueblo had much more definite answers.' (Huxley 1994, p.113). He is, however, excluded from the most significant rites of passage, leaving him unanchored even from the culture most central to his identity.

John's bizarre relationship with knowledge is most exemplified in his relationship with *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, providing him with a particular representation of Elizabethan English culture. This is most evident in the following exchange, in which John is shown a rocket in flight:

> "Twelve hundred and fifty kilometres an hour," said the Station Master impressively. "What do you think of that, Mr Savage?"
> John thought it very nice. "Still," he said, "Ariel could put a girdle round the earth in forty minutes." (Huxley 1994, p.137).

John reads Shakespearean drama as a source of literal knowledge on material reality, having no way of understanding the material, historical, political, and aesthetic influences that underlie this particular representation of 17th-century England. His epistemological relationship with Elizabethan culture is severely distorted, as seen in this instance when he believes that a fictional fairy is superior to a real rocket. In Shakespeare, he possesses a source of knowledge, but does not understand what it is and how to use it. John draws upon this abstracted third culture as a part of his identity, but this cultural 'knowledge' is quite distorted from its reality, which in turn reflects his epistemologically uncertain identity as a site of culture clash.

The culture clashes that happen in *Brave New World* thus unsettle the labels of 'savage' and 'civilized', opening up space for epistemological uncertainty both on the part of the characters as well as the readers. Readers may have already settled comfortably into the representation of the 'civilized' world by the time the Savage Reservation is introduced, but this clash disrupts it and throws doubt on the entire 'civilized' project of science, cleanliness, consumer consumption, promiscuity, conditioning, the caste system, and so on, causing readers to question their views about some of these cultural norms. Yet Huxley does not allow readers a comfortable position to inhabit, to which I come back later.

**Le Guin's *The Dispossessed***

Le Guin disallows the construction of a 'singular' or 'civilized' definition of 'culture' from the very beginning, by staging a comparison between Anarres and Urras. Anarres, we find out, is a 'mining colony of Urras' (Le Guin 2002, p.79), which exists in its present form primarily for the political function of exiling Urrasti anarchists, and subsequently also because 'it would cost the Urrasti more to dig the ores themselves; therefore they don't invade us' (Le Guin 2002, p.79). In short, Anarres is a colony with an unequal trade relationship with wealthy, capitalist Urras, enforced by the threat of violence. Indeed, the juxtaposition of 'civilised' and 'savage' in *Brave New World* is paralleled by the colonial relationship depicted in *The Dispossessed*. Higgins (2011) notes that, written 'within a historical moment defined by the context of global decolonization' (p.350), many of Le Guin's works disrupt an imperial or colonial gaze, challenging imperial epistemologies with epistemologies from the periphery. This is reflected in Le Guin's choice of an Anarresti protagonist; although many have criticized Shevek as a hero of a typically 'euclidean, European, and masculine mould' (Jose 1991, p.190), I would argue that Shevek's experience of estrangement in Urras does open up an epistemologically uncertain space, both for Shevek as an Anarresti and for readers who relate with the Urrasti context.

The novel was originally subtitled 'An Ambiguous Utopia', but it is not clear for much of the text whether this refers to Urras or Anarres. In the opening lines of the novel, the wall that divides them is described as 'ambiguous, two-faced' (Le Guin 2002, p.5), already allowing the possibilities of different and subjective realities. Spencer (2005) suggests that:

> Le Guin brings the two worlds, and by implication the two positions, into a proximity that starts to undermine the stability of both (p.126).

This proximity can be seen in the repeated motif of 'prisons' or 'boxes'. Anarres is initially described as a 'great prison camp' (Le Guin 2002, p.5), bleak and grey; in contrast, Urras is presented as vast and spacious, 'the most beautiful view Shevek had ever seen' (Le Guin 2002, p.56). The imagery of constriction and spaciousness symbolically reflects Shevek's departure from suffocating Anarres to Urras where, apparently, he can be free to pursue more advanced physics.

Throughout the novel, however, Shevek changes his mind, highlighting the ambiguity of both worlds and the changing perspectives one might have over time. Urras (Le Guin 2002) is

later seen as a 'jail' (p.242), 'box' (p.285), and even 'Hell' (p.286), suggesting that the subtitle refers instead to Anarres, which, though ambiguous, is a utopia compared to what Shevek now sees as a dystopian Urras. Yet this is immediately contested by the Terran ambassador Keng, to whom Urras 'comes as close as any [world] could to Paradise' (Le Guin 2002, p.286) compared to her own ruined Earth. The ambiguity of utopia/dystopia is thus explored through a plurality of perspectives within the text, which opens up an epistemologically uncertain space, never allowing the reader to be completely secure. Indeed, Call (2007) argues that Le Guin's works move beyond modern dialectical thinking to embrace a radical subjectivity that is 'perpetually provisional, deeply contextual, and powerfully psychological' (p.90) in its exploration of a postmodern anarchism.

Shevek's epistemologically uncertain encounter with Urrasti culture begins on the spaceship in the very first chapter, where he is hosted by Dr Kimoe. Peat's (2015) analysis of Huxley's narrative method in *Brave New World* is applicable here, as Le Guin also positions the protagonist as 'anthropological participant-observer', emphasizing the 'gap between seeing and knowing' (p.47). Shevek notices that the captain and crew avoid him; when the captain has to speak to him, he does so 'with uneasy disrespect', while the Second Officer 'seems to be afraid' of him (Le Guin 2002, p.15). It is implied that Kimoe, Shevek's sole source of explanation, attempts to soften the racism Shevek instinctively senses:

> The doctor, who was ready to explain everything, had his analysis ready: "He's used to looking on all foreigners as inferior […] Perhaps it won't always be so," Dr Kimoe added, evidently with an intent to flatter Shevek or draw him out, which Shevek ignored (Le Guin 2002, p.15).

Kimoe adds that 'these officers are ignorant' (Le Guin 2002, p.16), using the third person voice to distance himself from them. Shevek's responses are ambiguous, as seen in the way he 'ignore[s]' Kimoe's addition and comments, 'is it only bigots then who are allowed to go out into the cosmos?' (Le Guin 2002, p.16). One might guess that he knows what is happening but is too polite or uncertain to contradict Kimoe. It is, however, impossible to verify Kimoe's explanations; there is an uncertainty in the space created between seeing, speaking, and knowing, with Shevek positioned as dependent on a single, rather unreliable source of knowledge.

The central uncertainty Shevek grapples with during his time on Urras is the nature of his relationship with the Urrasti state of A-Io, where he is hosted warmly at a university to pursue physics. This uncertainty is precipitated by Chifoilisk, a foreign physicist, who offers a

different interpretation: that Shevek has been 'bought' by the Ioti state, that he is in 'danger' from agents who will steal his theory from him, and that Shevek would be better off serving *Chifoilisk's* state, Thu (Le Guin 2002, p.113-117). What is most unsettling is Chifoilisk's claim that Shevek lacks the specific epistemological framework needed to understand the situation: 'No matter how intelligent a man is he can't see what he doesn't know *how* to see' (Le Guin 2002, p.113, my emphasis). Chifoilisk claims that Shevek is unable to 'see' the logic of the Ioti 'capitalist economy' and 'pluto-oligarchic State':

> "I don't underestimate you, God knows, but […] You have got to understand the powers behind the individuals […] This is a profit economy, Shevek!" (Le Guin 2002, p.115).

Chifoilisk places Shevek in a position of not knowing who to trust, warning him against Pae, the Ioti physicist whom Shevek already instinctively distrusts. Chifoilisk, as Shevek correctly guesses, is himself 'an agent of [his] government', making him equally untrustworthy. Despite Shevek's ability to hold his own in the exchange, it is not clear that he is making the right decision to remain in A-Io, creating doubt as to whether his limited sources of information and natural instinct are sufficient for knowledge and judgement, or whether he is indeed a 'child among thieves' (Le Guin 2002, p.115). Even more unsettling is that 'four or five days later Shevek […] was informed that [Chifoilisk] had gone back to Thu' (Le Guin 2002, p.117). Pae hints that Chifoilisk has been summoned back abruptly by his government because he 'did [something] wrong', implying that Chifoilisk had the specific mission to win Shevek over, thus cementing his unreliability; furthermore, this makes it impossible for Shevek to ever follow up on the contents of their conversation.

Chifoilisk's counter-narrative introduces an epistemological and moral tension which forms the central inner conflict for much of the text. Shevek later discovers an anonymous letter in his pocket accusing him of 'work[ing] with the power system' and urging him to 'join with us your brothers', which shakes him 'both morally and intellectually' (Le Guin 2002, p.160). The letter, in one sense, can be understood as confirmation of Chifoilisk's claims that Shevek has been gullibly 'co-opted' (Le Guin 2002, p.160). Its contents are, however, highly questionable. Shevek 'had no idea how the letter had got there' and so cannot verify its reliability or the motives of its author. He conceptually understands that poor people exist but cannot experientially confirm it:

> He knew they were here: but where? He had not met one, not seen one, he had not met a poor man yet (Le Guin 2002, p.160).

Finally, he lacks the knowledge needed to act: 'he did not know how to break down the wall. And if he did, where could he go?' (Le Guin 2002, p.160).

A microcosm of culture clash between Anarres and Urras, this epistemologically uncertain space challenges the assumptions of both cultures. Shevek, bringing a different epistemology, challenges the logics of power that shape the states of Urras, as he 'approach[es] everybody as a person' instead of seeing the 'powers behind the individuals' (Le Guin 2002, p.115). The A-Io, Thu, and Benbili states are thinly veiled representations of what would have been called the First World, Second World, and Third World respectively at the time of Le Guin's writing. In the voice of Shevek, Le Guin challenges the perception of the immutability of the 'politics of reality' (Le Guin 2002, p.169) between the Urrasti states, implicitly challenging real-world political relations and positioning anarchic philosophy as a radical alternative. On the other hand, however, the uncertainties introduced in Urras challenge Shevek's confidence in himself, and by extension, his certainty about the sufficiency and superiority of the anarchic philosophy of Anarres.

The 'epistemological labour of bringing-to-knowledge' is, as Parrinder writes, a 'painstaking, unpredictable process, involving the twists and turns, the obstacles and dead ends typical of all intellectual enquiry' (2000, p.6). This central issue unsettles Shevek's conception of himself as an ethical, highly intelligent scientist and anarchist. Although he is in many aspects 'a man imbued with euclidean reason and a European bias towards the promise of technology and science' (Jose 1991, p.190), this uncertain space of cultural encounter opens up the possibility of subversion, allowing the possibility that Shevek is the very opposite: an unethical fool. Furthermore, though he certainly starts off as a man of science and knowledge, this situation forces him into the realm of instinct and subjective perception, in which he is forced to make judgements based on limited and highly unreliable sources. His apparent realisation about the Ioti government is dangerously uncertain, creating doubt about whether it is based on truth, with the risk that everything about this counter-narrative could be an elaborate deception.

**'Empty Hands' Versus 'Life Within a Bottle'**
*The Dispossessed* eventually resolves the epistemological uncertainty of Shevek's relationship with the Ioti state. Chifoilisk is found to be at least partly correct: the narrator reveals Pae

'pocket[ing] one of the papers' on Shevek's table (Le Guin 2002, p.193). Interestingly, although this confirmation happens for the reader while Shevek is asleep, Le Guin allows Shevek the same knowledge – he sees with 'hideous clarity' the next morning that he has been 'betrayed' (2002, p.225) – in an authorial sleight-of-hand which creates continuity and intimacy by conflating the reader's knowledge with Shevek's. Shevek's moral uncertainty is also largely resolved, as the evil of the Ioti government is confirmed, justifying his escape from the university, then from Urras, and his eventual return to Anarres. Pae's individual hypocrisy is conflated with the entire morally reprehensible system which he represents; in response to Shevek's discomfort with Ioti and Thuvian military interventions in Benbili, Pae's comment that 'we've outgrown the kind of barbarism that used to bring war into the heart of the high civilisations' (Le Guin 2002, p.227) ironically exposes the callous and self-serving hypocrisy of the supposedly 'civilized' Ioti and Thuvian states. This is only reinforced by the ruthless police treatment of the defenseless working-class protestors later on (Le Guin 2002, p.248). Thus, Le Guin resolves the issues which form the crux of epistemological and moral uncertainty for Shevek.

At the same time, however, *The Dispossessed* ultimately embraces an optimistic and hopeful view of epistemological uncertainty, conceptualising it as a condition of life which is necessary for meaningful cultural encounter, change, and progress. This is reflected in how despite significant uncertainties, Shevek is ultimately granted broadly correct judgements and a successful escape from the clutches of the Ioti state. Uncertainty is tied with trust, and both are necessary in order to move forward, as expressed in Shevek's speech:

> "if it is the future you seek […] you must come to it with empty hands. You must come to it alone […] wholly dependent on other people for [your] life." (Le Guin 2002, p.248).

A significant turning point comes when Shevek finally arrives at his Theory of Simultaneity, realising that 'he had been groping and grabbing after certainty', but it 'is not granted', meaning that certainty is elusive (Le Guin 2002, p.231). Furthermore, Shevek realizes that 'if granted, [it] would become a prison' (Le Guin 2002, p.231), tying together the ambiguous metaphor of both Anarres and Urras as prisons. Instead, freedom comes with uncertainty.

The necessity of uncertainty for progress is particularly emphasized by the final chapter, in which the Hainishman Ketho decides to land on Anarres with Shevek, stating that it is his duty to 'explore and investigate a new world when possible' although Shevek warns him that it could be dangerous and 'nobody is quite sure what happens next' (Le Guin 2002, p.316). The

subjectivity of the individual and the possibility of change over time is highlighted in Ketho's words, 'We have tried everything. Anarchism, with the rest. But *I* have not tried it' (Le Guin 2002, p.317), resonating with postmodern readings of Le Guin's anarchism as 'perpetually provisional, [and] deeply contextual' (Call 2007, p.90). The counter to the motif of 'prisons' separating cultures from each other is the motif of 'empty hands', symbolizing an openness and willingness to give and receive, with which Le Guin starts and ends the novel. Uncertainty, freedom, risk, change, and progress are all one in a cyclical process of personal estrangement and reconciliation, as

> Le Guin implies that openness to a certain amount of change is part of what makes a society utopian in the first place (Booker & Thomas 2009, p.230).

Conversely, *Brave New World* does not resolve the tensions of epistemological uncertainty raised in the novel, instead portraying a violent and non-negotiable culture clash that ultimately leads to destruction. Meckier's (2002) analysis of the typescript suggests that Huxley initially intended the novel to follow a pattern not dissimilar to *The Dispossessed*, beginning with John and Linda in the Reservation, relating John's clash with 'civilization', and finally casting John and Bernard as heroic and subversionary figures against the system represented by World Controller Mustapha Mond: in Meckier's words, 'a fairly conventional antiutopia' (p.436). Instead, the novel as we have it stages the ideological debate between John and Mond as

> a clash of inadequate perspectives the reader cannot resolve […] two incomplete philosophies collide, neither able to defeat or accommodate the other. (Meckier 2002, p.449-450)

In one sense, Mond wins the debate; he thoroughly unsettles John's notions of God, vice, and value, positioning John's beliefs as unanchored, while positioning his own view as firmly anchored to material reality: 'Providence takes its cue from men' (Huxley 1994, p.208). John's values are stripped of their value and left adrift without any defensible justification of their absolute existence. Yet Mond's use of history, philosophy, literature, and religion to win the argument undermines the very ideology of the system he represents, which regards it as axiomatic that 'history is bunk' (Huxley 1994, p.29), unsettling his authority by revealing its hypocrisy. Mond's eloquent justifications also fail to resolve the tensions explored throughout the novel, such as the weaknesses of Linda's 'civilized' epistemologies; he also fails to convince John, creating an uncomfortable sense that something is not quite right. Readers are

likely to resonate with elements of John's beliefs, making this ideological tension all the more unsatisfactory. The space of epistemological uncertainty widens, denying the reader a comfortable position to inhabit; Huxley himself writes later that the choice is 'between insanity on the one hand and lunacy on the other' (1946, p.xlii).

If the symbol of cultural encounter in *The Dispossessed* is that of 'empty hands', *Brave New World*'s would be the metaphor of 'life inside a bottle' (Huxley 1994, p.196). All the cultures in the novel are represented as a kind of 'bottle': static, limited, and rigidly defined by set parameters that cannot be changed, resulting in destructive culture clashes and an inability to understand or communicate effectively across cultures. In *Brave New World*, this results in John ultimately committing suicide, as he cannot reconcile his 'Savage' value system with his actions of having finally succumbed to the promiscuity of 'civilization'. Culture as a 'bottle' is inextricably tied to the issue of power: although John wants to escape – as Shevek does – he cannot, because Mond 'wanted to go on with the experiment' (Huxley 1994, p.214). John tries to escape, going out to live in the countryside, but he cannot – he is still inside the 'bottle', bringing the culture clash to its final destruction.

Shippey calls *Brave New World* an 'enclosed universe' story (2016, p.xiv); conversely, the universe of *The Dispossessed* is what we might call an open system. While the main culture clash is between the Urrastis and Anarrestis, surprising new actors who belong to neither culture are introduced almost at the very end of the novel and play a significant role in changing the direction of the plot by helping Shevek to escape. The sudden insertion of the Terrans and Hainish people underscores the idea that there are many cultures and events beyond one's existing knowledge, suggesting that there are always new opportunities and potential for change. More importantly, it also undermines the hegemony and power of Urras. Although Anarres is a colony of Urras, the ending of the novel opens up the possibility of subversion and change, in tension with the existing colonial situation. As Higgins (2011) argues, Le Guin's Hainish stories point towards a cosmopolitan politics, reworking the colonial dynamic in 'an always unfinished hegemony that is constantly interrogating and renegotiating its own constitutive exclusions' (p.333).

Huxley and Le Guin's depictions of culture clash in the novel resonate with Shippey's view that 'the real enemy [is] not any single belief [...] but rigid beliefs not susceptible to change or challenge' (2016, p.101). Both novels explore conditions of epistemological uncertainty, unsettling the characters' views of cultural norms and in turn challenging readers' perceptions of real-world issues. Ultimately, *The Dispossessed* embraces estrangement, reconciliation and uncertainty as a part of cultural encounter and progress, this optimism

coexisting with the tension of existing power dynamics, while *Brave New World* ends with a starkly unresolved clash that, in the suicide of John, underscores the destructiveness of culture clash when the cultures cannot or will not accommodate the possibility of change.

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# Yearning to Belong: Willa Muir's Struggle with the Motherland

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**Abstract:**

Willa Muir's life (1890-1970) was defined by estrangement and isolation, but she sought, almost desperately, to belong somewhere and to someone. Her memoir, *Belonging* (1968), appears to show that she found such a place in her husband, Edwin (1887-1959), the admired poet, critic, and novelist. Yet undertones of anxiety, of yearning for something else – without knowing what it is, perhaps – show through. The memoir and the autoethnographic aspects of another later-life work, *Living with Ballads* (1965), reveals her motherland, Scotland, to be the source of this anxiety. Moreover, her published novels, *Imagined Corners* (1931) and *Mrs Ritchie* (1933), emphasize her deep feelings of separation from her homeland due to competing ideologies, namely those of gender roles and religion. Muir's separation from Scotland began with her parents who were 'displaced persons' in the mainland, isolated culturally and linguistically in Montrose due to their Shetlandic identity. As her education and feminist values burgeoned, Muir continued to feel estranged from the patriarchal Calvinistic community in which she grew up and her relationship with her mother began to break down. Her estrangement from Scotland worsened with Edwin's public criticism of Scotland's culture in *Scottish Journey* (1935) and *Scott and Scotland* (1936). She grew to see the country as one which had caused his unhappiness. Muir only begins to find reconciliation with Scotland in her later works. Following her estrangement with her son, Gavin, Muir chose to return to Scotland, where she died. But *Living with Ballads* (1965) and *Belonging* (1968) reveal this reconciliation to be only partial.

**Keywords:** *Willa Muir, feminism, Scotland, women's writing, identity politics*

Until the 1990s, Scottish women's writing faced general obscurity.[1] Writing of the third wave feminist literary revival, Carol Anderson and Aileen Christianson note that this revival 'has not only expanded the Scottish literary "canon", it has brought new contexts in which to read the work' of 'lost' women poets and novelists (2000, p.7).[2] Up to this point, Willa Muir, despite her significant contributions to the landscape of German literature in the English-speaking

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[2] *A History of Scottish Women's Writing,* edited by Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan and published by Edinburgh University Press in 1997, was a pivotal text for pushing women's position in the Scottish canon. At 716 pages, the anthology showed that the topic of women's writing was far from narrow in scope, and certainly not limited in authors, poets, essayists, and dramatists.

world, was all but forgotten. At her death in 1970 in Dunoon, Muir left behind a stack of papers, an estranged son, and four published books that received minimal critical acclaim. Despite the literary world's general tendency to admire Edwin over her,[3] Willa's writing regained critical attention in the wake of newfound interest in some of her contemporaries in the 1980s (such as Virago Press's 1986 edition of Catherine Carswell's *Open the Door!*, originally published in 1931). In 1993, Joy Hendry redressed the balance somewhat by editing Chapman's collection entitled 'Peerie Willa'.[4] But, aside from Canongate reprinting four of Willa's key works, and Aileen Christianson's study, there has been little close attention in recent decades. The flame again fizzled, and Muir is rarely studied and very little known. Her place within the Scottish literary canon has been uncertain thus far, but she has undoubtedly made a considerable contribution to women's writing and European literature in Scotland with her translations. While scholars often analyse Willa's work in relation to her biography, this article seeks to show how Willa's fictionalisation of her life in her works was not for lack of material, but rather an attempt at catharsis and understanding her feelings of displacement. Similarly, scholarship often focuses on Willa and Edwin's years of traveling in Europe, but this article examines Willa's place in Scotland specifically, and how her relationship with her son and her husband shaped her ability to reconcile with Scotland in her later years.

Muir was born Wilhelmina Anderson in 1890. She was raised by Shetlandic parents in Montrose, where she first experienced estrangement. In her memoir, *Belonging* (1968), Muir recounts that 'I did not really belong to the Montrose way of life' and she blames this in part to linguistic differences: 'My people spoke […] the Norse dialect of Shetland, which was not valid outside our front door' (p.19). She goes on to explain her embarrassment as a little girl when,

> four or five older girls squealed in delighted mockery of what I had been saying
> and urged me to say it again (Muir 1968, p.19).

With a sturdy intellect, strong grasp of linguistics, a talent for writing, and unwavering curiosity, she left Montrose for St Andrews, then London, and eventually to travel to Europe with Edwin. She held numerous careers over her lifetime, often simultaneously, including teaching and translating German texts. Her time in continental Europe strengthened her

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[3] This article will make reference to Willa and Edwin by their first names in order to avoid confusion. However, in instances where only the surname 'Muir' is used, it is in reference to Willa.

[4] Hendry is an admitted friend of Gavin Muir (1927-?). She has expressed fondness for Willa Muir on several occasions, and has been an advocate in her publishing history for the re-emergence of Willa's work.

German to the point that she became one of the most significant German translators of the time. In fact, her translations, with which Edwin helped in part, often made up the bulk of the family's income, supporting Edwin in his poetry, Gavin in his education, and a one- to two-person household staff. Her life and writings are both indicative of and singular for their time period. For instance, while her representations of gender are decidedly progressive in that she offers women liberation from gender norms, including suggestions of a queer relationship (see section on *Imagined Corners*, published 1931), she retains some concepts of essentialism in her fundamental understanding of what women and men are capable. Muir was battling with strict gender norms, which likely influenced her essentialist viewpoints, but which also made the independent and monstrous women in her novels more unique. As Margery Palmer McCulloch states:

> despite the fact that women were increasingly making their way into the workplace and had achieved entitlement to vote in 1918 and on equal terms in 1928, the continuing social perception of a woman's role in these years was a domestic one (2004, p.xvi).

In 1933, the Scottish poet Nannie K. Wells argued that women's independence – like that of Muir's heroines in *Imagined Corners* – would not harm society or the family unit, but strengthen it. All that was required was a new framework. Wells also suggests that lack of independence would, in fact, be the real threat to society's development – as we see in Muir's next novel *Mrs Ritchie* (1933). Wells states, that 'Woman in the process of her individuation will carry the family and the home in some shape with her' and as a result, 'the experience, continuously expansive as it is of the family, is an essential of development' (2004, p.214). Wells based some of her theory on her friendship with Willa Muir, explaining a conversation the two had enjoyed: 'when women are economically independent of men they will evolve […] a new technique of the emotions, more delicate, more noble' (2004, p.214). The two other women on whom she based her theory were Catherine Carswell (1879-1946) and Naomi Mitchison (1897-1999) – also 'Scotswomen' and contemporaries of Muir. While other writers may have been writing 'The New Woman', these women were living it, and Wells appears to have believed it was because of their Scottishness:

> the Scotswoman has always been encouraged, both by Scots law and by custom, to "individuate" herself […] And yet in Scotland the family plays a bigger part than in England (2004, p.215).

This is largely simplified, as Muir's novels show. Women in Scotland, particularly in small towns, had not yet gained their liberty, due in large part to religious propriety. In light of this, Muir, Carswell, and Mitchison can be viewed as more revolutionary to have taken this 'custom' and turned it into lived reality. Yet, in *Women: An Inquiry* (1925) we are given an example of Muir's contradictory theories, and the influence of her small-town upbringing. Muir considers the creative possibilities of both men and women and writes that,

> women see humanity in vertical lines, while men see it in horizontal strata. The perfection of each individual is women's business, and the combination of individuals into social systems is man's business (1925, p.28-9).

Nonetheless, despite the tint of contemporary essentialist ideas in her works, she remains one of the first women in Scotland to have written about gender theory, especially in reference to nationality, and to offer female characters sexual freedom and independence (Elphinstone 1997, p.413). Having lived through the end of the Victorian age, the turn of the century, two world wars, women's Suffrage, the Civil Rights movement, the first and second waves of feminism, Muir's writing reveals a disillusionment with her world that cannot be easily reconciled. This is particularly in reference to her place within the Modernist period and the Scottish Renaissance in particular. Christianson writes that the anti-Kailyard nature of Muir's writing places her 'as part of "renaissancism" and modernism in Scotland' but goes on to show how Muir's short story, 'Clock-a-doodle-doo' (1934) pokes fun at the major modernist writers, Hugh MacDiarmid included (2011, p.135; p.136). In part due to this, she acknowledges that, despite Muir's 'central, if at times ambivalent, connection to modernism', the term 'renaissancism' is 'more easily fit for Muir's work than modernism' (Christianson 2011, p.145; p.144).

**The Scottish Renaissance, and Falling Out with MacDiarmid**

The term the 'Scottish Renaissance' was coined by Christopher Grieve (later known by penname Hugh MacDiarmid) in 1922 in the *Scottish Chapbook* – the same year as the publication of T.S. Elliot's 'Wasteland' and James Joyce's *Ulysses.* It was a period of turmoil and fragmentation, with artists looking afresh at a world that had been blown to pieces by the First World War. MacDiarmid's goal was to set forth a mission of renewed Scottish cultural autonomy – starting with poetry written in synthetic Scots, a new kind of language made from an amalgamation of Scots dialects from around the nation. To this day, MacDiarmid's *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926) is one of the most revered and appreciated texts showcasing

how Scots language can be used to produce great literary works – despite criticism from some, like Edwin Muir, claiming otherwise (see below). MacDiarmid wasted no time in introducing a variety of publications to showcase what he saw as Scotland's neglected literary landscape. In general,

> those involved believed that there could be no regeneration of the nation's artistic culture which did not also involve the regeneration of the social, economic and political life of the nation (Palmer McCulloch 2004, p.xiii).

This opened the door for writers like Willa Muir to present her case for reform within her novels and other writings.

However, many of MacDiarmid's promotional energies were directed toward male writers – specifically poets. This was at the expense of women and prose writers (often also women) who required a more established literary language for a sustained work of fiction. As Margery Palmer McCulloch points out, early analysis of the Scottish Renaissance 'was defined by its male contributors alone' (2004, p.xvi). She goes on to explain the revival of women in the Renaissance: 'it is only in recent years that women poets and fiction writers have been given their place in assessments' (Palmer McCulloch 2004, p.xvi). She later notes that Muir did have a role in public debates, unlike many other women writers of the time. These took the form of her feminist essays: *Women: An Inquiry* and *Mrs Grundy in Scotland* (1936). These were not always popular. As Muir wrote to F. Marian McNeill in 1926 of *Women: An Inquiry*: 'My old essay has fallen very flat. […] *The Nation* said it was as unexciting as boiled rice' (2004a).

In general, the Muirs were not always actively involved in the Renaissance, but enjoyed for a time a close relationship with MacDiarmid and the Renaissance composer F.G. Scott, as well as James Whyte and others on the periphery of the movement, including Catherine Carswell. However, the publication of Edwin's *Scottish Journey* (1935) and *Scott and Scotland* (1936) changed everything. These books came at a time when Edwin felt disillusioned with St Andrews and ultimately Scotland as a whole. Edwin describes in his *Autobiography* that '[it] was a depressing time, and there was no one with whom we could discuss the dangers we felt coming' (1987, p.244).[5] Edwin praised MacDiarmid in 1934 as the 'most gifted poet who has written in Scots since Burns' (Muir 2004a, p.37) and in a letter to his sister in 1931, he wrote

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[5] This 'depressing' atmosphere would be largely due to the oncoming Second World War the ongoing Spanish War, and the Great Depression. However, in the months preceding, Edwin recounts that a friend reviewed his book of poetry three times, and by the final review, the friend 'had hardly a word to say for them' p.240.

that '[perhaps] in a few years Scotland will be a Socialist republic' (E. Muir 2004c, p.319). His views at the time are unsurprising given it was during this period, in 1934, that the Scottish National Party (SNP) took form. Yet, his disappointments in St Andrews in 1940 seem to have marred his outlook.

Willa describes in her memoir how MacDiarmid began to see Edwin as 'The Enemy, and his [MacDiarmid's] fighting blood, […] prompted a literary vendetta against Edwin Muir which went on for years' (Muir 1968, p.195). This further isolated Muir from Scotland, as she felt a special protectiveness over Edwin. As their good friend Catriona Soukup explains, 'Edwin was perfectly content to let Willa come between himself and any adversary' (1993, p.20). The two were an inseparable pair and a vendetta against Edwin was a vendetta against Willa. This meant that Edwin's feelings of estrangement from Scotland were seen by Willa as a betrayal by her motherland: she could not be happy if he was unhappy. Regarding the schism caused by the abrasive *Scottish Journey* and *Scott and Scotland*, Muir shows how she blamed herself for Edwin's discontent and his 'uncharacteristic acerbity' in these texts. She writes in *Belonging* that this was caused by

> the effect living in St Andrews had had on him, and I knew that I was responsible
> for his being in St Andrews (Muir 1968, p.195).

Arguably, the war, and the difficulty for Edwin in finding a satisfactory job also contributed much to his unhappiness. Neither of these problems would have found a solution anywhere in Scotland. Margaret Elphinstone has written of the Muirs that '[it] is in Scotland that the feelings of alienation in the social world strike agonising chords in the inner world too', citing specifically St Andrews in 1940 (1997, p.405). Muir was never given the chance to reconcile her relationship with St Andrews after the family left for Edinburgh, but her decision to deposit her papers at the university before her death suggests she still felt a strong, if tormented, affection for the town.

### Choosing Edwin and a Literary Life

Willa's estrangement from Scotland began, as mentioned above, at a young age. Muir did not fit in with Montrose society, and clashes between her mother and herself are hinted at in *Belonging* and in her letters. When alerting her mother to her marriage, she writes, 'My mother ignored my announcement […] having probably acquired a habit of discounting anything I said' (Muir 1968, p.27). She goes on to explain how her mother wrote, 'pleading'

that the two 'be married properly by a minister of the Kirk' (Muir 1968, p.27). 'How like my mother,' she wrote, 'she meant well but she did not understand' (Muir 1968, p.27). Muir's mother adhered to propriety, while Willa was perfectly content to marry a man who was 'no gentleman' (1968, p.23) and wrote atheist, Nietzschean aphorisms that ultimately angered her Christian bosses at Gypsy Hill Teacher Training College.[6] Muir disregarded her mother's wishes, and left her work rather than give up her choice of life partner. Willa felt she had found her place of belonging – with Edwin – and if this could not fit into her current life, she would leave it to start anew.

The disparity between her ideals and that of small-town northeast Scotland are evident in her two published novels *Imagined Corners* and *Mrs Ritchie*.[7] Of *Imagined Corners*, Muir writes in *Belonging* that she felt if she could look at her memories objectively, without emotion, she could write a story,

> imagining what might have happened had I married my Rugby champion and gone to live there [Montrose], and I suppose, assuring myself what a nightmare that wrong marriage would have turned out to be (1968, p.125).[8]

Her fictionalized portrayal of her 'Rugby champion' Cecil Morrison as Hector Shand paints an unfortunate picture of middle-class men in northeast Scotland. A contemporary review describes Hector as a 'type common in puritanical Scotland' before going into more detail, noting that he

> fornicates promiscuously as circumstances allow, whose sexual activities run to waste and who marries someone who is not so much a wife as a mother to him' ('Mrs Muir' 2004, p.85).

Her mirror characters Elizabeth (Lizzie)/Elise Shand/Mütze (hereafter referred to as Elise) and Elizabeth Ramsay/Shand show the effect that small town religious propriety has on educated, free-willed women. While Hector is free to commit adultery and drunken antics, the 'proper

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[6] *We Moderns*, published in 1918 under the pseudonym Edward Moore, was Edwin's first published book. It's a series of aphorisms regarding everything from the Modernist mindset to gender to religion. Upon marrying Edwin in 1919 Muir was forced to leave her position as vice principal and lecturer at Gypsy Hill Teacher Training College because of its contents.

[7] The title for this novel comes from John Donne's Holy Sonnet. Lines 1-4 of the poem read: 'At the round earth's imagin'd corners, blow/ Your trumpets, angels, and arise, arise/ From death, you numberless infinites/ Of souls, and to your scatter'd bodies go;'

[8] Willa became engaged to Cecil Wilmot Morrison in 1911, at the age of 21. The engagement ended in autumn 1913 after Willa discovered Cecil's numerous affairs.

Calderwick'[9] women in the text push Elizabeth to keep him under control and within respectability. Ultimately, Mabel and Aunt Janet blame her when he goes astray. Hector's Aunt Janet is the first to criticize Elizabeth's seeming distaste for maintaining her husband's moral compass. After this conversation, Elizabeth ponders, '[I] must learn to be a good wife. Was that what Aunt Janet was driving at?' (Muir 1987, p.66).

Throughout, both Elizabeths experience judgment for their alleged indiscretions – Elise cannot escape her past in which she ran off with a married man, and Elizabeth is judged for her 'failure' to maintain her husband's respectability. Neither Elise nor Elizabeth are able to reconcile with Calderwick's ideologies, and ultimately both choose to leave. Elizabeth, unlike Elise, attempts to conform to the expectations of Calderwick. But, like Willa with Cecil, she ultimately refuses to accept blame for her husband's infidelity and drunken behaviour. Elise, however, has always been estranged from Calderwick and Muir alerts her readers to this from the start. Of his estranged sister, John Shand thinks:

> Lizzie was a wild creature, but not a selfish one. On the other hand, […] Lizzie had behaved scandalously; she had outraged everything he stood for (Muir 1987, p.25).

Despite Elise's partial reconciliation with Calderwick – insomuch as she was able to return to see her family for the first time in twenty years – she cannot stay. It must be a distanced relationship; partially estranged to reconcile.

Unlike Elise, Elizabeth's future is uncertain. Early on we see her frustration with the small town, which grows as the novel progresses. After Hector's infidelity with Mabel, Elizabeth blames not him, but the small town that created him in that fashion: 'She was glad to lay the blame of it on Calderwick' (Muir 1931, p.87). Elizabeth sees these gender norms – of the immoral man who needs a wife to keep him 'straight' – as a reproduction of old-fashioned patriarchal traditions. In so doing, however, she, at least in the beginning, unwittingly follows these traditions by blaming the norms alone, without expecting Hector to step out of his social construction and remain a loyal husband. This is not unlike Muir's own grappling with essentialist norms in *Women: An Inquiry*. In the final section of the novel, 'Precipitation', Elizabeth thinks:

> Whatever she did in Calderwick would look ugly in that bleak grey light [….]
> Calderwick was to blame, not she. She had done her best (Muir 1987, p.222).

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[9] Calderwick is Muir's fictionalised representation of Montrose. In *Belonging* Muir writes that Calderwick is a 'Montrose setting' (1968, p.125).

Though this conclusion does not offer much hope that Elizabeth will ever be able to return to Calderwick, Muir suggests otherwise in a personal letter to F. Marian McNeill: 'Elise & Hector were bound to leave it [Calderwick]. Elizabeth was almost equally bound to come back' (2004b, p.209). We are given some hope that there is potential for a strong-willed woman to reconcile with a patriarchal, puritanical culture. If Muir thought Elizabeth was bound to return, that could suggest she thought the same of herself – at least, perhaps, in relation to St Andrews. However, her life in Montrose was not meant to be. Muir wrote a letter in which she described the situation between herself, her husband, and Mrs Anderson while they were staying in her mother's home in Montrose: 'My poor mother has had a bad time with us!' (2004a, p.201). Like Elise, Muir's return home only emphasized how little she fit into Montrose. Yet, as Elphinstone writes of Elise and Elizabeth, 'neither can entirely liberate herself from the restrictions of Calderwick' (1997, p.404). Muir's writings, constantly struggling as they are with essentialist gender norms and her own more liberated ideals, would suggest that Elphinstone's analysis of the heroines of *Imagined Corners* also applies to Willa.

Muir's relationship with Calderwick/Montrose is further suggested in *Mrs Ritchie*. While *Imagined Corners* can be seen as the more whimsical of the two, *Mrs Ritchie* shows how Muir's life may have progressed had she not only stayed in Montrose, but also succumbed to gendered oppression. Elphinstone describes how Muir created a character 'who conforms to a Scottish construction of womanhood, and shows her to be diabolical' (1997, p.413). Annie Rattray, later Ritchie, is an intelligent, curious girl whose mother beats back her ambitions to be a teacher. Being a lower-class family, the Rattrays cannot afford for Annie to continue school rather than go to work. As a result, she ceases to work hard in school, and begins to befriend the other children. However, after she is 'humiliated' during a game of 'mesmerism' (Muir 1933, p.51), Annie turns to God for a psychological release and a sense of power:

> In that moment of exultation, Annie discarded her earthly father for ever, [….] God was her Father. In Mill Wynd she was a changeling (Muir 1933, p.56).

By 'electing herself to grace' she has, in her mind, a reason for her violence (Elphinstone 1997, p.410). Moreover, Muir shows that Annie's, and Calderwick's, God is 'created in the image of repression and conscious judgement. He is the antithesis of Belonging to the Universe' (Elphinstone 1997, p.408). *Mrs Ritchie* is, by Muir's own admission, a place in which Muir was able to work out and understand the 'motive power of *symbolism* in all our thoughts &

actions' (2004c, p.212-13). She shows the violence to which the oppressed could turn when they feel there is no other escape. Annie becomes the symbol of all women in patriarchal Scottish society and she, in turn, uses symbols and motifs in her re-imaginings of her own life. Early in the novel, Annie imagines she has dominion over her family, sending hail and snow onto their bare backs until it transforms into something more sinister. She imagines that,

> [hers] was no longer a mere power of resistance, but a power of life and death over her subjects. She was more devastating than any hail. They crawled before her–father, mother, sister and schoolmates–while she sat on a throne with a whip in her hand and her feet on the naked back of a brown slave' (Muir 1933, p.13).

Annie Rattray feels trapped in her life, and in order to regain power, she becomes the slave master in her daydreams.[10]

We are not meant to like Annie – we are only meant to understand that her circumstances turned her into the monster she becomes. Willa warns against the dangers of gender norms, writing in a letter that 'it is indirect, not direct propaganda that literature provides' (2004b, p.209). Within these norms, Annie is unable to come to terms with her bleak future and she ultimately estranges herself from her family. On the day of her marriage to Johnny Ritchie, she declares, 'I'll no' let a Rattray set foot across the door' (Muir 1933, p.152). Yet rather than regain contact in later years, as John Shand reaches out to Elise in *Imagined Corners*, Annie Ritchie only becomes more and more isolated. Her house becomes her empire, but also her prison. As Elphinstone suggests, Annie's engagement with Calderwick is both a 'threat and the challenge' and it is this combined force that 'drives Annie Ritchie back into the four walls of her house as into a self-destructive prison' (1997, p.402). Johnny Ritchie, whose childhood home it is, has no control over the workings of the home. Annie locks away the good bread and locks her son in the coal cellar for punishment as a child. Meanwhile, Johnny spends much of his time in the shed building coffins – including his own. Upon his death, the title of the property is given over to the new 'man of the house' – their son, John Samuel, who hates his mother. The importance of the house to her 'power' is outlined explicitly by her daughter:

> That's like telling mother that her body has never been her own, thought Sarah Annie. For she's been tied to that house, and it was only in the house that she was somebody (Muir 1933, p.287).

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[10] There is much to be said on problematic racial politics within this book. I deal with this, in some detail, in my thesis.

Once more, as when she was a child, the patriarchal laws of their time strip her of the only thing that matters to her. It is only her son's suicide that saves her place within her home. The novel does not suggest that Annie feels distraught at his loss. Rather, its conclusion suggests that she feels she has finally triumphed. The novel ends with a terrifying moment, in which Annie appears reconciled with her son and husband only because they are dead – a fact that her daughter, Sarah Annie, realises. As Annie Ritchie kneels in front of the graves of her son and husband,

> Sarah Annie, as if awakening from a sleep, stared at her mother's black figure kneeling on the green grass. […] Mrs Ritchie did not notice her daughter had gone. She was still patting the mounds, first one and then the other, saying, with tender possessiveness: "Poor Johnny…. Poor John Samuel" (Muir 1933, 338).

Sarah Annie flees to England, with no suggestion that she will return to Scotland.

These novels, in combination, do not offer a positive picture of reconciliation between women, nor of women and place. Moreover, they suggest the difficulties Muir had with her own experience of Scotland. Elphinstone notes:

> The narrator of *Imagined Corners* makes one thing clear: belonging to the universe, if one happens to be Scottish, means coming to terms with belonging, or not belonging, to Scotland. Elise and Elizabeth are Scottish women, and it is in terms of an idea of Scotland that their identity is constructed (1997, p.407).

We are granted some hope that Elizabeth may eventually return – perhaps to make the change she wants to see. This can only be achieved by leaving Scotland, in this instance to travel to mainland Europe. Muir was true to her assertion that the book is not about 'what *ought* to be in Scotland, but what actually would have happened there in 1913 to the characters' (2004b, p.208-9).

**The Later Years**

Muir's final publications, *Living with Ballads* (1965) and *Belonging* (1968), reveal her attempts to come to terms not just with life without Edwin, but with her career as a writer and translator, with her role as a woman, and with her relationship with Scotland. *Living with Ballads* was a Bollingen Foundation commissioned project that had originally been granted to Edwin. However, his death in 1959 meant that the project would either die with him, or that Willa

would need to take on this new exploration of Scottish ballads. Unsurprisingly, Willa chose the latter. Their good friend Lumir Soukup describes the situation:

> Willa felt morally obliged to write *Living with Ballads* [….] the book was not even in its early stages, and Willa took it over, writing a solid academic work [….] Writing it was, I know, a useful and even necessary therapy, but her heart was not in the work (1993, p.31).

Soukup knew that Willa, at the time of writing *Living with Ballads*, 'had already conceived the idea of writing about her life with Edwin' (1993, p.31). On the final page of *Belonging*, Muir writes simply, 'We belonged together' (1968, p.316). If Muir's place of belonging was with Edwin, his death meant she had to conceive of life without him. *Living with Ballads*, 'Dedicated to the memory of Edwin Muir' (Muir 1968), shows a woman reflecting on her past, her life, and the events that shaped her. She uses communal children's singing games and the communal experience of ballads to regain belonging:

> she brings in her self-in-the-past only to efface her. The experience described is that of merging of self into other, of truly belonging in a shared imaginative experience (Elphinstone 1997, p.403).

Her decision to include Norse influence is likely a nod to hers and Edwin's shared Norse heritage, which shaped the 'private language' (L. Soukup 1993, p.29) of Orcadian and Shetlandic that they spoke at home – another attempt to find her sense of belonging.

     *Living with Ballads* begins with a chapter on 'Children's Singing Games'. Muir brings in her own experience, using her memories of childhood singing games combined with a Freudian analysis to investigate the relevance of these playtime melodies. She writes about her experience within the school with these ballads, and how she

> went to that school at the age of nine and left it three years later because I won a bursary to the Academy […] In the new playground of the Academy I found no singing games; […] Only the working-class girls in our town kept that tradition alive, and only in the school playtime (Muir 1965, p.14).

These singing games always involved '[the] Father, the Mother, and the Lad [lover]' (Muir 1965, p.17). This biographical information offers all the frameworks for a Muir-esque analysis – gender, class, love, small-town, Calvinist Scotland, and family relations – which she then uses to analyse her selection of ballads. Importantly, it also shows her reflecting on a time when

she felt most at ease, and most involved in the community. She regains, or attempts to regain, a sense of belonging to Scotland. Muir chose her ballads and subject matter in line with this framework of reconciliation and of the themes listed above, rather than with a focus on battle tales from the Borders. Section titles show Muir's focus on family, love, and the role of the supernatural in these themes: Hind Horn, Young Beichan, 'Magic. Tam Lin', 'Magic and Family Authority', 'Family Authority: Violence, Murder, and True Love', 'Ballads and Calvinism', and 'Post-Reformation Ballads.' Any action that occurs – 'Violence' and 'Murder' – is strictly in relation to family matters. Muir uses these ballads as a way to find answers for her own life.

Unfortunately, the division between mother and son analysed in the book mirrors her own life. In her discussion of 'Willie's Lady', Muir explains how the ballad discusses 'a mother putting spells upon her son's wife, whom she mislikes' to prevent pregnancy (1965, p.142). However, the son realises his mother is practicing magic and prevents the spells so he and his wife can have a son. In this instance, 'the matriarchy is slily [sic] outwitted' (Muir 1965, p.144). Muir goes on to discuss at least four other ballads that show a mother's power, and its subsequent outdoing by daughter-in-law and son. These suggest anxiety around her role as mother and the power of women in general. This anxiety is present in *Mrs Ritchie*, in which Annie Ritchie, unlike mothers in the ballads, only imagines herself as having a supernatural connection to God but instead must use earthly, physical means to gain control. Other ballads included in *Living with Ballads*, like 'The Wife of Usher's Well', echo Muir's discomfort with her estrangement from her son. The Wife's three sons are lost at sea. Using magic, she is able to return them for a time, but eventually they must go to the Otherworld where they belong. Muir's focus is on the loss of children, sons in particular. This can be a total loss, as in death, or an emotional loss, with the marriage of the son. Unconscious or otherwise, these ballads suggest a similarity to Muir's own life experiences. Like the Wife of Usher's well, Muir was never able to reconcile with her son, Gavin.

In 1960, Gavin, and his wife Dorothy moved in with Willa at their family home in Swaffham Prior. After a large fight, Willa was forced to leave the home that her translation career had helped buy and move in with Kathleen Raine in Chelsea in March, 1963. In 1969 she spent time in the British Red Cross Home in Cambridge to treat her arthritis, then moved in with F.G. Scott's daughter, Lilias, in St Andrews. However, Lilias decided living with Willa was a mistake, and Willa was forced out of the home once more to stay with Edwin's niece, Margaret, in Dunoon, where she died on 22 May 1970, still estranged from her son, St Andrews, and Montrose. Muir's writing consistently revealed information about her emotional

response to life events: the absence of mothers in *Imagined Corners*, published two years after the death of her own mother; the overwhelming presence of mothers in *Mrs Ritchie*, while she struggled with her responsibility for Gavin; and the estrangement from mothers with sons in *Living with Ballads*. In *Belonging*, written after her estrangement with her son, Muir barely writes of Gavin, and omits their estrangement from the text. While *Belonging* is a testimony to the 'True Love' she experienced with Edwin, *Living with Ballads* is a lament for the loss of her son and the continued displacement that followed.

## Conclusion

Willa Muir's life was one of struggle. Struggle to define herself as a feminist, a Europeanized Scot, a writer, a translator, a wife independent of but in equal partnership with her husband, and, perhaps reluctantly, a mother.[11] Her memoir, *Belonging*, appears to suggest that she found some sense of belonging with her husband, despite her contradictory identity and the fragmented world in which she lived. As Edwin explained of both he and Willa:

> we are neither quite Scottish (we can't be, for there's no Scotland in the same sense that there is an England and a France), nor are we quite delivered from our Scottishness, and free to integrate ourselves in a culture of our choice (2004b, p.241).

She reconciled herself with this, at least partially, through her feelings of belonging with Edwin. Yet, Edwin's death strips Muir's barely attained sense of belonging once more, and is further peeled back by the loss of her home and her only child. She returns to Scotland, and it is this final move that suggests she is ready for reconciliation with her motherland. However, even this final resting is not permitted. Gavin chose to scatter her ashes over Edwin's grave, at the wind's mercy. While some may suggest that this is a return to the only place she belongs – with her husband – it is also telling that after a lifetime of partial nomadic existence, feeling out of place in her homeland, her remains are not given a final resting place. One might conclude that her scattered body is destined to roam the round earth's imagined corners.

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# The Self-Analyst and the Doctor: Montaigne and Browne in Dialogue

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**Abstract:**

One can characterise the epistemological and socio-political background of the early-modern age using this quote from *Hamlet*: 'the time is out of joint' (I: 5). This climate of suspicion and rejection of the intellectual European tradition is encapsulated by the works of intellectuals as diverse as the statesman and writer Michel de Montaigne and the English physician Thomas Browne. Montaigne lived during a very difficult time in France; the Wars of Religion between Roman Catholics and Huguenots had caused political conflict, strife, and death. In order to make sense of his own personal circumstances, Montaigne became an analyst for himself by writing transient chapters of his life, which ended up being called 'Essays'. The French word essai ('try-out', 'trial') suggests what Montaigne aims to achieve with his literary creation; he is conducting tentative analyses of his own personality and ideas perfectly knowing that none of them will make sense because the world itself no long makes sense. Montaigne is making attempts at self-analysis in order to orientate himself. Like Montaigne, Thomas Browne started to write essays to analyse his time. Travelling throughout Europe for his medicine degree and living during one of the most difficult times in early-modern English history, the Civil War, he started to write essays to defend himself and science. In his *Religio Medici* ('A Doctor's Religion'), he refutes accusations of atheism from more traditional audiences and reiterates his commitment to the dogmas of the Church of England. Science and medicine also come into the purview of Browne's work; in his *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, he attacks the scientific errors of his time. Despite their estrangement from tradition, both Montaigne and Browne attempt a reconciliation with their essays: the world – including medicine and science – is protean and transient and this must be accepted.

'The time is out of joint.' (*Hamlet* Act I: 5).

The background of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries could be aptly summarised by Hamlet's gloomy, albeit realistic, comment on how the socio-epistemological structure of a whole world was gone for good. Humankind, in the midst of this crisis, had been left with no viable epistemological framework.[1] The historian and philosopher Laura Snyder (2016, p.28-29) argues that this epoch was characterised by 'what was available to the naked eye. For the first time the question of *how* (author's emphasis) we see, assumed a central place […]'. Even

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though an empiricist approach was not new, it assumed more importance at this time. The purpose of this article is to investigate this climate of doubt and uncertainty by showing that the label of 'masters of suspicion' as it was put forward by the French philosopher Paul Ricœur (1970) can be applied to the philosopher Michel de Montaigne and the English medical scholar Thomas Browne. Ricœur's 'Masters of Suspicion' – Marx, Nietzsche and Freud – cast doubt on the epistemological structure of both the nineteenth and the twentieth century because their purpose was to 'clear the horizon for a more authentic world, for a new reign of Truth […] (Ricœur 1970, p.33). I believe that this concept will help the reader to understand the epistemic disarray of the early-modern age. This article attempts to show the flexibility of the notion of 'Masters of Suspicion' and its potential to illuminate intellectual figures who set out to investigate the 'lies' of their own times. In order to make sense of their circumstances, the intellectuals discussed in this piece confronted their situations in different ways. Montaigne investigated himself and his beliefs by recording the temporary nature of his thoughts. Browne defended the medical profession from accusations of atheism and endorsed Francis Bacon's philosophical investigations, showing how long-standing scientific ideas no longer made sense. In order to explain my argument, this article is divided into three parts. In the first part, I will discuss Montaigne's background and the genre of the essay. In the second part, I will investigate Thomas Browne's response to the upheaval in England and, finally, in the third part, I will draw conclusions.

**Michel de Montaigne and the Essay**

Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) was witness to one of the most difficult periods in French history, the Wars of Religion (1562-1598). To him, the violence and bloodshed were too much. Montaigne could not make sense of the world he was living in, a world which had lost knowledge of itself and lacked solid moral foundations.

As French literature scholar Michael Screech (2003, p.xiv) argues, this is the reason why he resolved to 'write about himself, the only subject he might know better than anyone else'. Even though subsequent readers of his work such as Bacon opined that Montaigne had invented the essay, he did not create the genre. Screech (1983, p.13) argues that Montaigne 'did not write essays and we call them *Essays* for convenience'; rather, he had written chapters. Montaigne was writing about aspects of himself, and so he divided his book into chapters. However, these chapters constituted a book which was incomplete, forever changing; thus, against this backdrop of uncertainty, he was penning try-outs, endeavours to explain why his ideas were prone to change. In order to understand Montaigne's ideas, one needs to understand

the genre of the essay and why Montaigne thought it an appropriate form for philosophical inquiry.

> The word *essai*, of Montaigne's coinage in this context, means a "try", an "attempt", a "weighing", or a "taste." Montaigne is rolling ideas around on his tongue, as it were, trying out uncertain new perspectives on existing questions and attempting to make provisional sense of complicated matters of human experience (Thompson 2018, p.20).

Montaigne's chapters were try-outs just because they were temporary. The essay was a tentative genre that endeavoured to make sense of a situation that could not be understood through the usual interpretative taxonomies. I argue that Montaigne fulfils Ricœur's contention that Masters of suspicion always attempt to make room for a new truth and establish novel ways to redefine their time. Since Montaigne sketched ever-changing ideas, the publishing history of the *Essays* bespoke the conventions of the genre. The first edition came out in 1580, the second was published in 1582 and the third in 1592, just before Montaigne's death. These endless revisions mean that Montaigne was 'volatile in his opinions […]' (Scholar 2016, p.434).

In her recent biography of Montaigne, historian Arlette Jouanna (2017, p.12) captures Montaigne's demeanour towards his undertaking. As she explains, Montaigne did indeed 'investigate his self'.[2] And such a plan was – by definition – cautious because Montaigne was trying 'to clarify his self and his surroundings' (Jouanna 2017, p.16).[3] It is important to note that the clear definition of one's self and one's whereabouts was of import in the sixteenth century. Greenblatt (1990, p.186-187) argues that the loss of a 'totalizing vision' could lead up to a "network of lived and narrated stories […] and representations […]'. In fact, the issue that bedevilled Montaigne the most was knowledge: to identify an overarching socio-political and moral structure had become impossible. The essayist argued (2003, p.908) that his ideas were volatile because he had become 'different' or because he considered 'different attributes or aspects' of his thoughts. In his *Apology to Raymond Sebond*, Montaigne laid bare his lack of knowledge more vocally. Written as a defence of the Catalan theologian Raimond Sabiunda, Montaigne (2003, p.591) attacked the vanity of knowledge by declaring 'que sçay-je'? 'What do I know?' In the *Essays*, he acknowledged that his knowledge was limited. Ironically, what he knew was that he knew nothing.

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[2] Translation mine.
[3] Translation mine.

This point vindicates the insights of both Ricœur and Greenblatt; against a backdrop of socio-cultural volatility, general social and moral certainties are replaced by doubt. Thus, Montaigne acted as an early-modern Master of Suspicion because his reflections emphasised the absence of a coherent epistemic framework. However, not only was the redefinition of knowledge problematic, the way individuals project their personas into the world needed addressing. Greenblatt (1980, p.2) argues that

> […] in the sixteenth century there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process.

With human beings living in a world devoid of unquestionable ideas, one's identity was like an artefact which could be manipulated and changed at leisure. The Montaignian self was like a palimpsest, which could always be rewritten and reconsidered. As Montaigne himself wrote,

> […] I am under no obligation to […] stick to the subject myself without varying it should it so please me; I can surrender to doubt and uncertainty and to my master-form, which is ignorance (Montaigne 2003, p.150).

Montaigne embraced doubt and uncertainty. He did not feel obliged to be consistent and dwell on the topic of his discussion; his own master was ignorance. Montaigne went on to explain that

> By portraying myself for others I have portrayed my own self within me in clearer colours than I possessed at first. I have not made my book any more than it has made me – a book is of one substance with its author, proper to me and the limb of my life (Montaigne 2003, p.180).

The 'I' of the *Essays* could no longer draw on an epistemology of certainty. His knowledge was fragmentary, volatile and uncertain, a record of 'so many chimeras and fantastic monstrosities […] without order or fitness' (Montaigne 2003, p.3). By considering things from a different perspective, he recognised that the world is 'a perennial see-saw' whose subject could not be easily identified (Montaigne, 2003, p.907); thus, the *Essays* were subjected to endless revision and they were consubstantial with its author, because they had provided Montaigne with a sketchbook where he could rehearse his short-term musings. His reflections were as transient as dreams; they came and went, and therefore they had to be noted down as quickly as possible. Thus, if we accept this view, it is possible to conclude that Montaigne openly admitted his epistemic limitations. Whitcomb *et al.* (2017, p.518) state that

[…] owning one's intellectual limitations characteristically involves dispositions to: (1) believe that one has them; and to believe that their negative outcomes are due to them; (2) to admit or acknowledge them; (3) to care about them and take them seriously; and (4) to feel regret or dismay, but not hostility, about them.

The essay is therefore akin to the intimate practice of taking down personal notes for yourself and discussing them with yourself. Indeed, it could be argued that the genre of the essay was an early-modern version of the *hupomnêmata*, which roughly means 'notebook'. *Hupomnêmata* are 'individual notebooks serving as memory aids […]. They constituted a material record of things heard or thought […] for subsequent rereading or meditation (Foucault 1997, p.210). *Hupomnêmata*, according to Nielsen (2015, p.90) constitute an example of 'technologies of the self', a means for subjects to gauge their ideas and study themselves more deeply. Likewise, Montaigne deployed a knowledge that was fragmentary. He meditated and conversed with himself, but he also wrote about and monitored his changing ideas and thoughts. The practice of taking notes which can be re-read or rehearsed perfectly fits into the form of the essay. The principle underlying this notetaking, and by extension the essay, was 'to delimit and circumscribe' the self (Hadot 1998, p.112). In the essay, the reader will only encounter manifestations of the self. The foreword to the *Essays* was in itself tell-tale: Montaigne was – metaphorically – naked in front of his reader. He knew only himself, because that self was – as it were – the very boundary and limit of his work.

One of the key statements made by Montaigne concerning his work was that it had been written in good faith. The expression of good faith was essential because it stipulated that the *Essay*s were like a contract. The audience read a book which was contingent on the trust between' […] two specific people: Michel de Montaigne and the reader whom he addresses' (Miernowski 2016, p.545). This textual contract stipulated that there is a bond of trust between Montaigne and his audience; but how can you trust somebody whose ideas keep changing and are never final? In other words, can you accept Montaigne's bona fides? This is another hint at Montaigne being a Master of Suspicion; if all pre-existing epistemological and moral imbrications no longer made sense, then even the bona fides of the author was to be questioned. This is what readers were supposed to do when approaching the *Essays*, because they would discover a '[…] patchwork of personal reflections' (Desan 2016, p.1).

To summarise, Montaigne lived at a time of great distress in France in the second half of the sixteenth century: the Wars of Religion between Protestants and Roman Catholics meant that traditional epistemic frameworks no longer made sense. Therefore, he started to investigate

himself. Montaigne began to write sketches of himself and his personality, his own *hupomnêmata*, which mirrored the erratic nature of his knowledge. His disparate try-outs were his own way to represent a new epistemological world.  He was an early-modern Master of Suspicion, who could only interrogate himself to discover new horizons and seek his own liberty from the pre-existing moral and epistemological shackles.

Having lived at a time of disarray, Montaigne decided to live in the tower of his family home, estranging himself from sixteenth-century France and trying to answer the question: 'What do I know?' Montaigne bridged estrangement and reconciliation by writing that he did not know anything but was trying to reconstruct the edifice of knowledge.

## Thomas Browne and the Essay

It was against the backdrop of the English Civil War that Thomas Browne and his complex work emerged. Between the 1630s and 1640s, England was ruled by a king – Charles – who believed his authority could not be questioned because his power came from God. Like James I – his father – Charles argued that his power was above the law. However, the Puritans negated the monarch's vindication of unbounded power. Like everyone, even the monarch is subject to God's judgement. England was a war-torn country. Like Montaigne's France, Browne's England had been pitted by socio-political instability. However, despite these religious conflicts, England was the stage of important progress, largely thanks to the contributions made by Francis Bacon. Not only had Bacon been a key politician in Jacobean England, he also helped to spearhead vital change in science by rejecting Aristotelianism via his theory of the idols.

Rossi (1996, p.26) contends that Bacon was 'the trumpeter […] the herald, the messenger'. His announcement was the reform of knowledge and learning, which could only be affected by dislodging the inheritance of Aristotelianism. Aristotle's thinking was more concerned with pre-established truths; any kind of inquiry was therefore blocked by pre-existing ideas. However, Bacon wanted to define 'the inquiry upon how we establish the truth' (Malherbe 1996, p.79). For Bacon, the only way truth could be established was by identifying the cognitive errors made by Aristotelianism. These errors are critiqued in Bacon's *Novum Organum* (1620), whose title was a satire of Aristotle's book on logic, *Organon*. Bacon's *Novum Organum*, the 'new instrument', articulated the Baconian alternative to an old and impractical approach to logic. The most effective attack on Aristotle and his philosophy was encapsulated in Bacon's theory of the idols, the cognitive errors humankind made that impeded the progress of science.

Browne, as a disciple of Bacon, had also criticised received knowledge in *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646). People, according to Browne (2018, p.108), 'are ready with open arms to receive the encroachment of errors' and unsound ideas made humankind 'rest in false apprehensions'. This is caused by the 'adherence to ideas coming from antiquity, tradition and authority' (Browne 2018, p.113-114). The authority of antiquity was Aristotelianism, and its 'vulgar errors' (Killeen 2018, p.xxvi) had stultified knowledge and needed to be destroyed to make room for more reliable scientific inquiries. Like Montaigne, Browne lacked a coherent worldview which had caused him to become alienated from his society. Their mutual uncertainty and lack of solid points of reference categorised both men as early-modern Masters of Suspicion.

Bearing this caveat in mind, Browne and Montaigne questioned the way knowledge was disseminated. Browne (2018, p.100) argued that common errors are produced by the 'infirmity of humane nature', while Montaigne (2003, p.338) had stated that humankind is preyed upon by 'doubt and uncertainty and […] ignorance'. Montaigne's 'que sçay-je' was the springboard to accrue new knowledge. Similarly, Browne (2018, p.89) set out to act as a gardener who would ensure that

> these weeds [old forms of knowledge] must lose their alimental sappe and wither of themselves; […] wee should trust the rest unto the sythe of time, and hopefull dominion of truth.

Browne (2018, p.113) investigated, amongst many things, how 'Adherence unto Antiquitie, Tradition, and Authoritie' impeded the progress of knowledge. In fact, Browne (2018, p.122) stated that the worst and most damaging enemy to knowledge was a 'peremptory adhesion unto authority and more especially of our beliefe upon the dictates of antiquities'. Browne, like Montaigne, opened up a Ricœurian understanding of reality: if we are to make room for new things, then we have to broaden our horizons. According to Browne, we have to start afresh and welcome the new realm of truth and make our mind more receptive.

Browne's scientific hermeneutics ran counter to received religious ideas. Europe – for a century – had been a battlefield of diverse Christian dogmas. Since he was a doctor, Browne's profession caused him to be deemed an atheist. Wolfe (2016, p.344) notes that the general diffidence towards doctors is encapsulated in the phrase '*tres medici, duo athei'*, or 'where there are three doctors, there are two atheists'. Therefore, Browne felt the need to pen a robust self-defence of his profession, *Religio Medici* (1643), 'the doctor's religion'. In the foreword to this treatise, Browne (2018, p.3) argued that readers who

> shall peruse that worke, and shall take notice of sundry particularities and personal expressions therein, will easily discerne that the intention was not publik […].

The epistemological purview of Browne's work is therefore similar to Montaigne's. Montaigne wanted his readership to know how volatile his ideas were and that the self was the limit of certainty. Likewise, Browne shared his own religious uncertainty with his readers. If readers were anticipating a vocal defence of the author's faith, they would be disappointed to find out that Browne's supposed declaration of faith raised more questions than answers. Browne (2018, p.5) claimed to be a Christian, but framed his confession of faith more scientifically than religiously because 'in his riper years' he had

> confirmed his judgement, seene and examined all, I finde my selfe obliged by the principles of grace […] to embrace no other name but this […].

Browne (2018, p.5) described himself as being 'of the reformed new-cast religion'; he was a member of the Church of England. However, Browne (2018, p.8) also argued that

> where the Scripture is silent, the church is my text; where that speakes, 'tis but my comment; where there is a joint silence, I borrow not the rules of my religion from Rome or Geneva, but the dictates of my own reason.

Browne was undoubtedly a Christian and a Protestant, but his worldview was not entirely informed by fideism and dogma. Even his faith was moulded by his status as a Master of Suspicion. He admitted being an Anglican and he faithfully upheld the doctrine of the Church of England. However, it was reason and not dogma that clearly characterised Browne's faith. In this way, *Religio* was Browne's *hupomnêmata*, the rhapsodic exposition of a faith which was continually reconsidered and rehearsed. Albeit an Anglican, Browne (2018, p.6) could not

> laugh at but rather pity the fruitlesse journeys of pilgrims, or contemne the miserable condition of friers; for though misplaced in circumstances, there is something in it of devotion […].

Browne's argument echoed Montaigne's *Apology*. There, Montaigne argued that despite national differences and religious divisions, all Europeans were united in their Christianity. Protestants and Roman Catholics may have had different ceremonies, but they shared the same faith in Jesus.

Thomas Browne, like Montaigne, lived in a time of socio-political disunity. Like Montaigne, he believed our epistemic frameworks could not advance knowledge because they were fraught with doubt and uncertainty; the only way to gather knowledge was to ask 'what do I know? Montaigne argued that both Roman Catholics and Protestant are Christians, and they should not be criticised for their practices. Browne believed that Roman Catholics dogmas, like pilgrimages, should not be mocked because they are Christian ceremonies. Browne wanted to dislodge epistemic errors. Influenced by Bacon's attack on Aristotelianism, Browne destroyed the idols (the cognitive errors) of his time and the blind adherence to antiquity. Browne defined himself as a gardener, one who must sow the seeds of truth and learning. Whilst Browne distanced himself from tradition, he also argued that defining new ideas through science could help innovate one's worldview.

**Conclusion**

According to Ricœur, Masters of Suspicion cast doubt on their time and knowledge because they want to establish new ways to look at the world. In this article, I frame Michel de Montaigne and Thomas Browne as Masters of Suspicion. Both lived in a time of religious and political unrest. The traditional moral and epistemic framework could no longer describe the world in which they lived; therefore, they resorted to a new means of self-analysis, the essay. An essay is an attempt to describe one's self. In his *Apology*, Montaigne conceded that he does not know anything; his thoughts are temporary and they need reformulating. Long-standing and unquestionable tenets could now be challenged. Thomas Browne similarly questioned the adherence to tradition which impeded the progress of science. Like Montaigne, Browne destroyed pre-established ideas and argued that freedom of inquiry was necessary to rebuild epistemic processes. Browne the doctor had to defend his profession from accusations of atheism; this is the reason why he wrote his exculpatory essay *Religio Medici*. Browne was an Anglican, but not a dogmatic one. He argued that the freedom of inquiry in science should also be applied to religion. For Browne, theological differences were not important because all Christians share the same faith in Jesus, regardless of their denomination. By questioning the status quo, Montaigne and Browne, like Ricœur's Masters of Suspicion, made sense of a world that, as Hamlet said, was out of joint.

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# The Great War and the Western Front: *Lieux de Mémoire* as Symbols for Reconciliation

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**Abstract:**

In an article from 2011 William C. Gay wrote that '[m]emory is fundamental to the pursuit of reconciliation'. This paper focuses on memory as a reconciliatory tool, more specifically the current remembrance of an event that continues to play an important role for the collective memories of formerly estranged countries: The Great War. During the centenary many people came in contact with commemoration of this war by visiting the numerous memorial sites on the Western Front. The connection of these sites to the pursuit of reconciliation is at the heart of this analysis. As a first step this paper will address reconciliation as a concept and its importance in the context of Great War remembrance. Following that, three lieux de mémoire in France will be discussed in more detail: The 'Ring of Remembrance' in Souchez, the 'Historial de la Grande Guerre' in Peronne and the 'Lochnagar Crater' at La Boisselle. By scrutinising the language and symbolism used at these sites, this paper will evaluate in how far these monuments and the museum encourage the overcoming of estrangement and the continued pursuit of friendship, inclusivity and international understanding. Although these are three very different sites, the analysis will demonstrate that they complement each other in their rich symbolism and focus on international commemoration. Together they serve as examples of how memorial sites can promote a remembrance that looks beyond differences and recrimination and instead fosters reconciliation.

**Keywords:** *Great War commemoration, centenary, Western Front,* lieux de mémoire, *reconciliation, memorialisation, First World War, World War One*

In 2020 we are more than one hundred years removed from the end of one of the seminal events of the twentieth century: The First World War. This war had a huge influence on millions of people around the globe and its effects are sometimes still visible. In the twenty-first century we live in a world that has come a long way since 1914-18 – nations that were former adversaries have turned their enemy status into one of partner – and even friendship. Nevertheless, even within today's Europe resentments can sometimes still be felt. It is far from guaranteed that former foes will continue to live in a reconciliatory spirit of amity, harmony and concord. The commemoration of this war has generated a lot of attention on questions of remembrance over the years. This was especially true during the recent centenary when thousands of people engaged in active commemoration and visited battlefields, monuments and museums. Given this recent heightened interest in First World War *lieux de mémoire*, this paper will thus analyse how such memorial sites can contribute to fostering reconciliation. It will

address what tools and symbols such a commemoration needs to promote a continued pursuit of international understanding.

On 11 October 2012, David Cameron gave a speech at the Imperial War Museum in London, detailing the British government's plans for the Great War centenary. During that talk he commented on the following inscription on a Turkish memorial at ANZAC Cove in Gallipoli:

> Those heroes who shed their blood and lost their lives, you are now lying in the soil of a friendly country. Therefore, rest in peace. There is no difference between the Johnnies and the Mehmets to us, where they lie, side by side, in this country of ours.  You, the mothers, who sent their sons from far away countries, wipe away your tears. Your sons are now lying in our bosom and are in peace. After having lost their lives on this land, they shall become our sons as well (Daley 2015).

It conveys a powerful message to have such a text engraved on a memorial erected on the Middle Eastern Front not by Commonwealth people but by a nation which fought decisive battles against the Allies. For Cameron, this memorial is '[o]ne of the most powerful things' he has ever seen:

> So beautiful, beautiful words on this First World War monument. For me, those words capture so much of what this is all about. That from such war and hatred can come unity and peace, a confidence and a determination never to go back.  However frustrating and however difficult the debates in Europe, 100 years on we sort out our differences through dialogue and meetings around conference tables, not through the battles on the fields of Flanders or the frozen lakes of western Russia (Cameron 2012).

This quote as well as the words on the monument highlight very adequately what reconciliation is about: to be able to move from hatred and estrangement, from having been former enemies on a battlefield to feelings of mutual respect, of friendship and peace. Having such words inscribed on this *lieu de mémoire* in the very place where a lot of hatred and bloodshed happened between former adversaries has great significance. It turns this place that witnessed the horrors of the war into an important facilitator for reconciliation and peace.

Such a transformation does not only happen at this impressive memorial in Gallipoli but instances of that can also be found on the Western Front. In the following, three such exemplary *lieux de mémoire* in the Hauts-de-France region of northern France will be scrutinised in more detail. These are the 'Ring of Remembrance' or 'L'Anneau de la Mémoire'

near Souchez, the 'Lochnagar Crater' close to Albert and the 'Historial de la Grande Guerre' in Peronne.



Figure 1: © Google, Inc. L'Anneau de la Mémoire, Historial & Lochnagar Crater. [map]. Generated by Sarah Fissmer. (Generated 11 June 2020) using Google Earth (version 10.40.1).

The discussion will determine in how far these sites promote a remembrance that looks beyond differences and recrimination and instead encourages reconciliation, especially between Germany and the UK/France. In order to ascertain in how far the two monuments and the museum champion such a commemoration, the analysis will pay close attention to the symbolism and language used at the sites as well as to what degree German perspectives are included in Allied remembrance. As a first step, however, it is necessary to approach such key notions as 'reconciliation' and '*lieux de mémoire*' and to address two important topics. These are the Great War's influence on collective memories and the significance of commemorating in a reconciliatory spirit.

**Reconciliation and the Memory of the Great War**

Reconciliation as a concept is not without its issues. Firstly, literature dealing with the topic is of modest quantity. In their influential study on *War and Reconciliation* from 2003, Long & Brecke call it 'an undertheorized phenomenon' (p.147). More recently scholars have pointed

out that there is still only a limited amount of research available on the subject (Heo 2012, p.5; Benson Brown & Poremski 2014, p.xi). Secondly, some of these texts emphasise that reconciliation is not desired by all parties at all times. Victims of violence might regard reconciliatory actions as indecent, untrustworthy and nothing more than a diminishment of what they had to endure – especially right after the end of a violent conflict (Rosoux 2014, p.1). Even winners might repudiate attempts at reconciliation if they understand this not as bringing people to justice, but as a process which equates the values of the losing side with their own (Rekdal 2014, p.26). This seems to be especially true if the winners had been oppressed by those who lost (Rekdal 2014, p.26). When analysing memorial sites this should be kept in mind. A *lieu de mémoire* as such first and foremost mirrors the attitude of those responsible for its creation and maintenance instead of the public in general. Therefore, not every attempt to focus on reconciliation might meet universal approval.[1] For the sake of argument this paper will nevertheless assume the stance of reconciliation in principle being a desirable notion in the context of Great War commemoration. After all, remembering a conflict one hundred years after its end does not qualify as the direct aftermath. As the many positive attributes linked to reconciliation attest, there is much which speaks in favour of trying to reconcile oneself. Topics that come up in definitions are for example trust and truth but also respect and *friendship* (Rosoux 2014, p.2). For instance, reconciliation is equated with finding its ultimate expression in community, trust and friendship and connected to feelings of understanding, empathy and the rapprochement of former adversaries (Gardner Feldman 2014, p.17; Ludwig & Linsemann 2011, p.29-30; Rekdal 2014, p.26). This paper understands reconciliation in accordance with these notions. It rests both on the term's definition by Gardner-Feldman as ultimately 'political community and friendship, sometimes referred to as 'stable peace' (2014, p.10) and the *OED's* definitions as '[t]he action or act of bringing a thing or things to agreement, concord or harmony' and '[t]he action of restoring estranged persons or parties to friendship' (*OED* 2020, under *reconciliation*).

When talking about commemoration, the term '*lieu de mémoire*' is equally of importance. Coined by Pierre Nora, he argued that

> […] a *lieu de mémoire* is any significant entity, whether material or nonmaterial in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community […] (1996, p.xvii).

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[1] Of course, once a memorial site is open to the public, visitor statistics and reception, e.g. in the media, can give indication of the more general mindset of the populace.

With regard to the topic of this paper it is important to note that although the term is often simply used as a synonym for memorial places in a geographical sense, a *lieu de mémoire* is more than that (Siebeck 2017, p.2-3). It is a place where history manifests itself, where the abstract memory of something that happened there finds a concrete realization (Wright 2005, p.52). Thus, these are sites where memory is secreted and crystallised, where collective memory can be stored and embodied (Nora 1989, p.7). In the context of the Great War, such 'symbolic elements of the memorial heritage' (Nora 1996, p.xvii) are not only located in Gallipoli. These monuments, museums, national cemeteries and anniversary celebrations can also be found in abundance in Belgium and France in the places where Allied forces fought their German enemy. Such *lieux de mémoire* can thus have a powerful impact as promoters of reconciliation if they foster international understanding and peace.

Since the 1980s there has been an increase in public interest in the Great War and its cultural representations in at least some of the former belligerent countries and also 'spectacularly,' as Becker calls it, on the Western Front (2015, p.91; Ashplant et al. 2000, p.3). This heightened attraction to *lieux de mémoire* raises some important questions: *Why does this particular war still have such a fixed place in the collective memory of many nations one hundred years after its end? Why should a remembrance in a reconciliatory spirit of friendship and international understanding be beneficial?* To answer these queries, it is necessary to turn to the issues of memory and identity because 'memory is fundamental to the pursuit of reconciliation' (Gay 2011, p.113). In *Remembering War*, published in 2006, Jay Winter, an eminent scholar of the Great War, stated that after at least two so-called 'memory booms' just before and during the twentieth century (1890s-1920s and 1960s to 1970s), today memory again gains in prevalence (p.17). Memory ensures that our existence is meaningful and has its purpose (Renard 2013, p.33). It is used as an information storage and retrieval faculty and allows individuals to 'reconstruct past experiences for present purposes' (Renard 2013, p.33, 25-6). It pervades all aspects of human life and is of utmost importance for our sense of self because it is by remembering that identities are constructed and reconstructed (Erll 2008, p.6). To date the memories of the First World War are strongly connected and influential to both identities of individuals and whole nations. In 2014 the British Council published a report on the global knowledge of World War One and its influence on how people view the UK (2014, p.3). They conducted surveys in 7 different countries, including the UK, France and Germany – and one of these surveys focused on the impact World War One has on people in the twenty-first century. When asked in which way their country is 'still affected by the consequences of the First World War and the subsequent peace negotiations', 42% of the UK population

answered that '[t]he First World War contributes strongly to [their] country's identity' and 35% regarded the war and 'its outcomes [as] hav[ing] a lasting impact on [the] country's international relations' (British Council 2014, p.10). In France, 34% saw a connection between their identity and this war while in Germany only 9% agreed to that statement (British Council 2014, p.10) – probably owing to the specific German history and focus on the Second World War. Thus, a general interest in the Great War today, at least in countries such as the UK and France, is not surprising.

That this war 'refuses to remain buried in the past' (Stevenson 2013, p.vii) also originates in the aforementioned anniversary commemorations such as the centenary and the war's cultural representations. Both ensure that it remains within collective and individual memories and retains value and meaning (Wilson 2015, p.70). The Western Front with its many World War One *lieux de mémoire* has become a popular destination – especially since the 2014-18 commemorations. This area is considered as highly iconic, as a cultural landscape that strongly resonates, has a potent influence on human memory and continues to magnetically attract tourists of various nationalities (Miles 2017, p.76). Miles, for instance, speaks of 351,000 Great War tourists in northern France and 551,000 in the Belgian Westhoek area between summer 2013 and summer 2014 and Bergez talks about approximately 300,000 visitors to the Somme battlefields every year (Miles 2017, p.76; Bergez 2016, cited in Holt & Holt 2016). These battlefield tourists encounter countless cemeteries, monuments and museums during their tours. It is estimated that between the 1920s and 30s alone France witnessed the erection of 760,000 monuments (Carls & Carls 2018, p.158). Many of these as well as most cemeteries are dedicated to the memory of a particular nation's fallen. The huge French Great War cemetery *Nécropole nationale de Notre-Dame-de-Lorette*, the British and Commonwealth *Thiepval Monument* in France and *Tyne Cot Cemetery* in Flanders as well as the Canadian *Vimy Ridge* and *Beaumont-Hamel* dedicated to the Newfoundlanders, both in the Somme region, are just a few of the countless examples. It is noteworthy, though, that despite a small number of larger cemeteries for the German fallen, it is impossible to find a German monument on the Western Front. Two different reasons can be attested to this fact. Firstly, the German focus on the Second World War is so strong that it often obscures any memories of 1914-18 (Becker 2015, p.102). Secondly, notions of victors and losers continue to play a role on the Western Front where sometimes Germans are still considered as 'the enemy' and do therefore not

always feel welcome. According to Becker, today such notions should be regarded as 'an outdated nationalist anachronism' (Becker 2015, p.102).[2]

A third reason for the continued interest in the Great War is that war has been and still is a constant reality around the globe which – unsurprisingly – turns it into a topic of interest (Hynes 1997, pp.xi–xii). This is true all over the world but also very much for Great Britain. MacAskill & Cobain pointed out in a recent article for *The Guardian* that since the beginning of the First World War British forces have been 'involved in conflict' somewhere every single year (2014, n.p.). Thus, even though war is luckily not fought anymore on European soil, it is no unknown entity. It continuously preoccupies scholars, journalists, politicians as well as people in general.

Remembering this specific war in a way that encourages people to overcome estrangement and to seek and strengthen friendly relations on an international level is thus beneficial in this world of continuous warfare – not only around the globe but also within Europe. The diplomatic service of the EU states on their website that for a long time the European Union has brought 'unprecedented peace, prosperity and democracy' (EEAS 2018). Former enemies have become partners, even friends, in a European as well as a global context. And yet, this does not guarantee everlasting reconciliation and the absence of estrangement. With invigorations of national borders, the EU faces challenging times. The Brexit vote, which according to scholars such as John Bibby was influenced by nationalist narratives (2019, p.17), is one such example. As a consequence, international cooperation and understanding become of utmost importance and a commemoration of the Great War that can help to strengthen these values should be applauded.

**Reconciliation and *Lieux de Mémoire* on the Western Front – Three Case Studies**

It appears that even a century after the conflict the 'Western Front continues overwhelmingly to belong to the victors' (Becker 2015, p.101). However, memorial sites on the former battlefields also show another objective. It is possible to find museums and monuments which are inclusive of diverse perspectives, that have an international rather than a national focus and which frame reconciliation as a desirable notion. In this context, the concrete understanding of Nora's term becomes important again. *Lieux de mémoire* are places that embody the memory of what happened on site – as with any war, on the Western Front a lot of that was enmity as

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[2] The fact that such sentiments do still exist demonstrates that despite the paper's general stance, even one hundred years after the end of the Great War some people are still disinclined to reconciliation in this context.

well as destruction and death on a large scale. If these sites then focus on the opposite, on encouraging friendship, peace and international appreciation, they can have a powerful impact as places of reconciliation. A remembrance that turns its attention to the significance of amity necessitates a focus that is not overly centred on inexpungable differences and on issues enhancing estrangement, such as blame and guilt. The following analysis will demonstrate what tools and symbols today's commemoration in France needs to achieve this. Reconciliation is an abstract notion, one which is not easily measurable in connection to monuments, museums and events. This analysis will therefore focus on related aspects whenever reconciliation as such is not an explicit topic, i.e. the aforementioned language and symbolism. Both have a huge influence on the memory of the war and the way in which former opponents are perceived and remembered. They can thus be used as tools for promoting reconciliation. Scholars, for instance, 'frequently suggest [...] that symbols, along with rituals, affect people's behaviour or outlook by propagating fundamental ideas about the world' and are used 'as reference points for understanding [life]' (King 1998, p.9). They can thus help to shape a visitor's perception of the Great War and its meaning. When talking about symbols in the context of the chosen *lieux de mémoire*, this paper is referring to the symbolism that is inherent in or attributed to the (architectural) design of the monuments and museum and the objects on display. Similarly, language is attested to considerable significance. Language and speech are amongst those phenomena which define us as human beings. They are our primary means of communication and permeate all aspects of life. How language is used, what is said or written is of huge relevance when remembering the past, on memorial sites and during acts of remembrance. This is firstly true, because 'memory, too, is formulated in language' and facilitates whether or not reconciliation succeeds (Rothermel 2011, p.59). Secondly, language itself is not a neutral faculty – those in charge of a language wield power (Gay 2011, p.114). The particular use of a language can both strengthen and thwart remembrance and influence the message that is received. In his essay on 'Language and Reconciliation', William C. Gay therefore opts for a critical examination of language whenever memory and reconciliation are concerned (Gay 2011, p.114-15). As will be visible in the following, the use of language as well as of symbolism at the selected sites in northern France will thus be of special interest.

The first *lieu de mémoire* which will now come under scrutiny is '*L'Anneau de la Mémoire*' (or the 'Ring of Remembrance') at Ablain-Saint-Nazarre near Souchez in the French *département* Pas-de-Calais.[3] This is an official French monument which was designed by the

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[3] If not otherwise indicated, the information on this monument stems from a visit in November 2018.

architect Philippe Prost, 'winner of [a] competition launched by the Regional Council' (Robert [n.d.], p.31). It was 'inaugurated on 11 November 2014 in the presence of the President of France' (Robert [n.d.], p.31). Thus, Francois Holland is among those French Presidents who 'have taken direct control over memorial projects' during anniversary years of the First World War (Becker 2014, p.92). It is therefore safe to assume that this monument's message reflects the more general stance of the French government towards reconciliation in the context of the two world wars.[4] This is a *lieu de mémoire* which specifically stores the memory of the fallen of that area. As indicated by the monument's name, visitors will find a huge ring of 125 dark concrete blocks shaped like wedges. Upon those 500 golden stainless-steel plaques are installed, bearing the names of 580,000 soldiers who fell in the regions Nord and Pas-de-Calais between 1914 and 1918 (Robert [n.d.], p.31). What makes this special is that although these are soldiers from all over the world they are not differentiated. An information panel at the entrance to the memorial emphasises that they 'are listed in alphabetical order, without any distinction made between rank or nationality, former enemies and friends side by side'. Seen all together these names are meant to 'underscore the notions of peace, fraternity and freedom between peoples' (Robert [n.d.], p.31).



Figure 2: '*L'Anneau de la Mémoire*', Ablain-Saint-Nazaire, France, © Sarah Fissmer, photographed 09 November 2018

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[4] Official French relations with Germany are often quoted as successful examples of post-WW2 reconciliation (see Lily Gardner-Feldman's study from 2012).

Although reconciliation as a concept is not addressed, the use of language at the monument is reconciliatory and inclusive. Not only does the panel emphasise words such as peace ('peaceful') and friendship ('friends') which can be affiliated with the definitions of reconciliation, the information is also provided both in the languages of the victors, French, English and Dutch and that of their former enemy, German. Furthermore, all four translations provide similar information. The decision of the architect to use an alphabetical order for the classification of all the names highlights the symbolic aspect of this specific architectural design and its focus on friendship. This intrinsic symbolism is evident in the construction process itself which necessitated international cooperation and partnership in order to provide the names of all the different nations' fallen in that region (Robert [n.d.], p.31). The information panel at the entrance states that French, British, German, Belgian and Portuguese organisations, amongst them the *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* and the German *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräber Fürsorge* provided necessary information. It also explicitly highlights that European countries today are at peace with each other: 'This memorial was erected in a peaceful Europe in memory of a terrible tragedy which devastated a generation of young men […]'. The symbolism inherent in the monument's design is explicitly meant to demonstrate how fragile this peace can be: Part of the ring is unsupported by any architectural structures and is instead poised above the gradient of the surrounding countryside. In his own words, the architect explains the reasoning behind the construction as follows:

> [W]e chose the figure of a ring, thinking of the circle formed by people holding hands. The ring is synonymous with unity and eternity. Unity, because the names form a sort of human chain and eternity because the letters are joined without an end, in alphabetical order without any distinction of nationality, rank or religion. […] Anchored in the ground across two-thirds of its perimeter, the ring then detaches where the downward slope of the land increases. Its cantilevered ring is there to remind us that peace always remains fragile (Prost [n.d.], cited in Robert [n.d.], p.32).

For Anette Becker a commemoration such as at the 'Ring of Remembrance' lacks the intention to further explain the terrible struggle of 1914-18 (2015, p.79). Instead, the past is exonerated and its remembrance becomes a king of 'reparation, offered by the living to the dead':

> What dominates the efforts of museums and politicians on the brink of the centenary is that all the combatants were the same men, dead together, for a cause that no one now wants to identify historically. They have in common their death at that time, here on this terrain, where they are now the watchmen of peace and strong

emotion, examples of universal reconciliation in the rediscovered peace (Becker 2015, p.79).



Figure 3: '*L'Anneau de la Mémoire*', Ablain-Saint-Nazaire, France, © Sarah Fissmer, photographed 09 November 2018

Whether one agrees or disagrees with Becker's reservations, her quote shows that this memorial can indeed be considered as a monument which strengthens the notion of reconciliation.

The second *lieu de mémoire* chosen for this analysis is the 'Historial de la Grande Guerre' in Peronne, in the Somme region. This museum was developed in the 1980s, opened in 1992 and completely renovated in response to the centenary between 2014-2016 (*Presentation of the Historial* 2016; Reynolds 2015, p.235). Although the curators managed to secure a considerable French investment for the museum's creation which ultimately cost one hundred million Francs (Winter 2006, p.41-42; Winter 2010, p.2), in contrast to the 'Ring of Remembrance', the origin of this museum is neither prominently governmental nor solely French. On the contrary, this is an international project to the core. The museum's programme was developed by an advisory committee of historians from various nations, amongst whom were Germans (*Presentation* 2016). These scholars, most notably Jay Winter, additionally decided to create an international research centre which opened in 1989, three years before the museum (Winter 2006, p.225). This research centre unites intellectuals from all over the world in their goal to promote historical scholarship through means such as fellowships, publications and international conferences (*Presentation* 2016). The association's website lists more than

Figure 4: '*Historial de la Grande Guerre*', Peronne, France (Somme), © Sarah Fissmer, photographed 02 November 2018

120 scholars as members of the scientific and steering committee, many of them from Britain, France and Germany but including other nationalities as well, amongst them especially Belgians and Americans (*Presentation* 2016). This 'commitment of key academics' as Reynolds rightly states, has 'helped to initiate a transnational approach that challenges the national paradigms through which the war has been understood' (2015, p.235). This is a very potent example of a project emphasising and strengthening international cooperation and understanding – key markers of reconciliation.

As with the 'Ring of Remembrance', this museum does not cover the topic of reconciliation as such but again its use of symbolism and language is reconciliatory. As a major scholar of the First World War and one of the prominent historians involved in the creation of the museum, Winter has written several texts with a focus on this memorial site. In his works it becomes clear that this *lieu de mémoire* is rich in symbolism, from its title to its setting and interior design. For instance, the name *Historial*, he notes in *Remembering War* in 2006, was chosen to bring memorials and history together, 'as a midpoint […] between the academy and public commemoration, […] between cold, dispassionate, precise history and warm, evocative, messy memory' (p.224). Furthermore, contrary to the 'Ring of Remembrance', the museum was not built from scratch but incorporated into already existing landscape and architecture – into the history of the land. It was placed in an old castle close to a lake which is meant to

symbolise 'the topography of the war, the way it required men to bury themselves in trenches or forts' (Winter 2010, p.3).

Moreover, Peronne is close to the heart of the Somme region. Unsurprisingly, the collective memory of the Battle of the Somme is thus very much part of the memory stored in this *lieu de mémoire* – as the explicit topic of one of the rooms and because of the museum's distinct location. The whole design of the museum centres on emphasising connections, on bringing different aspects together: history and memory, old walls and a new museum, differing perspectives, the soldiers' and the civilian experiences. The museum's objects are presented on two different axes, one horizontal with shallow dug-outs in the floor and one vertical with showcases along the walls (Miles 2017, p.81). These dug-outs feature artefacts, such as soldier's uniforms from the different combatant nations. Set into the floor, this presentation obliges visitors to look downwards both physically and conceptually, into these *fosses* and into history. This, McLoughlin points out, 'emphasises the spatial element of memorialisation' (2010, p.x). Interestingly, there is no artificial trench experience to be found anywhere on site. Even these fosses, although they are dug into the floor, are not meant to resemble trenches. They are presented in an orderly fashion to pinpoint the underlying artifice (Winter 2010, p.4).

They are presented in an orderly fashion to pinpoint the underlying artifice (Winter 2010, p.4). This decision was made in order to favour authenticity over verisimilitude and to evade
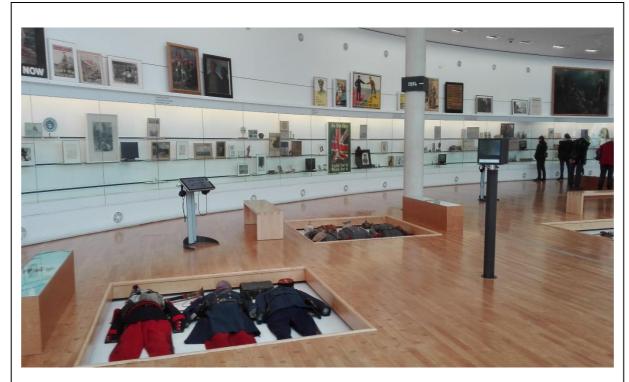


Figure 5: '1914-1916 Gallery: Experiences of War', '*Historial de la Grande Guerre*', Peronne, France (Somme), © Sarah Fissmer, photographed 04 November 2018

the danger of replacing representation with kitsch as it sometimes happens in attempts to replicate original trenches (Winter 2010, p.4).

The design of the showcases used on the vertical axis along the walls as well as the application of languages throughout the exhibition accentuates the international – and thereby reconciliatory – character of the museum. The overall thematic focus of the 'Historial' is 'war in a globalised age and the trans-national character of the conflict,' as Winter writes in 'Designing a War Museum':

> The museum is French, British and German in equal parts. The war belongs to us all, and left scars on all those who took part in it. Though the funding of the museum was French, its character was and is multi-national (2010, p.2).

This is evident in the showcases which focus on different topics concerned with the civilian story of the war. They exhibit three rows of objects below one another, one French, one British, one German, thus enabling a direct comparison of experiences and attitudes, without favouring one over the other. This impression is strengthened by the fact that the objects on display are accompanied by explanations in all three languages. Contrary to some other museums, these texts offer a more or less identical translation.[5] They are mostly written from a neutral perspective, without falling into an 'us vs. them' mentality. They frequently highlight similarities in experiences of the combatant nations concerning the hardship and brutality of war and although they share brutal facts, such as the topic of atrocities, these texts always try to provide a description which is as impartial as possible. This means not only mentioning German but also Russian war crimes and emphasising the complexity of the situation, i.e. reasonings for atrocities as well as the use of Allied propaganda for exaggerations. As a result, these texts don't focus overly much on blame and guilt and the descriptions are adequately emotionally distant. This prevents the texts from excusing atrocities while ensuring that liability is not transferred to people living today. Overall, this museum can therefore be considered as an impressive example of international cooperation and inclusivity. Here the descendants of former enemies have worked closely together as friends in a place where German and British/French troupes fought decisive battles against one another. They have created a space which comprises different perspectives yet stresses the importance of a

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[5] These findings concerning the exhibition texts derive from a visit to the museum in 2018. Thus, they pertain to the texts on display after the museum's renovation. Because of the museum's overall transnational concept, it is however likely that information was similarly presented in earlier versions of the texts.

cooperative transnational approach to the remembrance of the Great War, an approach that can help overcome prejudices and help strengthen international ties.

The third and final *lieu de mémoire* on the Western Front selected for this analysis is the 'Lochnagar Crater' at La Boisselle, a few miles outside of Albert in the heart of the Somme region. This memorial differs from the other two sites in a number of aspects. First of all, it is neither a new construction nor does it make use of a building predating the war. Rather, the memorial incorporates alterations of the landscape deriving directly from the actions of 1 July 1916. As its name indicates, the site is an actual crater – a site of combat which is considered to be a memorial and a war grave and as such is partly funded by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.[6] The crater, which is 330ft (100.5m) in width and 70ft (21m) in depth, resulted from one of 17 explosions of British mines placed below the German Front line that detonated on the first day of the Battle of the Somme (*Statistics* 2020).[7] Around the crater wooden planks provide a walkway leading to information panels and memorial items. These twenty so-called 'Labyrinth panels' take visitors on a journey through the history of the site and relate some individual stories of both men and women of the war (*The Lochnagar*



Figure 5: *Lochnagar Crater Remembrance Ceremony 1ˢᵗ July 2019*, Lochnagar Crater, La Boisselle, France (Somme), © Sarah Fissmer, photographed 01 July 2019

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[6] The CWGC manufactured and funded the information panels at the site (*The Lochnagar Labyrinth and Support* (2017)).

[7] These are the crater's dimensions as indicated on the memorial's website. They are however not unanimously agreed on. Holt & Holt, for instance, instead speak of 300ft width and 90ft depth (2017, p.15).

*Labyrinth* 2020). This is thus a memorial place which demonstrates vividly how a *lieu de mémoire* can embody the memory of what happened at its location.

The second difference to the 'Ring of Remembrance' and the 'Historial' is that 'Lochnagar Crater' is privately owned. It was bought by the 34-year-old Richard Dunning from Surrey in 1978 to prevent it from being refilled and repurposed as had other mines in the vicinity (Holt & Holt 2017, p.15; see further *Richard Dunning* 2020). Over the years Dunning has been supported by a volunteer group founded in 1989 called 'Friends of Lochnagar'. This group was later formed into the *Lochnagar Crater Foundation* on 31 March 2017, a charitable organisation recognised by the British Charity Commission (*The Lochnagar Crater Foundation*; for more information on the 'Friends of Lochnagar' see Holt & Holt 2017, p.16).

Remarkable about this memorial is its stance towards reconciliation. Similar to the other two sites language and symbolism are used as tools to emphasise a reconciliatory spirit on panels and memorial relics.[8] Some of these stress that this site does not differentiate between winners and losers but remembers the sacrifices made by all. For instance, the RAF Mountain Rescue Association laid a rock in 2015, which originates from the Lochnagar Mountain in Scotland. Engraved on it is a text that indicates explicitly the commemoration 'of combatants of all nations who made the ultimate sacrifice in WW1'. Likewise, a carved granite stone donated by Wenches in Trenches which remembers the women who served also stresses the concept 'of all nations'. Moreover, similar to the other two memorial sites, international cooperation between former enemies has its place at 'Lochnagar Crater'. Contrary to the exclusivity of nationalist, patriotic interpretations of *lieux de mémoire*, this site again emphasises the importance of inclusivity. Germans regularly participate in the annual Lochnagar remembrance ceremonies where in a reconciliatory manner parts of the ceremony are read in German as well as English and French. This cooperation is also symbolised in a memorial project by British, French and German twin towns called 'The Empty Chair'. As the information panel explains in all three languages, the chair was carved out of a German oak tree that had been 20 years old at the beginning of the war, roughly the same age as many of the soldiers. It is meant to accentuate 'the void left in so many homes across the world'.

The third and very important difference to the 'Ring of Remembrance' and the 'Historial' is that at 'Lochnagar Crater', however, reconciliation cannot only be read between the lines. It

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[8] As with the 'Historial' and the 'Ring of Remembrance', if not otherwise indicated, the following information provided on 'Lochnagar Crater' stems from visits to the Somme battlefields, in this case in November 2018 and July 2019. Further information on the panels, items, remembrance ceremonies and the memorial as such can also be found on the foundation's website: https://lochnagarcrater.org/.

is addressed explicitly as a topic and its promotion is considered as one of the most important goals of this impressive site. For instance, Tonie and Valmai Holt have pointed out that reconciliation together with remembrance and respect are the three major tenets which have guided Richard Dunning for many years (2017, p.18). Pursuant to this attitude, not only is one of the Labyrinth panels at the crater dedicated to the topic of reconciliation, but the foundation itself regards the promotion of reconciliation as an integral part of its credo. Its website states:

> The Lochnagar Crater Foundation was formed: […] To foster the unique atmosphere of peace and to help promote personal, social, national and international reconciliation. To bring individuals and communities together in an innovative spirit of kindness, goodwill and fellowship (*The Lochnagar Crater* 2020).



Figure 6: 'Lochnagar Wreath of Reconciliation', *Lochnagar Crater Remembrance Ceremony 1st July 2019*, Lochnagar Crater, La Boisselle, France, © Sarah Fissmer, photographed 01 July 2019

This is very evident in the annual laying of a Lochnagar 'Wreath of Reconciliation' at the 1 July and the 11 November ceremonies. This black wreath features white lilies as symbols for peace around its rim next to the names of all the major combatant nations, with France, Britain and Germany at the top. In its centre, on the purple background of a poppy, the following words are very fittingly printed: 'In a spirit of remembrance and reconciliation, Let us now, in their

honour, Go in peace'. Since there are about 250,000 visitors annually to the crater (*The Lochnagar Crater* 2020), it can be asserted that this message on the importance of reconciliation and peace reaches a sizeable audience. This foundation, thus, maintains a *lieu de mémoire* which encourages the overcoming of lasting resentments and focuses instead on building a shared future.

**Conclusion**

David Reynolds wrote in 2015 that 'there is no easy formula for making a global history of remembrance'. He pointed out that national histories are not only insistent but as perspectives 'vital to understanding and explaining the most recent formulations of the war and its meanings' (p.236). As plausible and important as this statement is, this paper advocates that remembrance can and should try to exceed solely national, especially nationalist and patriotic sentiments. The three chosen *lieux de mémoire* have shown that national perspectives on the First World War do not necessarily have to insist on their distinguishing attributes. Instead they can be interwoven into a common narrative that emphasises the importance of peace, reconciliation and international cooperation in today's world. The analysis of these sites in Northern France has demonstrated that there is more than one way for monuments, museums and events in the twenty-first century, dedicated to the memory of the Great War to encourage this overcoming of estrangement and continued pursuit of friendship and international understanding. The exemplary sites apply different tools and symbols to ensure a remembrance that turns its attention to the significance of amity between previously estranged parties instead of focusing overly on blame and guilt. These range from diverse architectural and memorial settings and questions of ownership, to a somewhat different approach concerning reconciliation as a topic. With the exception of 'Lochnagar Crater', reconciliation is not explicitly mentioned but instead encouraged through the slightly varied use of a language and symbolism of peace, amity and international cooperation.  In conclusion, it is when viewed together that these three *lieux de mémoire* achieve their full potential as beacons for reconciliation and peace: The 'Ring of Remembrance' as a powerfully symbolic architectural configuration of peace and friendship, the 'Historial' as a potent example of strong international cooperation on an academic level and 'Lochnagar Crater' with its foundation as a charitable organisation advocating for reconciliation as a necessity. By incorporating German casualties as well as perspectives, by involving German academics or by including German language signage, together the three sites emphasise that although cooperation can take different forms it is this inclusivity which memorial sites must use to foster reconciliation.

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# Gender, Race, and Participatory Neomedievalism in *Dungeons & Dragons*

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**Abstract:**

Historians' efforts to construct medieval histories reflect an attempt to reconnect modern audiences with past cultures and events. Practitioners of neomedievalism follow a similar principle, with one significant divergence – the neomedieval purposefully warps fact, thus estranging its consumers from real history in order to engage with an altered, imagined one. In this paper, I study the motivations, functions, and results of neomedievalisms by focusing on representations of race and gender in the fantasy role-playing game *Dungeons & Dragons*.

Claiming a pseudo-medieval environment for its backdrop, *D&D* is brimming with commonplace medieval tropes ranging from valiant knights to feudal cultures, but the game's propensity to incorporate counterfactual and ahistorically fantastical elements situates it as firmly neomedieval. What makes *D&D* a fascinating system of neomedievalism to study, though, is that it constantly evolves based on the invented narratives countless players create within it. As the game relies upon collectively improvised social interaction, players may choose – consciously or otherwise – to deform the rules or aesthetics of the *D&D* world to align with their own perspectives. In the case of social identities such as race and gender, these adjustments often result in the generation of neomedieval narratives in which racism and sexism are subdued or erased. Thus, I argue that *D&D* provides a space where players estrange themselves both from immersing themselves in an authentically medieval world, and from fully accepting the game's neomedieval world. The resulting system is one of participatory neomedievalism wherein players revise medieval and neomedieval material to constantly create new versions of the neomedieval. Ultimately, I assert that this endeavor to reimagine history presents an opportunity for players to reconcile themselves with the past by imagining a different, perhaps better, version of it in the present.

**Key Words**: *neomedievalism, gender, race, fantasy*

The popular tabletop roleplaying game *Dungeons and Dragons* (*D&D*) emerged in the wake of the mid-to-late-twentieth century rise of the blockbuster neomedieval fantasy genre that was embodied by novels such as *The Lord of the Rings* and an outpour of similar secondary world tales of epic proportions. In essence, *D&D* harnesses the spirit of those stories to form a game of collaborative improvisation in which one player, called the dungeon master, constructs a series of fantastical adventures for a group of players (often called the party). This party assumes the roles of heroic fantasy characters (such as noble paladins, vengeful barbarians, or sage wizards) which they invent themselves and sculpt as the story progresses. Like its literary counterparts, *D&D* departs from the present moment and situates itself within a vaguely medieval setting infused with the splendidly magical heroics of the sword and sorcery and high

fantasy traditions.[1] Such a setting beckons players to estrange or release themselves from the grasp of modernity in order to engage with a thoroughly different world where all varieties of strange and supernatural things can occur. However, this endeavour to simultaneously recreate a world of the past – as well as a world which never existed – is not always as completely distinguished from the present time as one might expect. For example, the following excerpt of dialogue from a podcast featuring a group of players engaging in a *D&D* session raises questions about the validity of the game's medieval milieu:

> DUNGEON MASTER (as a fairy non-player character): You're from the other world, aren't you?
> JUNO: Yes, we are.
> MARGARINE: I mean, if we tell you "yes" are you going to also try to sacrifice us to your god?
> DUNGEON MASTER: No, uh, in fact our god doesn't need a sacrifice.
> MARGARINE: Thank God. What?
> DUNGEON MASTER: We heard the bigger one mention the Order of Gaylahduille, are you affiliated with them?
> JUNO: Yes.
> DUNGEON MASTER: They figured out that our goddess–it's a goddess actually. Pretty weird of you to assume it's a god.
> MARGARINE: "God" was non-gendered! I'm sorry.
> (dir. Graessle 2018, minutes 18:00-19:00).

Modern dialects and fantastical creatures aside, a listener might be curious as to why this troupe of supposedly medieval characters is so pre-occupied with the assumption of a god's gender, as the conversation seems to tackle a more contemporary issue. Of course, the Middle Ages spanned around a thousand years and encompassed countless cultures, so discourse surrounding the gendering of God was present,[2] but the fact remains that this particular exchange is distinctively flavoured with modern cultural motifs. Thus, I begin with this excerpt because it gestures towards a larger trend in *D&D* which encourages players to adjust medieval social systems to accommodate modern notions of identity. In the pages that follow, I will explore how these adjustments function with regards to constructions of race and gender. I dwell on these two identities because they are the ones which are most visibly referenced in the *D&D* rulebooks, and also because cultures surrounding race and gender are most explicitly

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[1] For an exhaustive breakdown of fantasy subgenres (high fantasy, heroic fantasy, epic fantasy, sword and sorcery, etc.) see entries in John Clute's *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (available online at http://sf-encyclopedia.uk/fe.php).

[2] Caroline Walker Bynum addresses one such area of discourse in her examination of late medieval theological imagery which sometimes depicts the body of Jesus Christ as female or as having feminine characteristics (1992, pp.205-222).

differentiated within the game's universe from what their various medieval counterparts would have been. Through this exploration, I endeavour to reveal how role-playing games such as *D&D* are an epitome of neomedievalism because they inherently require individuals to playfully (and, therefore, often inaccurately) partake in the process of generating a medievalist world.

To begin with, I shall break down the terms 'medieval,' 'medievalism,' and 'neomedieval,' as the nuances of their definitions are of crucial importance to the validity of my argument. For the purposes of this paper, my use of the term 'medieval' refers broadly to the historical information and cultural or literary apparatuses associated with the Middle Ages, an era loosely delimited as beginning after the fall of Rome and ending with the start of the European Renaissance.[3] This definition's relative lack of narrower temporal, cultural, or geographic specificity is important for two reasons. First, many modern media inspired by the medieval, including fantasy pieces like *D&D,* draw their inspiration from a similarly non-specific notion of the Middle Ages. Second, this flexible notion of the medieval plays into the nebulosity of the term 'medievalism.' As Louise D'Arcens observes in her introduction to the *Cambridge Companion to Medievalism*, '[d]efining medievalism is complicated […] by both the scale and classificatory slipperiness of the period from which it takes its inspiration' (2016, p.4). Umberto Eco presents a similar take on medievalism in his seminal essay on the topic, suggesting that medievalism is the creation of various 'little Middle Ages', which focus on constructing different images of the period, whether that image be viciously barbaric or pristine, chivalric, and romanticized (1986, p.68). Thus, while acknowledging that medievalism has complex and varied definitions, this paper views it as an attempt by people of later time periods to revive, reconstruct, or otherwise understand certain aspects or aesthetics of medieval cultures.[4]

In contrast, scholars use the term 'neomedievalism' to refer to the so-called 'medievalism of popular culture' which 'appropriate[s] and transform[s] elements thought to be "medieval," often flaunting their historicity or verisimilitude to achieve a particular aesthetic' (Emery and Utz 2017, p.6-7). Essentially, the neomedieval purposefully warps the medieval to suit the purposes of the work it exists within. For fantasy, neomedievalism may entail introducing magic, dragons, alternate timelines, or entirely invented universes to a setting which otherwise draws upon medieval tropes such as chivalry, feudalism, castles, and swordplay. According to

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[3] Emery and Utz put forward the timeframe of 476-1453 as exact dates for the medieval period (2017, p.6).
[4] For a more in-depth view of the abundantly diverse ways in which medievalism manifests across history, see the essays compiled on the subject in the *Cambridge Companion to Medievalism.*

Pam Clements, such introductions have been used by critics to call into question the authenticity of neomedieval worlds, which generate themselves at a significant temporal distance after the Middle Ages (2017, p.19, 23). However, Leslie Workman, who is suspicious that an 'authentic' interpretation of the medieval even exists, offers a counterpoint to medievalists seeking strict historicity. In her view,

> The Middle Ages are virtually unique among major periods or areas of study in being entirely the creation of scholars [...] every generation has to write its own history of the past, and this is especially true in the case of the Middle Ages. It follows that medievalism, the study of that process, is a necessary part of the study of the Middle Ages [...] medievalism [is] concerned with process rather than product (Workman 1995, p.227).

The concept that medievalism (which, by Workman's definition, includes scholarship on the medieval period) is intrinsically a process that aims to sculpt a genuine product rather than the product itself positions neomedieval creations, especially games which are themselves living processes, as apparatuses which consciously critique the medievalist process by introducing flagrant impossibilities. Lauryn S. Mayer adds further affirmation to this sentiment, claiming that because we are essentially unable to access an original version of the medieval, we are constantly creating what Jean Baudrillard dubs simulacra – that is, 'cop[ies] without [originals]' (Mayer 2017, p.223). In the absence of an original, wholly infallible notion of the medieval, Mayer contends that neomedievalism arose, in part, to '[comment] directly on the process of [the] re-creation' of the Middle Ages (2017, p.224).

All of these ideologies deconstruct what authenticity means in the context of medievalism, thus inviting new interpretations of how to satisfyingly depict the medieval in popular culture. For Clements, the lack of critical consensus on genuineness means that the neomedieval can construct its own internal authenticity using commonly recognized signifiers of the medieval (and, more specifically, the neomedieval). Furthermore, the ability of these signifiers – a collection of objects, materials, and environments including 'tunics, tights and gowns, girdles and fantastic headgear; scenes of dirt and filth, of animals roaming at large in the street or halls' etc. – to create a believable world for whoever reads or interacts with it, replaces an audience's or player's perceived need for historical authenticity (Clements 2017, p.24).

In this way, neomedieval content functions as an easy way for both academics and non-academics alike to explore and, in the case of games, manipulate the medieval world. Some critics suggest that neomedieval media counterintuitively associates the Middle Ages with play

either by gamifying violence, or simply by constructing a threatened world (such as Narnia, Middle-earth, or *D&D*'s Forgotten Realms) which the protagonist or player must save in order to preserve the integrity and magic of the world (Moberly and Moberly 2017, p.177-179). This becomes particularly relevant with tabletop and videogames which insist that players

> acknowledge and constantly validate the rules within which the magic circle of the game is constructed, through questing, character configuration, combat, and almost every other aspect of game play (Moberly and Moberly 2017, p.177).

The combined effect of people becoming players within neomedieval worlds is that the world begins to depend upon them, evolving based on how they choose to play. In this sense, whether they realize it or not, players who serve as members of *D&D* parties constantly participate in the process that is neomedievalism, utilizing the guiding materials provided by the game and their own knowledge of medievalist landscapes to construct a new version of the medieval.

There are critics who question whether *D&D* can truly be considered an artifact of medievalism. Specifically, David Marshall labels *D&D* an autopoietic system, meaning that it

> distinguishes itself from the external environment to preserve its own distinctiveness, responding to external stimuli by self-referentially redefining the boundaries between self and environment based on its own needs and perceptions of that relationship (2007, p.172).

What Marshall's argument amounts to is that *D&D,* whatever its inspirations, ultimately asserts its identity using its own canon and rule system rather than falling back on historically accurate constructions of the medieval period. Furthermore, Marshall posits that *D&D* claims fantasy literature, rather than the Middle Ages, as its primary referent. Thus, Marshall claims that 'if fantasy literature is a form of medievalism, then *D&D,* as an outgrowth of fantasy, is a separate system of medievalism-ism' and that 'no direct reference to the Middle Ages appears in the game' (2007, p.174, 182). This claim, while rooted in truth, is marred by a logical error. First, even if *D&D* draws influence primarily from fantasy literature, it is fallacious to assume that this was the sole influence and that none of the various architects of the game looked to the medieval for inspiration. In fact, the creators explicitly address their inspirations within the *Player's Handbook,* citing folkloric fairytales and compilations of various mythologies as key influences in addition to post-1950 science fiction and fantasy (2014, p.312). Moreover, other portions of the *Player's Handbook* make direct reference to the Middle Ages, such as the game's use of 'Fantasy-Historical Pantheons' which transpose Celtic, Egyptian, Greek, and

Norse gods into the *D&D* universe as 'fantasy interpretations of historical religions from our world's ancient times' (2014, p.297-299).[5] Regardless of *D&D*'s specific inspirations, if we recall Workman's claim that an authentic Middle Ages is impossible to access and Mayer's discussion of the neomedieval simulacra, then the notion of separating 'true' medievalism from 'imitation' medievalism becomes a moot point. Even if we do, however, accept Marshall's claim that *D&D* is a form of 'medievalism-ism', then I would suggest we classify this form under the umbrella of neomedievalism. After all, Marshall claims that *D&D* produces a secondary, pseudo-medieval world by emulating and revising previous productions of the medieval – a practice which falls directly in line with the existing definition of neomedievalism. In fact, under this paradigm, *D&D*, a constantly evolving entity falling into the lineages of a variety of medieval and neomedieval lexicons, manifests an increasingly heightened expression of the neomedieval.

Marshall enfolds another assertion about the mechanics of *D&D* into his discussion of medievalism which is useful when assessing how players' choices – especially choices regarding contemporary social topics – influence the game's cooperative world-building process. This assertion centers around what Marshall calls deformation and involves the consequences of inserting allusions to the present into what is supposed to be a medieval world. As Marshall puts it,

> in terms of the game, outside events or sources can be drawn into the apparatus, but as they are deformed to fit into the game, they cause a deformation in the game (2007, p.180).

Examples Marshall uses to illustrate this notion include how modern technology or politics may be deformed or distorted into magic or cosmological systems to fit into the world of the game. In turn, these additions deform the game itself because they often either stretch the rules of the game or alter the narrative tone by introducing decay, cults, or destruction into the story which emerge from issues originating in the real world. Another way to apply Marshall's concept of deformation, though, is to consider how the game of *D&D* deforms and is deformed by players' conceptions of race, gender, and other social identities.

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[5] The *Player's Handbook* uses the term 'ancient' here to loosely refer to bygone ages. In this case, the phrase 'ancient times' appears to conflate the medieval and the pre-medieval (or ancient) era. This serves as an example of how some constructions of neomedievalism (e.g. the *Player's Handbook*) may reject specificity with regards to medieval influences, or even draw some inspirations from beyond the medieval.

For the remainder of this essay, I shall execute this investigation by looking at how the instructional and supplementary lore apparatuses of *D&D* deform medieval and neomedieval identity constructions while also allowing players to engage in and deepen that neomedievalist enterprise. Critics have observed the tendency of neomedieval fantasy media to '[impose] contemporary social or political values on the past', but there is less discussion of how the tension between the medieval and modern influences the way in which players approach and interact with social structures within in-game worlds (Driver 2004, p.19). I see the designs of *D&D*'s gaming structure and multiple secondary worlds as ones which both restrict players to certain neomedieval constructions of identity while also welcoming players to challenge and eschew those restrictions.

To understand this idea, I turn to the texts which govern *D&D,* namely the assorted editions of the *Player's Handbook* – a tome containing all the essential information players need to create *D&D* characters who will successfully and satisfyingly function within the game's world. In the most recent edition of this rulebook, the introduction makes it clear that the game is meant to be immensely flexible, conforming to the tastes and desires of its players. This is most lucidly illustrated by the game's 'three pillars of adventure': exploration, social interaction, and combat (*Player's Handbook* 2014, p.8). The first two of these pillars require players – be they acting as the adventure-crafting dungeon master or members of the adventure's questing party – to actively create the game through improvisation. After all, most published *D&D* modules offer only the bare bones of a plot, and it falls upon the players to invent the rest of the story. And then, of course, there are 'homebrew' campaigns which are adventure storylines which may be entirely independent creations of the dungeon master. Under Antero Garcia's paradigm, which asserts that 'the opportunities for transgressive social play are limited only by the imagination of players and the constraints of what a gaming system will allow', *D&D* players truly have vast power to define how they exhibit their characters' identities – which in turn implicitly defines, to an extent, social aspects of the world those characters exist in (Garcia 2017, p.235). Thus, the foundational principles of *D&D* expect players to generate novel iterations of the game's – and, therefore, a neomedieval – world.

One essential way in which *D&D* and its players manufacture the neomedieval is by socially constructing gender. Though different dungeon masters may choose to orient the social milieu and societal prejudices of their *D&D* worlds differently, most *D&D* campaigns operate using a decidedly non-medieval notion of gender roles. Most notably, the gender of a character does not affect the opportunities available to them during character development. Female characters can be any class – from bard to barbarian – with nary a stipulation in the *Player's*

*Handbook* about any cultural attitudes that may obstruct characters from entering a career based on their gender. Beyond negating hard and fast regulations based on gender, the *Player's Handbook* goes on to encourage players to deconstruct the concepts of the gender binary as they create and narrate their characters in the following blurb:

> You don't need to be confined to binary notions of sex and gender [when creating a character]. The elf god Corellon Larethian is often seen as androgynous or hermaphroditic, for example, and some elves in the multiverse are made in Corellon's image. You could also play a female character who presents herself as a man, a man who feels trapped in a female body, or a bearded female dwarf who hates being mistaken for a male. Likewise, your character's sexual orientation is for you to decide (*Player's Handbook* 2014, p.121).

While there certainly is evidence of female warriors existing in some medieval cultures, such as Nordic shield-maidens or Joan of Arc,[6] as well as a degree of tolerance for homosexuality and other socially transgressive queer identities,[7] it was not necessarily normative for women or for people with deviant gender expressions to experience the degree of social freedom presented to them in *D&D*. Instead, many of the medieval cultures which *D&D* draws influence from, like many contemporary ones, were infused with varying patriarchal structures that would have caused men and women to experience some level of differential treatment.[8] Thus, the erasure of these sexist and homophobic facets of medieval society within *D&D* gameplay represents an effort to construct a neomedieval society that reflects an aspiration for a non-patriarchal world.

Of course, this system of play which employs an egalitarian approach to gender is the product of *D&D*'s evolution and, in a sense, its deformation. It is both unfair and inaccurate to

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[6] The Germanic shield-maiden or Valkyrie figure is one that is present among medieval texts such as the Icelandic Eddas as well as sagas sagas such as *The Saga of the Volsungs* and *The Nibelungenlied.* Helen Damico offers a useful sketch of the so-called 'Valkyrie reflex' within Old English literature, and Leslie A. Donovan examines the trope of these 'martial maidens' within Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* (1990, p.176-190; 2003, p.121). Though recent anthropological studies contribute support to the idea that female Viking warriors did exist in actuality as well as within these medieval and neomedieval literatures, the fact remains that warrior women are thought to have been relatively scarce in the medieval period (Hedenstierna-Jonson *et al.* 2017).
[7] John Boswell's central thesis of his 1980 monograph *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* is that non-heterosexual conduct may not have been as condemned within Western medieval Christian traditions as we might expect. David Halperin bolsters this notion by pointing out that concepts such as homosexuality and heterosexuality were not fully concretized during the Middle Ages, and therefore there was some room for deviation (2013, p.262-281). All the same, attitudes towards queerness and sexuality were still much different than they are today.
[8] Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen's anthology *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature* offers a number of historical, literary, and folkloric perspectives on the positioning of women in early medieval European Germanic culture. For a more focused investigation of hierarchical gender structures specifically in Pre-Conquest Britian, see Stacey S. Klein's *Ruling Women: Queenship and Gender in Anglo-Saxon Literature*.

claim that *D&D* approaches gender simply and wholly without prejudice. Initial versions of the game, namely the first and second editions, have been criticized for their misogynistic depictions of women (Garcia, 2017). The accompanying *Player's Handbooks* for these earlier editions featured pictures of scantily-clad, exotic, or monstrous women and solely used masculine pronouns when referring to characters – a linguistic choice that Garcia argues expunged female players and characters from the game (2017, p.237-238). Additionally, female characters in these early editions had lower maximum strength limits than male characters, a mechanic which obstructed female characters and their respective players from advancing as easily through *D&D*'s world (Garcia 2017, p.238). Later editions of *D&D* strove to create a more inclusive experience by incorporating more powerful representations of female characters into game materials, including introducing female pronouns into the *Player's Handbook* (Garcia 2017, p.238-239). Something as seemingly subtle as altering pronoun usage in a game manual may not appear revolutionarily neomedieval, but that is precisely what it is, since the administrators of *D&D* adjusted their already neomedieval world to account for changing attitudes towards gender that do not reflect those present within the realm of strictly medieval historicity. To be fully effective though, this neomedieval act requires the cooperation of players, as the bulk of *D&D* exists beyond its rulebooks as an improvisation-driven narrative performed in a social space. Thus, efforts to limit prejudicial gender stereotypes, such as modifying pronoun usage or including illustrations of more women in positive heroic roles within *D&D* rulebooks, function to encourage players to make a version of the Middle Ages that they want to exist within as characters.

A similarly participatory neomedieval dynamic arises with regards to race in *D&D*. As opposed to sexism, which newer editions of *D&D* strive to dampen, racism is inextricably ingrained within the game. Now, race in *D&D* does not usually refer to skin color or ethnicity. While people of different ethnicities and skin colors do exist in *D&*D – indeed, newer editions of the game strive to incorporate increasingly multiethnic perspectives through added features such as the monk class, which takes its inspiration from Eastern philosophies and martial artists (*Player's Handbook* 2014, p.81) – the game does not foreground systemic prejudices associated with these physical and ancestral characteristics into its racial discourse. Rather, a *D&D* character's race refers to which humanoid fantasy species they belong to – of which there are a great number. In terms of *D&D* mechanics, racism manifests itself in the ability scores (i.e. strength, dexterity, constitution, intelligence, charisma, and wisdom) and typical alignments characters of different races possess. Ability scores affect various aspects of characters' prowess in mental and physical skills while alignment affects the morality of a

character, their personality, and the choices they might be inclined to make. These alignments are split into nine domains and organized along spectrums of chaotic to lawful and good to evil. For example, elves, lithe and graceful, have heightened dexterity and 'love freedom, variety, and self-expression, so they lean strongly toward the gentler aspects of chaos […] they are more often good than not' (*Player's Handbook* 2014, p.23). Beyond these fantastical forms of racism, which transcend stereotype and dictate essentially universal racial characteristics, there are more familiar forms of racism present within *D&D* as well. In the fifth edition of the *Player's Handbook*'s chapter on races, each race has an accompanying description of what their general views are towards other races. Dwarves, for instance, consider elves 'flighty and frivolous' while elves look upon dwarves as 'dull, clumsy oafs' (*Player's Handbook* 2014, p.19, 23). In sum, race in *D&D* is constructed both by supernatural, ability-affecting physical characteristics and by racial social perceptions or stereotypes that echo those in the real world.

These prejudicial mindsets and inherent racial characteristics may play a larger role in *D&D*'s lore and rules than gender, but the game still offers players opportunities to undermine and deform constructions of race to suit their own purposes. After all, as dwarves, elves, and dragonborn are entirely fictitious races that never existed at any point in our world's history, *D&D*'s racial system is fundamentally neomedieval. However, like *D&D*'s approach to gender, because races and race relations are somewhat loosely defined by the rulebook, players have liberal creative license to do what they please with their characters and the *D&D* world they exist in while they play. Thus, players' opportunities to deconstruct and reconstruct the game substantially augments its neomedievalism. An exemplar of this concept is the drow elf race. Described in the *Player's Handbook* as 'vicious', 'dangerous', and 'evil' beings coming from a 'depraved' society, the subterranean drow (or dark) elves are set up to be bad guys (*Player's Handbook* 2014, p.23-24). Yet, the *Player's Handbook* questions its own portrayal of this race by pointedly mentioning Drizzt Do'Urden, a drow elf who 'broke the mold', '[rejected] his heritage', and '[proved] his quality as a good-hearted defender of the weak and innocent' (*Player's Handbook* 2014, p.24). In emphatically discussing an example of a character who undermines the integrity of its racial system by diverging from standard racial alignment, *D&D* implicitly gives players the option to deform its racial system as well as other aspects of the game's lore, thus participating in an ongoing neomedieval process.

With this in mind, I return to the podcast excerpt with which I began this essay. In that snippet of dialogue, the players are very much placing modern gender ideologies into what is supposed to be a medieval world. While the participants achieve this in a playful manner, they ultimately form a new medieval world – a new simulacrum, if you will. Recall that Umberto

Eco suggests that there are ten 'little Middle Ages' which medievalisms can be classified under (1986, p.68). *D&D* parties across the world have been manufacturing thousands of versions of the Middle Ages for half a century, but I suspect that by virtue of *D&D*'s vibrantly neomedieval nature, many of these versions enter into conversation with Eco's 'barbaric' Middle Age which applies to medievalisms that envision the Middle Ages as an unyielding cesspool of brutal atrocities (1986, p.69). I suspect this because, despite *D&D*'s fixation on violent combat, the game's designers and players have shown efforts across time to reimagine a neomedieval world that is progressively more free from the damaging social ailments that stratify society based on race, gender, and other identities. While *D&D* may continue to reinforce some socially problematic ideologies, the collaborative labor of those who sculpt the game to constantly critique and modify its current version of neomedievalism reflects a collective desire to positively reconnect with and reimagine history by constructing a more optimistic view of humanity's possible past(s), present, and future. In this way, gathering around the *D&D* table to craft tales of fantastical wonder and daring adventure allows players to estrange themselves from strict historical fact in hopes of dreaming up a world where past and present injustices might be remedied.

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# The Male Gaze, Gender Dynamics and Narrative Control in Muriel Spark's *Reality and Dreams*

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**Abstract:**

In 2017, revelations about the sexual misconduct of high-profile Hollywood figures such as Harvey Weinstein brought feminist discussions about patriarchal power into the mainstream. The #MeToo movement encouraged women to share their experiences, show solidarity and raise awareness about the ways women are seen and their bodies used by men not only in the glamorous film industry but in everyday life more generally. In this light, I think it is worth revisiting the fiction of Muriel Spark, a writer whose interest in film, gender, role-play and performance is well-suited to the contemporary moment. Spark's twentieth novel – *Reality and Dreams* (1996) – which follows the life of a chauvinistic and controlling film director, seems especially relevant. In this paper, I argue that *Reality and Dreams* uses metafictional techniques and the film industry as a setting in order to explore the heterosexual male gaze, gender dynamics, and the power of narrative control. The novel satirises not only the film industry and its male-dominated milieu, but also the patriarchal structures it reflects and reproduces, making it an appropriate and useful text for the #MeToo era.

**Key Words**: *gender studies, Muriel Spark, male gaze, metafiction, #MeToo*

## Introduction

As the recent #MeToo movement demonstrates all too well, women are still subject to the oppressive social and political power of the heterosexual male gaze. The male gaze was famously theorised by film scholar Laura Mulvey; by combining psychoanalytic theory and feminist critique, Mulvey showed how Hollywood's mainstream cinema systematically subordinated women, casting them as the passive, erotic spectacle of heterosexual male desire. Mulvey argued that the gaze of the camera in mainstream film production was decidedly male, a gaze which pandered to the heterosexual male spectator, and thus one which reinforced and reified patriarchal structures: 'The *determining* male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly' (Mulvey 1999, p.808, emphasis added). It is easy to expand this analysis of the cinematic male gaze to patriarchal society more generally, to see in the gendered dynamics of modern society a panopticon of male gazes: the beauty industry, advertising, pornography, and social media.

In 2017, after several women in the film industry, including Rose McGowan and Ashley Judd, came forward to report the sexual abuses of a high-profile Hollywood figure, Harvey Weinstein, the scandal provoked public outrage. The 'Me Too' movement was originally

founded by activist Tarana Burke in 2006, who used the phrase in workshops and on her Myspace page. However, once Hollywood stars like Alyssa Milano got involved and turned the phrase into a popular hashtag, #MeToo became a global movement of women demonstrating, using social media to share their own experiences of sexual harassment, and speaking out about other high-profile male figures in film, politics, academia and elsewhere. The movement, among other things, has thrown the male gaze into sharp relief and raised awareness that 'everywhere, in every part of women's lives, physical control, self-discipline and sterile sexual display are the watchwords of a new gender conformity that is branded into our very flesh' (Penny 2011, p.1). Feminist resistance reminds us that female subjectivity, as defined by patriarchal networks, remains a site of alienation and estrangement.

In this essay I show how Muriel Spark's twentieth novel, *Reality and Dream*s (1996), uses metafictional techniques and the film industry as a setting from which to explore the heterosexual male gaze, gender dynamics, and the power of narrative control.[1] The novel begins after Tom Richards, a renowned (and obnoxious) male director, falls from a crane during film production and recovers in hospital. The rest of the narrative follows Tom's life in the film world, satirising his chauvinistic behaviour in both filmmaking and reality. On a meta-textual level, Spark experiments with the gaze of narration itself. The metafictional aspects of the novel serve to remind readers that whoever controls narrative – *how* a story is told, its perspectives, frames, tone – wields immeasurable power. In this way, the novel satirises not only the film industry and its male-dominated milieu, but also the patriarchal structures it reflects and reproduces.

I focus on several of the women in the novel, including, for example, Jeanne, a novice actress, and Cora, Tom's first daughter, both of whom are subject to the male gaze in different ways. Tom's second daughter, Marigold, resentful of her father's behaviour and power, attempts to undermine Tom's gaze by using the same tricks of image-making and manipulation she has learned from her father. Marigold, however, is no feminist heroine; she appropriates the male gaze for her own, selfish ends, becoming increasingly destructive and violent in the process. In this respect, Marigold demonstrates a negative form of reconciliation, aping instead of subverting patriarchal modes of control.

While Spark's later work drew (largely positive) attention from critics, scholarship has tended to overlook or gloss over the last few novels in Spark's vast oeuvre. This is especially the case with *Reality and Dreams*, which is mentioned once, and only in passing, in 2010's *The*

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[1] The novel is hereafter cited as *RD*.

*Edinburgh Companion to Muriel Spark*. In his biography of Spark, Martin Stannard offers a compelling autobiographical reading of the novel (in which Tom's recovery from hospital mirrors Spark's own considerable health problems at the time of writing), but in doing so he fails to grapple with the text's central themes of looking, image-making and gender. While Stannard's book is primarily concerned with providing context for Spark's work, he nonetheless follows the trend set by Spark scholars of giving far less space to her last three novels than to earlier work. The only other extensive critical commentary on *Reality and Dreams* comes from Chikako Sawada's book, *Muriel Spark's Postmodernism*, which informs some of the arguments which follow. This essay therefore serves two purposes: to explore the theory of the heterosexual male gaze in a modern novel, but also to encourage and invigorate greater critical attention to the later period of a remarkably consistent writer.

## Metafiction and 'Reality'

Before looking more closely at how the novel interrogates the male gaze and its warped version of reality, it is important to establish how Spark deploys metafictional techniques to trouble the novel's own claims to 'realism' and draw attention to the ways it, too, is partial.

Spark's protagonist recognises and enjoys the god-like role of director: 'Yes, I did feel like God up on that crane. It was wonderful to shout orders through the amplifier and like God watch the team down there group and re-group as bidden' (*RD*, p.14). Spark, too, spent most of her career 'playing God' with her deceptive, often cruel omniscient narrators, but for the sake of exploring the dynamics of narrative control and exposing the ideological conventions of older literary forms. Tom Richards, on the other hand, appears to indulge his directorial fantasies uncritically: 'Right up there I was beyond and above pausing a minute and listening to their suggestions. What do they think a film set is? A democracy, or something?' (*RD*, p.14). Tom's disdain towards the idea that a film set could or should be co-operative or dialogic reveals his penchant for narrative control, which is also alluded to on the novel's previous page:

> There was a television in the corner, stuck up on the wall, and a controller by the side table. Tom switched it on. A Nigerian politician being interviewed – "Democracy," he said, "is not a one-man cup of tea." Tom switched off (*RD*, p.13).

This description foregrounds the passivity of the TV compared to Tom, the active spectator; Tom uses the TV controller to switch on the TV which is 'stuck up' on a wall 'in the corner'. Tom's disapproval of democracy is signalled when, after hearing one pro-democratic message,

he promptly turns the TV off. The reference to Nigerian politics, which at the time were embroiled in a dictatorship, serves as another reminder of Tom's own authoritarian tendencies.

The novel's metafictional ploys are particularly striking when Tom considers deep, ontological questions. For instance, the novel opens with the characteristic mystery and literary self-awareness for which Spark is known: 'He often wondered if we were all characters in one of God's dreams' (*RD*, p.7). The refrain is repeated later in the novel, this time with further elaboration:

> Tom often wondered if we were all characters in one of God's dreams. To an unbeliever this would have meant the casting of an insubstantiality within an already insubstantial context. Tom was a believer. He meant the very opposite. Our dreams, yes, are insubstantial; the dreams of God, no. They are real, frighteningly real. They bulge with flesh, they drip with blood. My own dreams, said Tom to himself, are shadows, my arguments – all shadows (*RD*, p.63-64).

As with many metafictional instances, this excerpt can be read in several ways. Spark had been a Catholic since her conversion in 1954, so Tom's thoughts here may well mirror Spark's own theological beliefs (Stannard 2009, p.150). However, these observations also work as an ironic piece of metafictional critique; Tom *is* a character in one of his creator's dreams (i.e. Spark's imagination). Spark's novel is both 'insubstantial' and 'real, frighteningly real'; *Reality and Dreams* contains a fiction, yes, but the characters and events are real inasmuch as the reader infuses them with reality for the duration of the reading. Similarly, and most importantly, Spark suggests that the seemingly insubstantial can be substantiated into the real – or what the reader *thinks* is the real – in the same way that, according to Tom, we may be the unreal – or dreamlike – products of an entity whose power is nonetheless profoundly real, bulging with flesh, dripping with blood.

In the context of the novel and in the critical context of the heterosexual male gaze, Tom's observations serve to describe the process by which ideological forces create and reproduce subjectivity, a dialectic of reality/ideology which frames our experience of the world, including our experience of gender. Patricia Waugh argues that 'in showing us how literary fiction creates its imaginary worlds, metafiction helps us to understand how the reality we live day by day is similarly constructed, similarly "written"' (1993, p.18). As we shall see, the metafictional strategies used in *Reality and Dreams* serve to foreground the ways in which female subjectivity is 'written'.

**The Male Gaze and Cinematic Practice**

As a male film director, Tom's camera wields the symbolic power of patriarchal society at large. This is seen most explicitly with the production of the 'hamburger girl' film, which is inspired by Tom's visit to France, where he sees a 'girl […] who was making hamburgers and sandwiches on a camping site, and who had struck his imagination so that he had kept her in his thoughts for weeks' (*RD*, p.19). However, Tom wishes only to capture the *image* of this girl, and nothing else: 'Tom had no further interest at all in the girl, except that glimpse' (*RD*, p.19). Tom's vision of the hamburger girl subscribes to what Laura Mulvey theorised as the '*to-be-looked-at-ness*' quality bestowed upon female stars in early Hollywood films: 'In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*' (Mulvey 1999, p.808-809). Mulvey elaborates further: 'Going far beyond highlighting a woman's to-be-looked-at-ness, cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself' (Mulvey 1999, p.815). In other words, the spectacle of women in cinema is not produced from a neutral point of representation but constructed by and for a voyeuristic male gaze.

When Tom discusses with Dave, his taxi-driver friend, the original hamburger girl and how she might react to the events of the film's plot, Spark lays bare the modus operandi of the cinematic male gaze:

> "[…] you've forgotten that the girl has a character, a personality, already functioning before you saw her dishing out hamburgers. She was already a person."
> […]
> "The charm of this girl is that she has no history," Tom said.
> "Then she isn't real."
> "No, she's not real. Not yet" (*RD*, p.75).

In her reading of the text, Sawada argues that 'the director has no intention to give "a character" or "a personality" to his hamburger girl who embodies and *is* a mere idea', that instead she 'should become "real" in the discourse of the field of vision and remain insubstantial as ever in the context of the real world' (2011, p.141). When Tom replies that she is not real *yet*, Spark both signals the contradictions of fiction's status as both real and imaginary, but also that the 'insubstantial' spectacle of the hamburger girl 'in the discourse of the field of vision' will, through the determining mechanisms of the heterosexual male gaze, enter the realm of the real. In other words, the representation of women in Tom's cinema promotes and reproduces the male gaze in reality.

This situation is dramatized by the actress who plays the hamburger girl and coincidentally shares the name of the character: Jeanne. Jeanne becomes absorbed by the role, indeed comes to believe she really *is* the hamburger girl of Tom's conception, and hassles him about not following through with the film's plot as if it were her life. The plot of '*The Hamburger Girl*' is only ever detailed in vague fragments, but the main storyline appears to follow a rich old man's obsession with the eponymous hamburger girl, and his plan to anonymously bestow on her a great fortune. In a conversation with Claire, Tom's wife, Jeanne betrays her confusion with film and reality:

> Claire discerned that Jeanne urgently needed a psychiatrist's help.
> "I was to have inherited millions."
> "Jeanne, you are not the Jeanne in the movie."
> "Oh no?" said Jeanne. "Oh, no?" This carried a threatening note (*RD*, p.110-111).

Not unlike Kim Novak's character in Hitchcock's *Vertigo* – who aims to fulfil in reality a role she was previously simulating, in a scheme to beguile an obsessive, stalking male detective – Jeanne tries to occupy in material reality the *ideal* object of desire created by Tom's distant, voyeuristic male gaze. Furthermore, the situation bears similarity to the sexual dynamic of another Hitchcock classic, *Rear Window*. Mulvey describes *Rear Window* as follows:

> His girlfriend Lisa had been of little sexual interest to him, more or less a drag, so long as she remained on the spectator side. When she crosses the barrier between his room and the block opposite, their relationship is reborn erotically (Mulvey 1999, p.813-814).

With Tom and Jeanne, this happens in reverse; the hamburger girl as a distant, mysterious and objectified 'glimpse' drives Tom's obsession, but when the film's producers want to interfere and make Jeanne 'into a more prominent personality', Tom demurs: '"She's an idea. If you make her a somebody […] the movie falls to pieces. It is nothing. Nothing at all"' (*RD*, p.79, p.80). More than any Hitchcockian character, however, Tom most resembles Hitchcock himself; Hitchcock's obsessive, controlling behaviour towards his actresses is well-documented (see Spoto 1983 and Ackroyd 2015). In this respect Jeanne, a relatively unknown actress and admirer of Tom, recalls Tippi Hedren – an inexperienced and unknown actress before *The Birds* – and her troubled relationship with Hitchcock (Evans 2016).

Jeanne regularly tries to find and confront Tom but is always met instead by his wife, Claire. One evening Jeanne calls Tom's house, and after a brief conversation Claire takes a

note to pass on to Tom: 'Jeanne is *looking* for you' (*RD*, p.81-82). Jeanne as spectator rather than spectated threatens the legitimacy and power of Tom's gaze, and as such must be (and is eventually) stopped. At the end of the novel, encouraged by Tom's vengeful daughter Marigold, Jeanne attempts to climb up the crane on the film set of Tom's next film and crush him in it, but, not knowing how to operate the machine, 'she tilted the pivot-arm to an angle, leaned over it clumsily and slipped nearly twenty feet. It was a very bad thump on to a cement floor. She was killed outright' (*RD*, p.159). The death is highly symbolic: Jeanne's climb to the crane (from which Tom often feels like God) represents a final, desperate attempt to effectively reclaim the heterosexual male gaze, and her inability to control it and the subsequent fall represent the powerful patriarchal resistance to such claims. When a technician asks why Jeanne would want to go up the crane Tom replies, 'perhaps to wreck it. […] Perhaps merely to see what it was like to look down at a crowd of people' (*RD*, p.160). Looking down, of course, characterises the asymmetrical power dynamic of the male gaze, and Jeanne's attempted ascent into this order is promptly curtailed. On the previous page, Tom, safely seated behind the camera on the crane, assumes the asymmetrical position just described: 'Tom looked down at her twisted face as the ambulance screamed to a stop outside the studio' (*RD*, p.159).

As Mulvey shows, Hitchcock's films (and those by other male auteurs) betray a clear sympathy with a patriarchal gaze, and Spark exploits and dramatizes these Hitchcockian tropes in order to both acknowledge and satirise their implications; what Mulvey explains in criticism Spark demonstrates through fiction.

## The Inescapable Gaze of Narration

Beyond Tom's personal and professional treatment of his actresses, another, more subtle gaze can be found within the very telling of the narrative – the familiar Sparkian gaze of the narrative voice. Spark's omniscient narrators have commonly been seen as cold, uncaring to their fiction's characters, and sometimes sadistic. The most famous example can be found in the proleptic sequences of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, in which the narrator reveals in a matter-of-fact manner the grim fate of a schoolgirl: 'Mary Macgregor, […] who was later famous for being stupid and always to blame and who, at the age of twenty-three, lost her life in a hotel fire' (Spark 2018, p.10). *Reality and Dreams* uses a similarly knowing and self-conscious narrative voice to reinforce the notion that *what is seen* (or read) in this text is a construction, that what Waugh (1993, p.152) calls the *histoire* (the contents of the story) are defined, coloured, shaped or refitted by the *discours* (the way the story is told). The *histoire* as a pure, neutral or objective narrative cannot exist because it must be relayed through the subjective

frame of the *discours* – the two are inseparable. As if to illustrate this, at the beginning of chapter four Spark includes within a description of two characters a metafictional jibe at the gullible reader:

> They were both very serious people – too serious for Tom, but who was to say he was the just arbiter of other people's character? Simply because he was always ready to assume that part, and others only too ready to listen to him with dazzled conviction is not to say that Tom was always right (although generally there was always something in what he said) (*RD*, p.33).

On one level the narrator undermines Tom's authority in order to reinforce their own textual authority. On a metafictional level, Spark as author mocks a reader 'only too ready' to uncritically absorb the narrative 'with dazzled conviction'; the narrator effectively points out the act of narration, and so casts doubt on its veracity ('not to say that Tom was always right'), while at the same time preserving a semblance of truth: 'generally there was always something in what he said'. The narrative is therefore not a complete fabrication, but its *telling* is suspect, especially in relation to its treatment of women. In *Reality and Dreams*, Spark's *discours* resembles another male gaze.

There are several moments in the otherwise 'realist' narrative in which the narrator betrays a complicity with Tom's gaze. A few paragraphs after the narrator asserts that 'Jeanne should be a throwaway item seen always at an angle', Tom repeats the sentiment: '"She's a throwaway item. You see her only at an angle"' (*RD*, p.78-80). Although readers might assume the first piece of narration uses free indirect style from Tom's perspective, the narratorial perspective in *Reality and Dreams* is less straightforward than that. For instance, the same chapter opens with an explicit acknowledgment that the narrator and Tom are different entities: 'It is time now to describe what Tom looked like, six months after his accident' (*RD*, p.71). 'It is time now' reminds us that the narrator, not Tom, is creating and organising the structure of the narrative, and the move towards a description of Tom, what he '*looked* like', reinforces the narrator's position as a transcendent spectator. For this reason, the reader only *sees* Jeanne 'at an angle' throughout the novel, from only one side, and rarely. Similarly, the cruel description of Jeanne as a 'throwaway item' foreshadows her fate on the crane.

The narrator, then, plays an active role in the gender dynamics on display in the novel. This is seen no more clearly than in the contrast between Tom's two daughters, Cora and Marigold. At the beginning of the novel, both sisters visit Tom separately. Each encounter is markedly different. Marigold is described in terms connoting deception and evil:

"Well, Pa, I hear you're going to be all right," said she, with her turned-down smile, skinnily slithering into a chair and arranging her coat over her flat chest' (*RD*, p.12).

The gratuitous, ornamental description of Marigold is more likely to belong to the narrator than it is to Tom, especially the alliterative and symbolic phrase 'skinnily slithering', evoking the biblical associations of woman and original sin. The 'flat chest' remark hints at Marigold's androgyny, a destabilising and thus threatening nonconformity in the eyes of the heterosexual male gaze (and, as will be seen, also prefiguring Marigold's adoption of her father's tactics).

Cora, on the other hand, is described favourably: 'He was touched that lovely Cora his daughter by his first wife had flown into London to see him. […] Her first words were, "Pa, you're going to be all right"' (*RD*, p.12). Tom being 'touched' is a clear report of Tom's feelings, but the following qualifier, 'lovely Cora', is more ambiguous; it could come from either Tom or the narrator. Furthermore, the reference to Cora being Tom's first daughter 'by his first wife' implies a kind of pristine, unspoilt nature in Cora – a complete contrast to the snakelike Marigold. In both cases, the narrator, alongside Tom, guides the reader like a cameraman, and characters are 'seen always at an angle'. The dialogue further establishes each woman's position in relation to the male gaze; Cora demonstrates 'feminine' compassion while Marigold instead betrays a 'masculine' appreciation for the factual.

As a character, Cora is constructed not by her own personality, dialogue or actions, but by the collective gaze of the men in the novel, including the complicit narrator. First, consider her own father's perverse desire: 'Cora was so beautiful, Tom wished she were not his daughter. He *looked and looked*' (*RD*, p.22, emphasis added). Later, and in the light of the context of Tom's lascivious gaze, the cliché expression of paternal affection takes on a more sinister tone: 'She was […] more beautiful in her appearance than ever, the apple of her father's eye' (*RD*, p.52). When Ralph, Tom's son-in-law, first sets eyes on Cora, it is through the frame of a window which, if we refer back to Hitchcock, is often a symbol for the cinematic spectator: 'Ralph was still looking out of the window. '"There's an extremely beautiful girl," he said, "coming up the garden path"' (*RD*, p.48). Other male characters construct Cora through their gaze: 'The policeman looked at good-looking Cora in amazement' (*RD*, p.93), 'Ivan Simpson […] was galvanised by Cora's beauty' (*RD*, p.107). The disembodied narrator too contributes to the collective male gaze, as can be seen in the following examples: 'It was left to Cora, the family beauty' (*RD*, p.25), '"Let's face it," said Tom to his really beautiful daughter. Only to see her move half across the room was an aesthetic delight' (*RD*, p.27). Or consider how the

narrator describes Ivan's gaze at Cora: 'He *noticed* that her features were perfect, her body charming' (*RD*, p.107, emphasis added). While the narrator appears to report Ivan's subjective position, the narrator actually foregrounds their own fictionalising, concealed within another character's 'observations'.

The reader is never privy to Cora's own gaze or self-reflections, as if to reinforce the following statement by Roberta Sassatelli (2011, p.127-128) that 'the male gaze is also the female gaze – namely that women look at themselves through the male gaze', that we 'can't escape the male gaze as it is "the gaze"' – in patriarchal society there is no alternative perspective from which to look. As a fairly superficial but highly gendered *construction*, Cora represents the ideal, successful product of the male gaze: conventionally beautiful, compliant and virginal ('Cora' derives from the Greek *κόρη* which translates to 'maiden') (*OED*, under *kore*). One of the final sentences in the novel, a poetic juxtaposition of surface and depth, implies that the superficial image of Cora shown throughout the novel is contrived by a gaze determined to suppress nuance: 'Cora was so beautiful it seemed impossible that she could have an ugly suspicion' (*RD*, p.160).

Cora's beauty and the intense desire it inspires in men can be related to what Laurie Penny calls 'mercantile eroticism' or 'erotic capital': the concept that representations of sexuality in media (such as advertising and pornography) 'is not sex itself but the illusion of sex' (2011, p.8). Penny quotes Jean Baudrillard to further explain the distinction between 'the erotic as a generalised dimension of exchange in our societies' and 'sexuality properly so called' (2011, p.9). Furthermore, 'the erotic is never in desire but in signs. […] in advertising and fashion naked bodies refuse the status of flesh, of sex, of finality of desire'. Throughout the novel Cora is presented as a model of perfection, and as such appears alienated from fleshly, lived experience, looking/appearing as almost unreal: 'She had a perfect form, a fresh, charming face, good hands, grey-green eyes and a mane of brown hair. She walked like a leopard' (*RD*, p.51). Cora's beauty thus overwhelms men with its erotic capital: 'She could not fall in love intensely or long enough to match the desire she aroused in men' (*RD*, p.52). As a kind of goddess figure – 'Kore' is one of the names for the Greek goddess Persephone (*OED*, under *kore*) – Cora represents Western society's relentless investment in erotic capital. As Penny argues, 'the Western female body, which seems to be everywhere on display, is in fact marginalised and appropriated by a culture of monetised sexuality that alienates us from our authentic personal and political selves' (2011, p.16). Throughout *Reality and Dreams* Cora always appears 'on display', and as such Spark emphasises the fictionality of Cora, and by extension the semiotic construction of women in the Western world under the patriarchal gaze.

Marigold, on the other hand, chooses to go into hiding in order to reassert control over her own image.

**Marigold's Ambiguous Resistance: Reclaiming or Reproducing the Male Gaze?**

Marigold becomes an important driving force for the novel's plot, as well as a looming danger for Tom, when she disappears. Around the novel's half-way point, Marigold goes missing for an unspecified amount of time, at least five weeks (*RD*, p.85). The reason for her disappearance is revealed once she is found; Marigold has supposedly been investigating the effects of redundancy by living the part as an out-of-work, destitute idler in order to report on it. The theme of unemployment and redundancy recurs throughout the novel almost as an ambient background, with various characters becoming redundant throughout, including Tom himself after his accident. Fluctuations in labour markets and the ways people are affected is connected to the politics of the heterosexual male gaze, especially when it comes to sex. When Tom's son-in-law, Ralph, loses his managerial job at an electronics firm, he confesses to Tom: '"I can tell you from personal experience […] that redundancy causes sexual disaster. It causes anxiety and inadequate erections"' (*RD*, p.44). Tom's response signals the judgement of the male gaze: 'He was looking at Ralph with new eyes', as if Ralph's redundancy and subsequent emasculation casts him anew as the passive, 'feminine' object of the patriarchal gaze (*RD*, p.43).

The close relationship between employment, productivity and male sexuality is a construct of the patriarchy. In the realm of cinema, this dynamic is concretised by the voyeuristic and erotic control maintained by the active, male spectator of Mulvey's analysis. Marigold's disappearance aims to undermine Tom's position in this order. As Chawada argues, Marigold's intensive 'research' is 'only the surface story': 'She has been observing the mass media picking up on her disappearance, and watching her family get a bad press, assailed by their old guilt that they might have neglected her' (2011, p.153). Marigold's disappearance puts into motion a project of spectatorship. Thus, she becomes both a spectacle *and* an invisible figure, thereby becoming a threatening spectator.

Chawada discusses the phenomenon in which people visited the empty space left by the Mona Lisa's theft in 1911, explaining that 'in an empty space once occupied by an object, the object finds itself as a new, elevated figure, which becomes absolute and inaccessible, "emptied of all substance"' (2011, p.153). In the novel, Marigold 'transforms herself into an inaccessible figure, though this undesirable girl's empty space is more related to its *threatening power* than to the viewer's desire' (Chawada, 2011, p.153, emphasis added). Furthermore, 'Marigold

disappears and stirs up her presence in people's mind by her very absence, but that presence consists solely of images' (Chawada, 2011, p.153). For instance, soon after the disappearance, Tom and Claire watch a 'home-movie video cassette' Marigold made in which she plays the part of a prospective employer in a fictional job interview with another actor – a nod to her directorial ambitions (*RD*, p.85-86). Public images haunt Tom in the media: 'Marigold's formidable face continued for a while to *look out* of the pages of the glossy magazines' (*RD*, p.106, emphasis added). Abstract images, like memories, contribute also to the ghostly, but inescapably present, image: 'Tom thought back on the times he had tried to make Marigold part of the family. Her manners were frightful. […] This was apparent before her fifteenth year, when she could be described as "difficult"' (*RD*, p.89-90). Speculation and gossip from other characters render Marigold an 'elevated figure', such as a televised interview in which Rose Woodstock, one of Tom's actresses, paints a sympathetic picture of Marigold: '"Tom neglected his daughter, I know. […] Tom frankly *didn't* like Marigold. […] Poor Marigold, she did what she could to keep her family together"' (*RD*, p.103). Of course, the reader is not privy to this version of Marigold; in fact, Marigold believes her parents should divorce (*RD*, p.37).

Marigold's disappearance enacts what Mulvey's 'active', male spectators achieve in classic Hollywood films – control. By veering out of shot, as it were, Marigold removes the power of the male gaze while simultaneously reclaiming it to remake or rewrite the narrative. Spark alludes to as much in the following discussion between Tom and a police investigator:

> "It may be," he said to the officer, "she has just gone away to write a novel."
> "Has she expressed a desire to that effect?"
> "No, but everyone is writing a novel, why not Marigold?" (*RD*, p.91)

From a distance Marigold not only changes the course of the plot but also the image and reputation of her father. His career in film is jeopardised: 'The producers of Tom's film worried about the effect of Marigold's disappearance' (*RD*, p.102). Following Rose's and others' damning interviews, 'Tom's personal popularity was low' (*RD*, p.103), 'he was thinking how afraid everyone was since Marigold's disappearance to get mixed up with him. Just in case…' (*RD*, p.96). It takes a toll on Tom's mental stability: 'his feelings were chaotic', 'he hated to be afraid' (*RD*, p.88, 121).

Of course, Tom begins to suspect Marigold's disappearance is a premeditated effort to undermine him. As Tom says, '"it's unfinished business"' (*RD*, p.88). Later Tom says to Claire, '"[…] the nicest thing that could happen to Marigold, and make her happy, is that we should have a bad reputation on her account,"' to which Claire replies, '"there's a touch of blackmail

involved in her disappearance"' (*RD*, p.106). Dave, Tom's insightful taxi-driver friend, observes to Tom: "'It seems to me […] that the tone is set by Marigold herself"' (*RD*, p.114). Marigold appropriates her father's own art of image manipulation to sabotage his narrative power. In this respect Marigold is an ally to Jeanne, with whom she sympathises. To Claire, she criticises '[Tom's] shabby treatment of Jeanne' (*RD*, p.87). Before Marigold's disappearance, Tom had been having an affair with his actress, Rose, but during the investigation he stops: "'I've actually dropped Rose. The worry of it all has put me right off her"' (*RD*, p.94). Marigold's disappearance removes total narrative control from Tom's male gaze, rendering him, in both senses, impotent.

Yet, while Marigold succeeds in unsettling – at least temporarily – Tom's life, she fails to upend the patriarchal order because she adopts and reproduces the oppressive politics of the male gaze, as is suggested when she reappears disguised as a man. Tom watches the news report come in: 'The name 'Marigold'… A police car… A close-up of a young man, yes, but it could be a girl, and anyway it was Marigold' (*RD*, p.136). In a televised interview, Marigold explains the disguise: "'Partly for self-protection, she said. Partly, she wanted to be unrecognised and left alone"' (*RD*, p.137). To stave off the dangerous, misogynistic behaviours of men, Marigold assumes the role of a man, but on a symbolic level she ascends to the position of male gazer. During Marigold's disappearance, an attempt is made on the life of Tom's friend Dave, presumably as a warning to Tom. The hit is suspected to have been arranged by Marigold, and the novel confirms as much near the end (*RD*, p.154). Given that Tom's aimless cruises with Dave have Tom observing the world through the frame of a car window, the gun shots shattering that window symbolise Marigold's attempted annihilation of Tom's gaze. This violent gesture seals Marigold's transformation into an active, controlling male spectator.

Tom's reaction to Marigold's reappearance is coloured by his desire to cast her in his new film, about the relationship between a Roman centurion and a Celtic soothsayer. Before Marigold's reappearance, Tom obsesses over the idea of Marigold playing the Celt:

> Then Tom couldn't sleep at nights. For a week he puzzled over the casting of Cedric the Celt. Night after night before his closed eyes, and practically on his pillow in the morning, looking at him, looking… he could see the dark sullen ugly face of Marigold, herself (*RD*, p.132).

Marigold's (still invisible) spectatorship haunts Tom to the point where the only way he can reassert his power is by recasting Marigold's 'look' into a fiction and thereby taming it. Earlier Tom reflects that

> "Marigold could be quite handsome. […] If she could only get rid of that expression she could have a certain *look*. I don't know what part she could be cast in, but there is a part somewhere for her" (*RD*, p.106).

In Cedric the Celt, Tom identifies an opportunity to regain control over the chaos of Marigold's behaviour by capturing it within a cinematic frame. In the script, the Celt is subservient to the centurion, who is modelled after Tom, and 'was to be assassinated by superstitious zealots in the end' (*RD*, p.143). Tom relishes the idea of Marigold's death pose: 'Tom thought Marigold would look well, dead' (*RD*, p.143).

Paradoxically, Marigold's role in the film further cements her transformation into male gazer; the Celt's supernatural vision becomes a metaphor for Marigold's own farsighted, and proactive, spectatorship. For instance, when Marigold first goes into hiding at the campsite which inspired Tom's previous film, she predicts her parents will show up: 'Marigold had only partly dreamed that Tom and Claire would follow her to this very spot' (*RD*, p.102). Earlier in the novel, arguing against her parents' materialistic lifestyles, Marigold sermonises about the need to '"see things *sub specie aeternitatis*. Which means, […] under the light of eternity"' (*RD*, p.37). Indeed, the novel's denouement and its implications reveal the extent to which the text's events are instigated and controlled by the eerily omniscient and tyrannical Marigold. As Tom reflects, disturbed: 'Marigold knows everything, Tom thought. How?' (*RD*, p.52).

As mentioned above, Jeanne falls to her death during an attempt to sabotage Tom. In this endeavour, she is influenced and instructed by Marigold:

> It had been one of Marigold's bitter confidences, "I'd like him to go up in the crane and this time come down with a final thump. He doesn't need the crane. These days it is only a director's expensive toy. I'd like to fix it for him, and him with it," that had worked on Jeanne's drugged brain (*RD*, p.159).

'"[T]his time"' suggests Marigold may have been responsible for Tom's first crane 'accident', the event from which the narrative springs. In which case, Marigold, not Tom, is the character driving the plot from the beginning, in the same way as she 'fixes' the course of the novel during her disappearance. At the time of the second accident, Marigold has had the foresight to disappear once again: 'Marigold had left for the United States. She had given a press television interview at the airport. "The great crane was quite unnecessary for the film. It was my father's party game" (*RD*, p.160). The phallocentric gaze, symbolised in the '"great crane"',

has been exposed as a '"game"' with its own rules and terms, one which Marigold plays or *games* (to manipulate to her advantage)*,* fighting fire with fire.

**Conclusion**

Weinstein's conviction may secure closure for his victims and signal a promising new era for feminist resistance, but for as long as patriarchal structures continue to dominate and define the ways we *see* and understand gender, female subjectivity will remain alienated and estranged. Art can intervene and aid the struggle by exposing and thereby challenging the power dynamics under which gender is produced and reproduced, and Spark did this in her own unique ways. In her essay, 'The Desegregation of Art', Spark criticised tendencies within what she called 'socially-conscious art' – 'art which depicts with pathos suffering and victimization' – in order to explain the function or purpose of her own fictional strategies (Brown 2006, p.228). Spark contends that 'socially-conscious art' 'allows for a self-congratulatory moral earnestness that is often exhausted once a given work has been safely consumed' (Brown 2006, p.228). In other words, art which provokes pity for the oppressed only serves to produce and satisfy self-righteous readers who 'feel that their moral responsibilities are sufficiently fulfilled by the emotions they have been induced to feel' (Spark 1992, p.34).

To many contemporary woman writers and feminists – for whom confessional writing has been crucial in sharing experiences and confronting sexual trauma – this may seem controversial and alarming. But for Spark, a more effective way for art to combat systems of oppression can be found in the ironic form of satire, because 'it can have a greater and deeper impact on some of the grounds from which we act, namely, our perceptions, interpretations, and understandings of reality' (Brown 2006, p.229). Spark's fiction attempts to make us see the world anew, and in *Reality and Dreams* she satirises the film industry in order to explore the power dynamics of the heterosexual male gaze and show how gendered realities are constructed and maintained. Marigold's malevolent ploys fail to offer comforting feminist solutions to patriarchal oppression, and instead shows the extent to which women embody – and are trapped within – the values of the male gaze. By using metafictional techniques, employing a narrator who draws attention to the act of narration and the power it wields, Spark forces readers to consider the frames through which gender is understood, experienced and practiced, in the dreams of film as in those of reality.

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# Masters and Sons: Reconciling the Family in *There Will Be Blood*, *The Master,* and *Phantom Thread*

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**Abstract:**

This paper considers intergenerational conflict, estrangement, and reconciliation with the focus on the family in the works of contemporary American film director Paul Thomas Anderson. Using a combination of Trauma and Critical Adoption Studies as a novel methodology for cinematic analysis, this paper applies this particular critical approach to three of Anderson's major works: *There Will Be Blood* (2007)*, The Master* (2012), and *Phantom Thread* (2017). I explore ambivalent constructions of familial ties present in Anderson's films and consider the evolving shape and nature of the Anglo/American nuclear family in the contemporary moment as reflected on screen. Ultimately, this paper reads ambivalences around the possibility of reunion and reconciliation in his works. Anderson's films potentially offer a new definition of the family, one constructed through action rather than hereditary ties, but they are ultimately unable to reconcile these competing modes of family His families – both broken and surrogate – are structured around narratives that contain irretrievable loss and hopefulness for reconciliation.

Adoption narratives depict biological and adoptive families, and in doing so, offer 'a way of thinking about the family, exploring what a family is' (Novy 2001, p.2). A traditional definition of the family prioritizes hereditary and genetic ties between its members. From this perspective, adoptive, surrogate, or non-traditional families are always an imitation of a 'real', biological family, meaning that the two modes of family cannot be reconciled. By representing adoptive and biological families as inherently different, this dichotomy maintains an essentialist definition of the family that places biology at its heart. However, adoption narratives have the power to blur these boundaries, to destabilize such a definition of the family, and the possibility of reconciling the adoptive with the biological.

The work of American filmmaker Paul Thomas Anderson portrays such a blurring. His films *There Will Be Blood* (2007), *The Master* (2012), and *Phantom Thread* (2017) offer audiences a protagonist alongside their biological and surrogate families, and by comparing both, the films do not emphasise biology as being constitutive of the family. These films present units and relationships structured around participation in chosen kinship ties: instead of organising around biology, they are mediated by material interactions – a 'society of family'

(*The Master,* 2012). These films do not assume that an individual has only one set of parents and/or relatives by privileging one over the other. Nevertheless, the original, biological family is not entirely effaced. Although Anderson's characters are completely estranged from these families, who are absent from the films' narratives, they cast a long shadow, thus highlighting the lasting repercussions of biological family trauma. Consequently, my reading of the films will show that although they succeed in blurring the real/fictive and biological/adoptive boundary, they ultimately are unable to present a stable reconciliation of these two modes of family.

Each of the aforementioned films is explicitly concerned with notions of family, both biological and adoptive. Jason Sperb states that Anderson's films are consistently concerned with the 'disintegration of the white middle-class family' (2014, p.20). *There Will be Blood* follows the rise and fall of oil prospector Daniel Plainview (Daniel Day Lewis) in early 20th century America. Plainview adopts H.W. (Dillon Freasier), the orphaned son of a dead employee, and becomes locked in conflict with his symbolic son, local preacher Eli Sunday (Paul Dano), as he attempts to drill for oil in the town of Little Boston. *The Master* observes damaged Naval veteran Freddie Quell (Joaquin Phoenix) as he finds a new family in the Scientology-esque cult The Cause and its enigmatic leader, Lancaster Dodd/The Master (Philip Seymour Hoffman). *Phantom Thread* tells the story of obsessive dressmaker Reynolds Woodcock (Daniel Day-Lewis) and his psychosexual relationship with Alma (Vicky Krieps) and, tacitly, with his sister Cyril (Lesley Manville) in 1950s London. As adoption narratives, these films' depictions of non-traditional and biological families rethink the concept of family and problematize its traditional boundaries. Whereas both *There Will Be Blood* and *The Master* are primarily concerned with surrogate fathers and sons, *Phantom Thread* focuses on the figure of the mother, which is seemingly absent from many of Anderson films. Each of the films analysed centres on male characters who suffer trauma at the hands of their traditional, biological family unit and follow their relationships within new adoptive families: Plainview, HW, and Eli; Freddie and Lancaster; and Reynolds and Alma.

Adoption narratives generally subscribe to two distinct categories in the representation of the differences between biological and the adoptive family. As Adoption Studies theorist Marianne Novy suggests:

> In literature about adoption […], the superseded parents are often stereotyped – in one version of polarities the birth parents are irrational and irresponsible, in another the birth parents warm while the adoptive parents cold (2001, p.2).

Both these categories of representation place the biological and adoptive in conflict with each other, and in doing so reinforce their differences. Furthermore, they both assume that one is a 'real' family while the other is not. Either love and affection from the adoptive parents trump biological ties, or the power of biology is inescapable in defining a true family. *There Will be Blood, The Master*, and *Phantom Thread* contest this dichotomy primarily through their positioning of the adoptive family in relation to the biological. They firmly associate the original family with severe mental traumatisation that estranges its members and drives them to adoptive relationships. The presentation of both families as traumatic and dysfunctional does not adhere to traditional representations of adoption: they are not presented as diametrically opposed, but rather deeply similar in how they are experienced by their participants and their effects on them. However, it must be noted that although Anderson's films can be viewed as adoption narratives, they do not completely conform to these modes of representation. And even when adoption narratives do not prioritise the importance of the biological or birth family above that of an adoptive or surrogate one, often this relationship is, in essence, reversed.

**Estrangement, Trauma, and the Biological Family**

The biological family in Anderson's films can be analysed in response to contemporary discourses regarding adoption, which assert that estrangement from the birth family is inherently traumatising. Novy states that adoption narratives 'dramatize cultural tensions regarding the definition of the family and the importance of heredity' (2001, p.6). One such cultural tension that Anderson films dramatize is a theory of adoption and family that emerged in the 1990s, when Anderson begins writing and directing his films. Nancy Newton Verrier's theory of adoption, published in *The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adoptive Child,* locates adoption and separation of biological relationships as an inherently 'primal wound' (1993, p.7), for it severs a connection between child and mother that is 'primal, mystical, mysterious' (Verrier 1993, p.21). This connection can never be replicated by an adoptive parent, who is doomed to be a poor substitute mother to a traumatised child. Thus, adoption 'is, or is like, trauma' (Horman 2006, p.7). In the theory of heredity and adoption advocated by Verrier, the boundaries between 'real' (biological/traditional) and 'artificial' (adoptive/surrogate) are clearly and definitively demarcated. While Verrier suggests that an adoptive family can be a positive influence, it is never equal to its biological counterpart. A similar theory of adoption and trauma is espoused by Betty Jean Lifton, who asserts that the lives of the adopted are 'fictious' (1975, p.4) and 'the adopted and their birth parents are just as much in need of reunion as families separated by the Holocaust' (Horman 2006, p.24). Horman states the theory of

traumatic adoption advocated by writers like Verrier and Lifton 'corresponds to the theory of trauma as 'unclaimed experience' (Horman 2006, p.7). Detailed by theorists such as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, the theory asserts victims of trauma are unable to fully process trauma into their psyche. Regarding adoption and trauma, Novy states:

> One of the controversial issues among people who write about adoption is the question of how much trauma is inevitable in adoptee experience. Is the loss of a birth mother, whether through death or relinquishment, always painful and therefore a primal wound that affects the adoptee throughout life? (2007, p.221).

While familial trauma is at the heart of *There Will Be Blood, The Master*, and *Phantom Thread,* the films do not subscribe to Verrier's and Lifton's views. Instead, they present an inversion of this model as it is the birth families that are a source of trauma which affects characters throughout their adult lives. Their estrangement from these families is not an inherently traumatic act as Verrier or Lifton describe, but rather a response to pre-existing familial trauma. Thus, it is the biological family that is, or is like, trauma. In representing a differing view of trauma and separation, these families destabilise the firm boundary between the real and fictious family that such theories emphasise.

In *There Will Be Blood* and *The Master,* the traumatic nature of the biological family is signalled through Plainview's and Freddie's inability or unwillingness to openly discuss their biological family. Trauma theorist Cathy Caruth asserts that trauma presents a 'past that was never fully experienced as it occurred […] and is not yet fully owned' (1995, p.151). Caruth's explanation of trauma offers insights into Plainview's character. In his analysis of *There Will Be Blood,* George Toles discuses Daniels's 'vast, buried hurt' (2016, p.84). He states that at the heart of Plainview's character is 'a proud pushing down of unwelcome psychic material' (2016, p.85-86). While he identifies this as Plainview's grief over the death of H.W.'s biological father, what Toles overlooks is Plainview's history of familial traumatisation When asked about his fractious relationship with his father and why he left the family home, Plainview vaguely responds 'I couldn't stay there, I just couldn't. I don't like to explain myself' (*There Will Be Blood*, 2007*).* This cryptic statement is a coded expression of a traumatic past. As Felman and Laub suggest, to ascertain the nature of trauma one must 'listen to and hear the silence' (1992, p.58). Thus, through his inability to engage with why he 'didn't get on with' his father (*There Will Be Blood*, 2007*),* Plainview reveals his family as a site of personal trauma that he is now separated from.

In *The Master,* while Freddie is more explicit in his narration of his personal family trauma, again it is the manner in which he talks about this past that reveals the 'force of an experience that is not yet fully owned' (Caruth 1995, p.151). Freddie undertakes a psychological processing session administered by Dodd and is asked to answer a series of questions without blinking. Many of the questions relate to Freddie's history of trauma. Dodd asks multiple times 'Do your past failures bother you?' (*The Master,* 2012). Freddie eventually reveals the nature of his traumatic family – his father's death from alcoholism, his mother's institutionalisation for psychosis, and his incestuous relationship with his Aunt Bertha. The fact that Freddie is only able to discuss these events during an intense psychological processing session evidences that these too are deeply repressed and not yet 'fully owned' events. Furthermore, Felman and Laub's assertions on the temporality of trauma are relevant to Freddie's traumatic experiences:

> Trauma survivors live not with the memory of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, is current in every respect (1992, p.69).

When questioned by Dodd, Freddie does not know the whereabouts of his parents and extended family, or even if they are still alive. Paradoxically, through his estrangement from them, Freddie's relationship to his family becomes ever present as it 'did not proceed to its completion' (Felman & Laub 1992, p.69). Both Plainview and Freddie experience the biological family as a distinct site of trauma resulting in estrangement.

While *Phantom Thread* offers a departure from the violently traumatic families of Freddie and Plainview, Reynolds' family is also another site of dysfunction. Despite claiming positive and affectionate feelings toward his biological mother, Reynolds is traumatised by his overly close relationship to her. Like Freddie and Plainview, it is how Reynolds speaks of his biological family that reveals trauma, for he does so frequently and obsessively. His mother died many years previously (thus not featuring in the events of the film) and yet, he spends much of his first date with Alma talking about her. He asks Alma if she has a photograph of her own mother, telling Alma to 'carry her [Alma's mother] with you, always' (*Phantom Thread,* 2017). He also states that he has a lock of his mother's hair sewn into his jacket lining over his heart in order to always be close to her. However, despite being siblings, Cyril does not share Reynolds' obsession with their mother. Reynolds' traumatisation stems not from an estrangement between biological mother and son as Verrier would suggest, but rather from a

lack of any meaningful separation during her life. As such, he believes their relationship to be positive when it is in effect extremely dysfunctional: even decades after her death, Reynolds' relationship with his mother is the structuring event of his life. Thus, it is an event 'that was not fully experienced as it happened […] and is not yet fully owned' (Caruth 1995, p.151).

The unknowability of the unclaimed experience of Reynolds' familial history and his misinterpretation of his relationship to his mother is succinctly demonstrated during a scene in which Reynolds hallucinates his mother whilst ill. She appears in the far corner of his room, unmoving, which suggests the emotional distance between them. She silently mouths words, to which Reynolds attempts to reply: 'I don't understand what you're saying. I can't hear your voice' (*Phantom Thread,* 2017). Reynold's inability to understand his mother in the scene is a literalisation of his inability to understand the true, traumatic nature of their relationship. Furthermore, like Freddie, Reynolds' maternal trauma is continually present as is demonstrated in his dialogue at the beginning of the film, when he tells Cyril near the film's opening that he has the

> […] strongest sense she's near us, reaching out toward us. I very much hope that she saw the dress tonight […] it's comforting to think the dead are watching over the living (*Phantom Thread,* 2017).

Reynolds verbalises his feeling that his mother is near him, which foreshadows the later hallucination/ghost sequence. Reynold's mother is indeed near to him, in the sense that the spectre of his traumatic relationship with her 'is present in every sense' (Caruth 1995, p.151). As such, all three films present the biological family as a site of trauma that engenders separation and disintegration through its dysfunctional nature.

Freddie, Plainview, and Reynolds have been unable to incorporate these traumas fully into their psyche and thus experience a trauma that 'precludes its registration' (Felman & Laub 119, p.57). The films' narrative structures reflect the unknowability of these traumas through their lack of visual representation. Each characters' interactions with their biological families sits before the beginning of the films' narratives. Thus, the only information the audience receives regarding these histories is through the characters' testimonies. By placing these traumas outside the films' visual scope, Anderson foregrounds their nature as unprocessed by the traumatised and unrepresentable to the audience. For example, when such pasts are visually represented in *The Master,* these are not narrative flashbacks, but instead visual depictions of Freddie's inner psychic processes. When he is instructed to close his eyes following his psychological processing with Dodd, the film cuts to Freddie with his long-lost love Doris

before the war (and the events of the film). Doris is associated with Freddie's familial trauma, as it is established that she lived near the Quell family home. Furthermore, in his estrangement from his family, Freddie also becomes estranged from Doris. The editing during this sequence cuts from Freddie with his eyes closed in the present to Freddie's 'past' with Doris. Instead of a straightforward narrative flashback, the camera moves from an apparent omnipresent narrator to a visual depiction of what Freddie is thinking/remembering. Similarly, in this scene's sound design, some of Dodd's and Freddie's conversation overlaps with the visual depictions of Freddie's memories. This technique is reversed when the audience sees Doris singing to Freddie. The film cuts to the narrative present as Freddie hums the tune of Doris' song. Her singing does not exist in the film's narrative but within Freddie's memories. *The Master*'s narrative continuity remains intact, showing the past is unattainable on the level of direct narrative representation. Instead, the film gives a cinematic representation of Freddie's act of remembering that occurs within the narrative present. As Toles states, Doris 'lives in his memory […] having the conversation that he has long dwelt on and never erased' (2016, p.145). By situating the only representation of Freddie's past within the narrative present, *The Master* shows Freddie's separation from Doris and his family is a past that 'has no ending, attained no closure […] and is present in every respect' (Felman & Laub 1992, p.69).

**The Repetition Compulsion and Adoption**

The examination of how adoptive families are constructed and their relationships to the original, biological family through a materialist lens is useful to the purposes of this article, as they are defined through active participation rather than innate biological relationships. In the adopted family, material action and interaction fill the void left by the absence of biological relationships between family members. Louis Althusser offers a materialist critique of the family as an institution in *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus* by suggesting that the family is a material expression of ideology in society, which interpellates 'concrete individuals as concrete subjects' (1971, p.149). Through this process, humans create institutions, such as the family, in order to convert people into subjects that fit within them. For Althusser, biology is not a determining factor in our economic or social existence, meaning that biological or hereditary relationships are not a defining factor in a family or an individual's identification as a member of a family. Instead, the emphasis is on behaviour and specific interactions between individuals as being the defining trait in a family. Novy offers such a materialist theorisation of the family by asserting the importance of human action in familial relationships:

> Relations of adoption are constructed relationships – at least in that sense, they are fictions. But there is a sense in which the relationship of a parent and child who have always been together, as well as one of a reunited birth parent and child, is also a constructed relationship – one built up out of many small interactions (2001, p.11).

By comparing the constructed adoptive relationships with the biological ones in Anderson's films, similarities become apparent. Many of the specific features of Freddie's, Plainview's, and Reynolds' biological relationships are replicated in the adoptive ones. Freddie's and Plainview's enforced separations from their adoptive families at the end of their respective films mirrors their estrangement from their biological families. Reynolds' continuation of his relationship with Alma reflects his own relationship with his mother. Examining these adoptive families as constructed relationships clarifies the nature of the biological family in these films, their relationship to one another, and what these films view as a 'real' family.

An unconscious compulsion to repeat informs the actions of all three protagonists. Plainview, Freddie, and Reynolds each re-enact traumas suffered in the biological family in their adoptive structures. This blurs the boundaries between these families and moves toward a reconciliation of these competing modes of family, while not effacing this boundary altogether. A theory of adoption that locates separation from the biological family as an inherently traumatising event posits that as the traumatised adoptees are not able to know their trauma, they 'act out rather than consciously recall their abandonment' (Horman 2006, p.7). In *The Primal Wound,* Verrier tells an anecdote of a young woman who was unable to resist re-enacting her own abandonment:

> […] she believed in adoption so much that when she gave birth at age 16 (the same age her birth mother had been when this young woman was born) she relinquished the baby […] I don't think there was a professional in the room who didn't realise that, even though unacknowledged, that young woman was identifying with her birth mother by repeating the pattern of getting pregnant at age 16 and relinquishing her baby. The pull to repeat the pattern is unconscious, yet very real (1993, p.121-122).

Instead of dealing with the unprocessed trauma of separation from the biological family, the adopted, in Verrier's eyes, unconsciously repeat the pattern. Plainview, Freddie, and Reynolds follow a similar pattern of unconscious traumatic re-enactment in their relationships with their surrogate or adoptive families.

In a 1908 paper entitled *The Family Romances*, Sigmund Freud discussed adoption and surrogacy in his theory of the Family Romance. As a way of psychologically dealing

with negative feelings about their own parents and family, children create a fantasy of discovering that they are an adoptee and can be 'reunited' with their true family (trans. Stratchely 1959, p.237-241). Similarly, Plainview, Freddie, and Reynolds enact the fantasy of finding a new family. However, the conclusion Verrier and other scholars draw from such re-enactments is that they reaffirm the boundaries between the authentic and 'fake' families. These repetitions allow the adoptee to identify with their birth mother/family and to 'condone the original relinquishment' (Verrier 1993, p.151). Anderson's films do not reinforce this boundary in such definitive terms by instead offering an ambivalence towards families in general. Ultimately, adoptive families have the same affective power over and effects on the characters as biological families, for adoptive structures end as the biological did, thus presenting both as fundamentally alike and susceptible to the same dysfunctions and trauma. In doing so, these films remove the mystical connection of biology that Verrier emphasizes.

Furthermore, Anderson's films suggest that if a family is defined by the nature of specific human relationships and interactions, then there is a possibility of reconciling these families. The material enactment of the repetition compulsion shows that both modes of family are continuously entangled in the identity of the adoptive subject. However, this also reaffirms the importance and power of the biological family within the films. The traumatic separation from the biological family 'generates the need for adoptive parents' (Novy 2001, p.2). The wound inflicted by the biological family is so great that it affects all subsequent familial structures and relationships. Thus, the unconscious re-enactment of trauma stemming from the biological family simultaneously blurs the real/false/biological/adoptive dichotomy while maintaining its supremacy.

The re-enactment of trauma is expressed visually in the closing scene of *There Will Be Blood*, which shows Plainview's biological past as having a constant impact on his present, thus blurring the two. Eli, now a bankrupt and destitute radio evangelist, returns to Plainview to ask him for a drilling contract on virgin soil. Plainview taunts Eli before beating him to death in the bowling alley in the basement of his opulent mansion. The framing and composition of the final shot, in which Daniel is shown sitting next to Eli's corpse after having finally beaten his nemesis (both literally and figuratively), mirrors an earlier shot of Plainview in Eli's Church of the Third Revelation. This earlier sequence functions as a symbolic victory for Eli over Plainview: in order to be granted a drilling lease, Plainview attends one of Eli's services in which Eli slaps and screams at him in the guise of a sermon. The final scene in the film is an inversion of this, narratively and visually. Eli comes to Plainview's 'church' of wealth, his

mansion, to obtain a drilling lease, and Plainview violently murders him. The body of the congregation in the earlier church scene forms diagonal lines, which in the bowling alley are replaced with the blood-red lower part of the walls. The light of the cross in the church becomes Plainview's modern electric lighting, while both men occupy the background of the frame. The link between these two scenes is further established through the dialogue, as Daniel taunts Eli by telling him that 'I [Daniel] am the Third Revelation' (*There Will Be Blood*, 2007). The colouring of the lower part of the bowling alley has obvious connotations of blood and violence, but its position on the lower sections of the wall as well as the shot's composition also suggest Plainview's buried and repressed past by signifying 'blood ties'. Thus, the set design and use of colour in the final scene shows the ever-present nature of Plainview's traumatic past. This is further solidified when, as Eli is beaten to death, his blood mingles with the red of the wall. This image shows that the acrimonious familial separations in Plainview's biological past are indistinguishable from the violence he enacts on his symbolic son, Eli. This scene occurs immediately after Daniel spurns his now adult adopted son H.W., itself another instance of traumatic repetition. Yet the extreme and jarring violence Plainview displays towards Eli in the scene is indicative of how emotionally and affectively significant these original traumas are in his life and how they have impacted him since.

Surrogate and biological families can also be compared through their representation of psychosexual dysfunction according to psychoanalysis and its material implications. Freud suggests that all male adolescents undergo the Oedipal complex, in which they experience a sexual attraction toward their mother and a jealously of the father. This is resolved in the development of the super ego, during which the child internalizes the characteristics of the father figure into their psyche (trans. Stratchely 1959, p.173-197). As stated earlier, Reynolds suffers from an overly close and obsessive relationship with his mother that structures much of his adult life: he seeks a surrogate mother and both Alma and Cyril fulfil this function. This is most clearly evidenced during the dream sequence, when Reynolds dreams his mother in the room with him, wearing the wedding dress he made for her. Alma enters the room to care for Reynold's during his sickness, causing the apparition to disappear – she literally replaces Reynolds mother while performing both a maternal and romantic role. Reynolds reveals that his mother was the only parental figure from much of his life, due to the death of his father when he was a young child. The continuing fixation that he has with his mother, and its subsequent effects on all his adult relationships can be explained through the Oedipal complex.

Due to the death of his father at a young age, Reynolds was unable to fully progress through this Oedipal stage of development and still experiences an unconscious sexual desire for his mother, as evidenced through the act of dressmaking and its repetition from his mother to Alma. He tells Alma during their first meeting that he sewed his mother's second wedding dress at the age of 16. Shortly afterward, he begins to measure and make a dress for Alma, a woman he is romantically interested in. As Reynolds was unable to physically express his attraction toward his mother, he consummates this materially through dressmaking. Thus, dressmaking is the symbolic sexual act and is a material expression of Reynolds unconscious sexual desires: his making of a dress for Alma on their first date is their symbolic sexual union. When Alma asks him why he is not married, he replies 'I make dresses' (*Phantom Thread,* 2017). The curse that Reynolds believes afflicts him in his romantic life is this lack of progression from an infant stage of psychological development. This trauma is never fully worked through and is repeated in both his adult relationships with Cyril and Alma. Similarly, in *The Master,* Freddie discusses his incestuous relationship with his aunt. No information is given about this other than that he 'was drunk and she looked good' (*The Master,* 2012). This too can be read as an expression of an unconscious attraction to a maternal figure. *The Master* is bookended by images of Freddie with the same maternal figure. In its opening, he crudely simulates sex with an overtly feminine sand figure and shortly afterwards masturbates into the ocean. The closing image of the film sees Freddie reunited with this figure as he 'rests beside its foregrounded breasts, like a child seeking comfort' (Toles 2016, p.144). This incestuous desire is somewhat repeated in the surrogate family of The Cause, when Dodd's daughter Elizabeth makes sexual advances toward Freddie. Despite his rebuffing, the repetition of an incestuous sexual relationship or desire towards a female 'family' member is indicative of the repetition of Freddie's traumatic family history.

The effects of Freddie's trauma as expressed through re-enactment are aligned in *The Master* with water, wake, and boat imagery, representing Freddie's both past trauma and its incursion into the present. These images represent Freddie's adoptive families as a structured relationship continuously affected by his biological past. Sperb suggests that one of *The Master'*s key visual and thematic concerns is wakes, both in terms of the trail of disturbed water left after a boat and the consequences following a particular event. Just as red in Plainview's bowling alley represents the incursion of his history of violence into his present and blurs the two, the blue of the ocean is a visual signifier of the past that Freddie seeks to escape. When he first leaves Doris and his biological family, he does so by joining the navy, fighting in World War Two, and does not initially return home. After his discharge, Freddie

stumbles onto The Cause's yacht and meets Dodd. The film therefore uses boats not only to indicate Freddie avoiding contact with his biological family but also as a structured re-articulation of them in his adoptive family of The Cause. Water and sailing imagery are directly associated with past trauma by Dodd later in the film:

> Is there something frightening to you about The Cause's travels into the past? […] Are you afraid that we might discover that our past has been reshapen? Perverted? […] There are dangers to travelling in and out of time as we understand it but it is not unlike travelling down a river: you see, you travel down the river, round the bend, look back and you cannot see round the bend can you? But that does not mean that it is not there, does it? (*The Master,* 2012).

While this is ostensibly a discussion of The Cause's faith system, it articulates many of the film's visual and thematic concerns. Through Dodd's use of the word 'reshapen', he alludes to Freddie's traumatic past, while 'perverted' references the incest and sexual dysfunction of Freddie's biological family. Boats are a means of moving away from trauma to a new structure, and yet simply because Freddie does this with The Cause, Freddie's biological past is not just round the river bend.

In the film's penultimate scene, Dodd sings to Freddie 'Slowboat To China', a metaphorical lament for the end of their relationship, which further correlates boats with their adoptive relationship. While Michael Slowik suggests that Freddie's decision to definitely leave The Cause in this scene is unclear (2015, p.150), the repetition of his biological familial trauma necessitates this. After Freddie becomes estranged from his new family, he returns to his hometown, the site of his biological familial trauma, and subsequently leaves again. Therefore, his return to Dodd and The Cause, and his choice to leave them both is a direct repetition of his relationship to his biological family. By the close of *The Master,* Freddie has dealt with both of his families in the same way (estrangement – reconciliation – estrangement) and both are now relegated to his past. But for Freddie to fully commit to leaving The Cause, he must fully commit to his estrangement from his biological family. He does so in the scene preceding his return and separation from Dodd and The Cause. While Freddie can use new constructed relationships to avoid his biological past, it both precedes and determines the adoptive one.

**Conclusion**

In his Jungian critique of *The Master,* Thom F. Cavalli states that Dodd will continue exploiting men such as Freddie 'as long as there are needy people looking for a long-lost father' (Cavalli

2013, p.59). Alternatively, *The Master* shows that Dodd *is* in fact a genuine father to Freddie. On the opening page of *Imagining Adoption,* Novy asks the reader

> Is an adoptive parent a real parent? If so, is a biological parent who does not nurture after birth a real parent? […] Adoption make ambiguous the definition of parenthood and of such other important terms as *family, kinship* and *identity,* as well as *mother* and *father* (2001, p.1).

Adoption narratives indeed make these terms ambiguous, as is evident from Anderson's work. These films firmly locate the biological Anglo/American family as a site of trauma that is later represented or alluded to on multiple aesthetic and narrative levels. Through a materialist lens, the films focus on depictions of reconstructed family units that re-enact trauma, thus suggesting that what constitutes or defines a family is neither heritage nor biology, but rather agency. As such, Alma is just as valid a mother to Reynolds as his biological one; Dodd and Plainview just as valid fathers to H.W. and Freddie as their own flesh and blood. These texts do not assume a character has just one, true family, but that a family is defined by actions. However, these films ultimately fail to reconcile these two competing notions of family: they stop short of offering the hope of familial redemption for their traumatised protagonists. The material construction of the family and the re-enactment of trauma across the biological/adoptive boundary simultaneously weakens this boundary while keeping it intact. The sheer traumatizing power of the original family structures inform and dictate everything that follows it. By showing that Freddie, Reynolds, and Plainview cannot transcend their pasts but their traumas can, the films retain the idea of the supremacy of genetic and hereditary similarities in a family. These films do not suggest that an adoptive family is a poor imitation of a biological one, but while the artificial family is enacted in the same way as the biological, it is always as a repetition, reflection or representation of it.

The 'cultural tensions regarding the definition of the family and the importance of heredity' that these films dramatize are those that emerge in the 1990s and regard adoption as trauma. The films reject the notion that adoption itself is traumatizing and instead show that biological families are, or can be like, trauma. At the same time, these films show that biological and adoptive families are entangled in the identity of its members, this entanglement is inexorably linked to trauma, and that the differences between the biological and adoptive family are insurmountable. By denying his protagonists reconciliation with the biological family, Anderson denies the possibility of reconciling biological with adoptive families. Again, Novy asks 'does adoption make a real family or a fictive one? Perhaps it does both. Perhaps

there is a way to discuss family that breaks down the dichotomy' (2001, p.10-11). And perhaps there is. While these films blur this dichotomy, in doing so they must preserve it.

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# The (E)strange Case of Han Kang's *Vegetarian* and Her Discontents

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**Abstract:**

Mary Douglas states that, since partaking of food is not merely a nutritional activity but is embedded in a matrix of social relations, discussion of food 'has a social as well as a biological component' (1972, p.61).

The social enmeshing of food in acts of consuming and of being consumed draws attention to the degree of inclusion or exclusion in societies, which I will explore through a textual analysis of Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*[1], with reference to a number of secondary sources and especially to the scholarship of Carol J. Adams, a feminist and animal rights activist.

Kang's novel depicts the anxiety induced by challenging the status quo. When Yeong-hye gives up meat, her familial world is unsettled. Her decision to abstain disturbs the existing order, and as a consequence, she is estranged from society and towards the end of the novel confined to a mental hospital, her estrangement complete.

Part I of my paper focuses exclusively on Yeong-hye's process of alienation. Part II analyses how Yeong-hye's act of disobedience has a particularly strong impact on her sister, In-hye, who is 'made aware of bars that she'd never known existed' (Kang 2015, p.143); and explores how she seeks a reconciliation with this new awakening by envisaging a sylvan world that is devoid of patriarchal violence.

**Keywords:** *estrangement, vegetarianism, politics of food, food studies, feminism, shamanism, Confucianism.*

## Introduction

Noted anthropologist Mary Douglas treats food as a code that is capable of expressing social relationships; and this code, if decodified, conveys 'a message about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries' (1972, p.61). She likens food to sex: both have a 'social as well as a biological component' (1972, p.61). When food is served, people partake not only of nutrients but also of kinship obligations. Food preference eschews neutrality; we routinely use food to express relationships between different aspects of ourselves, with one another, and with the environment. The obtaining and

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[1] This article is based on Deborah Smith's English translation of Kang's novel, originally written in Korean. The analysis is from the perspective of a reader treating the translation as a work in its own right. I apply Adams' scholarship because of her relevant analysis of the subjugated positions of women and non-human animals that underpin most patriarchal societies around the world. Relevant socio-cultural examples are cited to enhance this argument.

consuming of food is an eloquent statement of shared ideology. The gastronomic medium serves as a conduit for including people in, or excluding them from, society.

*The Vegetarian* traces the anxiety induced by challenging the status quo when the protagonist Yeong-hye gives up meat. Her decision upsets her familial world, estranging her not only from her family and society but also from herself. Before analysing the text, I wish to highlight certain key elements of Korean society which shed light on it.

Long before Buddhism and Confucianism arrived in Korea from China, shamanism and animism were of prime importance. Indigenous cultures revered Korea's flora and fauna, natural phenomena, and landforms. The 'proto-Koreans believed that they could communicate with, appease and negotiate with the spirits by venerating Nature' (Mason 2011, p.7). For shamanists, Nature was Culture.

The advent of Buddhism and Confucianism inaugurated a 'new notion of a clearly defined administrative and liturgical hierarchy' (Baker 2008, p.30), pushing shamanism to the periphery, and creating a schism between nature and culture. Although Buddhism gained a firm grounding in Korea upon its arrival in the fourth century AD, it could not counter the growing influence of the newly imported Chinese religion, Confucianism. Confucianism's goal was 'the collective good' of society (Baker 2008, p.42), which Confucians believed could be achieved by placing strong emphasis upon hierarchy. Another Confucian value that came to inform Korean behaviour was the 'injunction to elevate males over females in the public arena' (Baker 2008, p.44). Confucian rituals are characterized by filial piety – a sentiment that further ossifies and 'sanctifies hierarchical relationships among patrilineal kin' (Kendall 1987, p.167).

The cult of the proto-Koreans was gyno-centric. Laura Kendall understands shamanism as a 'feminist subculture' (1987, p.24), which allows women to articulate their voices and exercise their authority. Shaman priestesses are called *mutang* [literally meaning the altar or shrine of a *Mu* or shaman (Lee 1973, p.136)]. However, this subculture was not immune to the onslaught of the Confucians. Kendall states that the Confucian reformers of the Yi period sought to stifle the activities of the shamans as well as the hereditary priestesses on the ground that these 'women coveted wealth, deceived people, and were licentious' (1987, p.31).

During the fourteenth century, Korean society underwent a change, as did Confucianism. It mutated into Neo-Confucianism which was 'more philosophical and presented an assertion of the ultimate importance of Confucian moral principles in the face of Buddhism' (Baker 2008, p.46).

Modern Korean society, underpinned by Neo-Confucian values, emphasises 'traditional familism', where:

> an individual is construed as *a relational being* who is interdependent with others, and whose behaviour is determined, contingent on, and organized by the thoughts, feelings and actions of others in the relationship (Markus & Kitayama 1991, cited in Yoo & Yoon 2015, p.116, emphasis added).

Individuals in Korean society do not seek to stand out, but to fit in. To maintain order and harmony, they tend to behave as members of groups rather than as 'individuals with absolute self-autonomy' (Chung 2015, p.78). This collectivism is most pronounced at the dinner table, where eating together and sharing meals signify a sense of belonging and of subscription to the views and ideas of their communities.

It takes only a subtraction of one food item, meat, to disturb Yeong-hye's world. The question is: why meat?

The Sino-Japanese War (from August 1894 to April 1895) resulted in a remarkable paucity of meat for local consumption by Koreans, as a result of which meat came to occupy a special status in Korean society as a symbol of wealth. Even before the war, meat was a luxury, served only on special occasions or to the rich. Moreover, slaughter was symbolic of the family elders' sacrifice for the family. Refusal to partake of meat is still interpreted as a deviant act of refusing to form 'intimate relations, and thereby becoming members of a family by sharing food' (Park 2009, cited in Yoo & Yoon 2015, p.116).

Yeong-hye's decision to give up meat is thus interpreted by those around her as a 'rejection of a longstanding tradition and a threat to the homeostasis of the group' (Roth 2005, cited in Yoo & Yoon 2015, p.114); and this paper delineates how these reactions lead to her estrangement.


**Part I**

Carol J. Adams deconstructs the symbolic reinforcement of social systems by food in general and meat in particular. The term 'meat' as I use it here is an umbrella term for all edible animal flesh.

Adams' scholarship traces the connection between the subjugation of women and the subjugation of non-human animals in patriarchal societies. Drawing on historical, literary and theological sources, Adams identifies a 'mythology' that has percolated through the various strata of these societies: the belief that 'meat is a masculine food and meat eating a male activity' (2015, p.4).

In her analysis of why the difference between men and women is akin to that between animals and plants, Adams invokes the role of the male hunter, whose celebrated cultural image

feeds the narrative of male dominance of society. She draws from Kappeler's seminal work *Why Look at Women* to build upon the similarity between women and non-human animals as 'symbols, as objects for representation' by men who have 'access to representation, to cultural symbolization' (Kappeler 2013, cited in Adams 2018, p.15). Thus, the interchangeability between women and non-human animals is further proof of how women lack subjectivity and agency. To be a subject within a patriarchal culture, they have to 'constitute [themselves] as objects who are looked at' (Kappeler 2013, cited in Adams 2018, p.15). In non-human animals, women identify an unlikely ally, for the resemblance between their muted existence and objectification is uncanny. To quote Adams:

> Eating animals acts as a mirror and representation of patriarchal values. Meat eating is the re-inscription of male power at every meal. The patriarchal gaze sees not the fragmented flesh of dead animals but appetizing food. If meat is a symbol of male domination, then the presence of meat proclaims the disempowering power of women (Adams 2015, p.178).

Following this line of argument, vegetarianism is a challenge to male dominance and violence. In rejecting meat, one rejects a dominant ideology that is at once 'masculinized and animalized' (Adams 2015, p.178). And what happens after this rejection? It ensures the overturning of a dominant social reality; causes discord and disharmony; and the one who has 'erred' must make amends to return to the way of life that is socially ordained for them, or be rejected.

Part 1 of the novel begins through the narrative gaze of Yeong-hye's husband, Mr. Cheong. The choice of this narrative technique already makes Yeong-hye's existence passive and aids in her objectification. He thinks of her as the most 'run of the mill stuff', and does not 'affect intellectual leanings' or worry about the 'size of [his] penis' after meeting her, for her 'unremarkable beauty' (Kang 2015, p.4) validates his manhood. Her body acts as a reassuring site and sight for Mr. Cheong. A man of limited ambitions and aspirations, his choice of a 'middle course in life' allows him a 'carefully ordered existence' (Kang 2015, p.4). However, this ordered existence is soon perturbed when Yeong-hye announces her remarkableness and difference by giving up meat.

Prior to her commitment to vegetarianism, the power dynamic between the couple reflects deeply ingrained patriarchal values and ideals. The marriage endures because Yeong-hye has always been a 'woman of few words' (Kang 2015, p.4). The only thing 'unusual' about her is that she does not like wearing bras. However, her husband tries to correct this unusual trait by forcing her into wearing 'thickly padded bras' to 'save his face in public and among

[his] acquaintances' (Kang 2015, p.5), despite her protesting that they squeeze her breasts. The husband's lecturing and reproaching are examples of ways through which patriarchy infantilizes women and seeks to control their autonomy.

Yeong-hye's estrangement begins even before she openly proclaims her change of diet. On one particular night, when her husband 'did not even want to reach out to her with words' she is haunted by a dream (Kang 2015, p.9). The following morning, her husband finds the kitchen floor strewn with their supply of meat. Yeong-hye has already retracted from duty by not waking her husband, and when he tries to extract the bag of meat from her hand, he is left rather stunned by her 'fierce tugging at [him]' (Kang 2015, p.10). Discord has ensued: docile marital bliss has been rendered obsolete by the 'strange behaviour of an even stranger wife' (Kang 2015, p.11).

Yeong-hye's refusal to eat meat and to serve it interrupts the cultural distribution of power. This interruption endangers Mr. Cheong's 'ordered existence' and can be discussed in terms of Adams' concept of the necessity of an 'interruption in narratives that provides the "gestalt shift" by which vegetarianism can be heard' (2015, p.126). Interruption, through its focus on food and eating habits, subverts the dominant reality manifesting as incomprehensibility or 'confusion in those who are usually in control' (Adams 2015, p.126). Mr. Cheong tries to reason away this incomprehensible behaviour, saying it is nothing short of 'sheer obstinacy for a wife to go against her husband's wishes' (Kang 2015, p.14).

I will now briefly interrupt this analysis to discuss Yeong-hye's first, visceral dream, which elicits a 'vivid, strange, horribly uncanny feeling' (Kang 2015, p.12). Yeong-hye dreams that she is in a barn with a carcass so freshly slaughtered that blood drips from it and the meat seems to be endless. While escaping, terrified, she reflects upon her deeds in the barn and concludes that her 'bloody hands......bloody mouth' prove that she has slaughtered the animal, whose meat feels 'real'; and this reality distorts her self-perception – she becomes a stranger to herself when she recognizes her face as one she has 'never seen before' (Kang 2015, p.12). Between the first and the second dream, Yeong-hye gives up meat, eggs, milk, and sex. Her decision to 'actively avoid sex' (Kang 2015, p.16) stems from her disgust with her husband's body that 'smells of meat' (Kang 2015, p.17).

The subsequent dreams are stepping stones that create a wall between Yeong-hye and society. Yeong-hye begins to recognise her fate as that of an object lacking agency, by reconciling and interiorizing the uncanny feeling of her first dream. She reconciles her position in patriarchal society as an absent referent, congruent to the position of non-human animals as absent referents in a human-dominated world. Adams introduces the concept of absent referents

to substantiate her claim that, like non-human animals, women are subjected to violence in a male-dominated world. She elaborates on how the act of butchering turns non-human animals into absent referents:

> Animals in name and body are made absent as animals for meat to exist. Animals' lives precede and enable the existence of meat. If animals are alive, they cannot be meat. Thus, a dead body replaces the live animal.....the absent referent permits us to forget about the animal as an independent entity; it also enables us to resist efforts to make animals present (Adams 2015, p.20-21).

She posits that, in a patriarchal matrix, 'women are also often the absent referents' (2015, p.22), their bodies the locus of acts of violence such as rape. This lack of bodily integrity further aids in standardizing patriarchal values. She recognizes a 'shared violation' (2015, p.118) with hunted non-human animals, and by adopting vegetarianism, she strives to reject a male oriented world that also objectifies women. The freedom to choose allows her the agency to embark upon a process of self-discovery.

The reclamation of agency by Yeong-hye through vegetarianism and no longer wearing bras gradually endangers her relationship; and the occasion where she is first rendered 'utterly unknowable' (Kang 2015, p.25) is the dinner party.

This party, hosted by Cheong's boss, marks the obliteration of Yeong-hye from the social sphere. A dinner party or *hoesik*, hosted by one's boss, or indeed one's husband's boss, is of particular significance in Korean society. The company is a microcosm of the family, with its entrenched notions of filial piety, and the boss functions as the symbolic patriarch.

At the dinner, Yeong-hye is met with 'curiosity, astonishment, and contempt' (Kang 2015, p.23), when she announces her decision to adopt vegetarianism. During the dinner, a discussion takes place about her choice, with arguments ranging from the invocation of ancestral hunters, to a declaration that '[m]eat eating is a fundamental human instinct' (Kang 2015, p.23) and therefore that vegetarianism goes against human nature itself. Yeong-hye's forsaking of meat and the brassiere unsettles the diners, who try to 'fill the awkward silences', and gradually 'learn to ignore her presence' (Kang 2015, p.25). Yeong-hye, by abstaining from meat, defies two patriarchal authorities: her husband and his boss.

Yeong-hye's aberration must be corrected, and who would correct it better than her family? In between the first calls made only to matriarchal figures – her mother, and her older sister, In-hye – and the later call with her father, Yeong-hye dreams of 'violent acts perpetrated by night', where everything begins to feel unfamiliar, and yet it 'feels like [she] is coming face

to face with the thing that has always been there' (Kang 2015, p.28). The 'thing that has always been there' is her subjugation, and the unfamiliarity evokes her alienation from the androcentric world.

To further explore this trajectory that highlights the commonalities between non-human animals and women, I will refer to Adams' cycle of 'objectification, fragmentation, and consumption' (2015, p.27). Adams argues that it is through objectification that women are rendered passive, with their experience of 'being violated by object-like treatment' (2015, p.27) triggering fragmentation of their identities and their erasure through consumption, the final act that annihilates their will.

The more Yeong-hye is subjected to demeaning treatment by her husband, the more she awakens to the likeness between herself and the non-human animals that haunt her in her dreams. Her being is violated by her husband when he rapes her (marital rape was criminalised in Korea only in 2013) and then ironically highlights the permanent mark of estrangement by likening her passivity to that of a 'comfort woman', and himself to a 'Japanese soldier' (Kang 2015, p.34). By comparing himself to a Japanese soldier, he acknowledges his role in the subjugation of Yeong-hye, since 'comfort for soldiers often meant the death of these young women – not only physical death but also social and spiritual deaths' (Chong 2013, p.37). The allusion to the system of comfort women foregrounds the taut, estranged relationship between the couple; and hints at 'social and spiritual deaths' in the estrangement of Yeong-hye from Mr. Cheong as well as from her family and wider society. The violent war imagery continues when Yeong-hye's father, the 'patriarchal man' whose service in Vietnam earned him the 'Order of the Military Merit', believes that Yeong-hye needs a 'dressing down' for her defiant act of giving up meat, and it is revealed that he had 'whipped her over the calves until she was eighteen years old' (Kang 2015, p.29). The blatant violence inflicted on Yeong-hye's body dissipates the difference between herself as a receptacle and a piece of meat, between violence implemented with literal and with metaphorical knives, to use Adams' terminology (2015, p.34).

The second dining scene is the family gathering, during which Cheong places faith in the institution of family to amend Yeong-hye's errant ways. Before this gathering, Yeong-hye has a third dream in which she recognizes her self-alienation. The butcher shop haunts her, and she finds solace and places trust in her breasts because 'nothing can be killed by them. Hand, foot, tongue, gaze, all weapons from which nothing is safe' (Kang 2015, p.33). Breasts function as a benign symbol of maternal care and nurture. She seeks an escape from the androcentric world

by embracing the comfort of nurturing breasts – maternal care replacing the phallocentric discourse.

Yeong-hye attends the family gathering, again without a brassiere. The latent discord at her vegetarianism becomes increasingly visible. Yeong-hye's vegetarianism is nothing short of 'preposterous' for the family (Kang 2015, p.39), and her sister-in-law remarks that she has become a 'different person' after embracing vegetarianism (Kang 2015, p.36). Despite much coaxing, Yeong-hye eventually declares that she will not eat meat. This threat to male dominance, which needs cognitive recognition through the 'continuous recollection of itself on everyone's plate' (Adams 2015, p.62), triggers the patriarch, Yeong-hye's father, so much that he resorts to force feeding her meat. He universalises the dominant ideology by declaring 'if he tells you to eat, you eat' (Kang 2015, p.38) – the 'he' evocative of all patriarchal figures. In the force-feeding scene, Yeong-hye's father slaps her. In resistance, Yeong-hye lets out 'an animal cry of distress', before wielding a knife over her wrist as an act of self-defense (Kang 2015, p.40). A probable motivation for her brandishing the knife is that it provides her with an opportunity to actively exercise her agency, escaping from what she perceives to be a compromise of her sense of self.  Yeong-hye recognizes the congruence between her position and that of non-human animals slaughtered for their meat. However, unlike them, she refuses to cower down. She has come to strongly empathize with them, and has interiorized their plight so much that she refuses to consume their flesh even at the cost of her life, thereby also refusing to be complicit in society's violent androcentric ideology.

The fourth dream, which immediately follows Yeong-hye's act of resistance, finally makes her realise what has provoked the dreams that until then had haunted her: the gruesome death, at the hands of her father, of a dog who had bitten her as a child, after which the family feasted on the dog's flesh. The likeness between this real-life incident and her dreams begins to make sense to her, when the face that had 'flickered on the surface of the soup' (Kang 2015, p.42) reminds her of the first dream. In Korea dog meat is informally referred to as 'Confucians' meat' because of its popularity amongst Confucians in the late Choson period. Since Confucianism was 'largely a men's affair, dog meat came to be associated with masculinity' (Walraven 2013, p.104). Dog meat thus serves as a symbol of patriarchal authority that haunts Yeong-hye in her dreams.

Adams' 'interruption' (discussed earlier) occurs in four stages (2015, p.126), and this article applies her theory to the novel. The first stage is the 'refusal of male acts of violence' (Adams 2015, p.116), and the most obvious examples of this in the novel include Yeong-hye's resistance to her husband's sexual advances and to being force fed meat by her father. The

second stage is identification with non-human animals, which Yeong-hye feels increasingly strongly before identifying completely after her third dream.

Adams posits repudiation of men's control over women as the third stage; this finds expression in the novel when Yeong-hye repudiates not only meat, but also the use of brassieres to cover her breasts, her most benign body parts, symbolic of maternal care. Her repudiation of meat stems from her fourth dream where something is 'lodged permanently in her solar plexus...the lives of all animals [she] ate' (Kang 2015, p.49). The 'enmeshed lump' evokes ancestral guilt that Yeong-hye's body seems to be rejecting. Adams regards meat as 'ancestors' food that continues to provide a sense of continuity' (2015, p.141); and this is especially true in Korean culture where meat is symbolic of the sacrifices made by family elders. This continuity is broken by Yeong-hye's adoption of vegetarianism.

Adams' fourth stage involves idealistic adoption of vegetarianism, pacifism, and feminism. In the novel, this stage finds expression when Yeong-hye vomits up the black goat meat that her mother feeds her under the false pretext that it is a herbal medicine. Through the actions of vomiting up meat, and giving up clothing, Yeong-hye detaches herself from society. Towards the end of the novel, when she is isolated from her family and wider society in a psychiatric hospital, she begins to identify herself as a tree, and to see the 'trees as her brothers and sisters' (Kang 2015, p.144). Before this, she had already begun to reject culture by refusing to wear bras, and later, all clothes.

To understand how Yeong-hye attempts to escape from patriarchal authority and to find comfort in nature, this thesis analyses her behaviour with reference to the proto-Koreans' maternal cult of shamanism. In shamanism, mountains and trees occupy a lofty position. The novel is populated with images of mountains and trees, and Yeong-hye's psychiatric clinic is surrounded by mountains and forests. Mountains are worshipped as originators of Korean shamanism. According to a shamanistic myth, the Holy Mother of the Heavenly King manifested as Mt. Chiri, thereby endowing all mountains with a divine presence. Moreover, mountains and trees serve as intermediaries between the 'heavenly spirits and the earthly humans' (Mason 2011, p.7). In traditional shamanism, specific trees including zelkova, referred to in the novel, are considered sacred because of the 'core belief in mythical cosmic trees by which shamans could climb to and from heaven in order to communicate with the spirits there' (Mason 2011, p.7).

A single decision about diet alienates Yeong-hye from her family and wider society. She becomes completely estranged from her husband, Mr. Cheong, who declares that he does 'not know the woman' (Kang 2015, p.52) and divorces her; and partially estranged from society,

being assigned to a psychiatric hospital, discharged and assigned again before she leaves with her sister at the end of the novel.

**Part II**

Two people come close to achieving reconciliation with Yeong-hye: her sister, In-hye, and her brother-in-law. However, this thesis argues that there is no possibility of reconciliation between Yeong-hye and her brother-in-law, not only because it is after posing for his artistic project that she is confined for the second time, but also because he fails to fully gauge the magnitude and intensity of her ethical vegetarian stance. Another obstacle is their unequal power dynamic. The Korean familial ethos respects hierarchy in order to maintain harmony. According to this value system, Yeong-hye's brother-in-law occupies a 'prior' social position as a man and as the older of the two, whereas Yeong-hye occupies a 'posterior' position as a younger woman (Chung 2015, p.77-78). These unequal positions additionally prevent the brother-in-law from wholly empathizing with Yeong-hye.

In her theory of women as receptacles, Adams compares literal butchering with knives to metaphorical 'butchering' of women with camera lenses, a process which helps the dominant male to control the body of his victim by fetishising body parts (2015, p.40). The brother-in-law fetishises the 'Mongolian mark' (Kang 2015, p.40) on Yeong-hye's hip, and this prevents him from understanding and reconciling with her. His fetishism further fuels the narrative of objectification of Yeong-hye, bringing to the fore the unequal power play between men and women in Korean society, with his 'prior' position allowing him some leeway over the 'posterior' position of Yeong-hye, but preventing him from understanding her inner thoughts. Indeed, his excessive fetishism leads him to become estranged from his wife and son, and to flee society.

Before analysing why In-hye comes closer than anyone else to reconciling with Yeong-hye, it is important to discuss the role of the body. The bodies of both women and non-human animals are subject to objectification. Adams emphasises this eloquently:

> The association between attractive human female bodies and delectable attractive flesh appeals to the appetitive desires as they have been constructed in the dominant culture. The human male consumes both – images of female beauty and large chunks of meat (Adams 2018, p.9).

In Part 1 of the novel, Cheong exercises control over Yeong-hye's body by forcing her to wear padded bras (Kang 2015, p.5), guiding her on how to wear make-up (Kang 2015, p.20), and

finally by raping her. This exercise of control reinforces dominant ideas of how female bodies should be 'prepared, reshaped, acculturated to be made consumable in a patriarchal world' (Adams 2015, p.35).

This article situates the focus of resistance in bodies; Yeong-hye's attempt to slit her wrist and her conscious decision to free her breasts from stifling brassieres are examples of tangible instances where she tries to exert her agency and take control of her body. Adams locates resistance in female bodies, quoting Harrison:

> If we begin, as feminists must, with "our bodies, ourselves" we recognize that all our knowledge, including our moral knowledge, is body-mediated knowledge. ... Failure to live deeply in "our bodies, ourselves", destroys the possibility of moral relations between us (Harrison 1985, cited in Adams 2015, p.134).

Through dietary choices, 'women's bodies become the texts upon which they inscribe their dissent through vegetarianism' (Adams 2015, p.151). The inscriptions on Yeong-hye's body develop throughout the novel, from Part 1 where Mr. Cheong exercises his authority over her body, through Part 2 where her brother-in-law paints it with flowers, to Part 3 where her autonomy culminates in an understanding of her body as a blooming tree.

In-hye is helped by her husband, and by Yeong-hye, in embarking upon her own journey of awakening. In-hye is the only person who, holding her father's hand, 'begs' him to stop force feeding Yeong-hye (Kang 2015, p.39); and by Part 3, like Yeong-hye, she is estranged from her husband and family, and has begun to dream about her sister who seems to be metamorphosing into a tree. Although she is responsible for Yeong-hye's confinement, she takes on the role of her carer. Their 'existences briefly aligned' (Kang 2015, p.127), when she compares her own life to that of her sister who has become lost in the forests surrounding the psychiatric hospital.

However, this alignment of existence had always been present, although dormant – erupting to the fore by the end of the novel. While Yeong-hye's estrangement from society is due to her awareness of the congruence between her oppressed existence and that of non-human animals, In-hye recognizes her oppression through the gradual metamorphosis of her sister into a 'total stranger' (Kang 2015, p.129). She acknowledges that the reason she lets Yeong-hye stay in the psychiatric hospital is that she is 'no longer able to cope with all that her sister reminded her of' (Kang 2015, p.143). She is:

> unable to forgive her for soaring alone over *a boundary she herself could never bring herself to cross*, unable to forgive that magnificent irresponsibility that had enabled Yeong-Hye to *shuck off social constraints* and *leave her behind, still a prisoner*. And, before Yeong-hye had *broken those bars*, she'd never known they were there (Kang 2015, p.143, emphasis added).

This admission prompts In-hye to re-assess her own life. When remembering incidents from their childhood, In-hye begins to experience bodily empathy with Yeong-hye, who was the 'only victim of their father's beatings' (Kang 2015, p.157), acts of patriarchal violence that In-hye escapes by taking the role of her mother and docilely serving her father broth, and their brother Yeong-ho escapes simply because he is a boy (Kang 2015, p.157). In-hye begins to comprehend the intricate relationships between the bodies of non-human animals and the bodies of girls and women, both of which are subject to violent male aggression. Just as Yeong-hye interiorises the pain of livestock during slaughter, In-hye interiorises the pain of her sister during the force-feeding, remembering how her body 'had jerked violently as though she herself was the one receiving the blow' (Kang 2015, p.136). She begins to make sense of why her sister insisted on not trying to find the way home when they had lost their way in the forest. Yeong-hye's alienation may have begun on that day when she had found herself more at home in the forest, away from the violence of her father, and of society at large.

In-hye's attempt at reconciliation with her sister also makes her aware of her role as a receptacle. Her husband rapes her, reflecting the similarity of the two sisters' subjugated positions; and soon after the rape her vagina begins to bleed, mirroring Yeong-hye's suicide attempt in In-hye's mind (Kang 2015, p.161). The violence inflicted on her body makes In-hye recognize her subjugated position. She then finds comfort in maternal fluid, wearing the shirt that she had worn when she was breast-feeding her son; its 'milk-and-newborn-baby smell gave her a sense of security' (Kang 2015, p.165), echoing the maternal comfort that Yeong-hye sought from her breasts at the beginning of the novel.

In-hye becomes more aware of her position as an absent referent when she identifies with the caged birds. In-hye has already reflected on how Yeong-hye made her aware of the metaphorical 'bars' she never knew existed. After breaking free from the 'cage' of her earlier roles as daughter, older sister, wife, mother, and shop owner – roles which placed her in relation to others and in which she was 'never herself' (Kang 2015, p.139) – she is ready to take control of her own life trajectory. Adams argues that bird imagery is pivotal in the creation of a new form of 'mythopoesis' (2015, p.169). Yeong-hye has already begun this process of mythmaking, and In-hye is gradually starting to. Since birds appear as subjects, unlike other

non-human animals that appear only as objects in the form of meat, there is a heightened sense of the connectedness of all forms of life, which, in Adams' terms, '[trigger] the recognition' of the 'same oneness of living beings' (2015, p.169).

This recognition places In-hye in the same position as Yeong-hye. The title of Part 3 of the novel, 'Flaming Trees', reinforces the idea of female solidarity. Flaming trees symbolise Yeong-hye's belief in her own metamorphosis into a tree, with her 'golden breasts' (Kang 2015, p.119) heralding a matriarchal world.

In-hye's reconciliation with her sister and estrangement from society occur as she undergoes traumatic experiences – including multiple occasions of rape; dreams; disturbed familial and conjugal relationships; and a search for comfort in the maternal objects of breasts and a nursing shirt – that mirror Yeong-hye's; and becomes aware of the parallels between the subjugated position of both sisters and that of meat species. The importance of bodies in reclaiming agency is emphasized from the beginning of the novel, and finds its final expression when In-hye tells her sister '[i]t is your body, you can treat it however you please' (Kang 2015, p.177). In-hye, as she gradually moves towards reconciliation, comes to view 'so-called "normal" people as strange' and the inmates of the psychiatric hospital as 'trapped' (Kang 2015, p.142), a change in perspective catalysed by the 'guilt she feels for having had Yeong-hye incarcerated' (Kang 2015, p.178). She is 'surprised by her impulse to reach out and put her arms around' Hee-joo, a patient who cares for Yeong-hye in the hospital (Kang 2015, p.177), and more generally by her sense of solidarity, which leads her to empathise with the female patients.

In-hye's engagement with Yeong-hye allows her to take mental flight from society. By the end of the novel, when the two sisters are leaving the psychiatric hospital, In-hye, like her sister, lapses into silence, rejecting the patriarchal, phallogocentric worldview of Confucian Korea to seek solace in a feminist, shamanist and animist subculture.

**Conclusion**

Yeong-hye's unlikely dietary choice deeply affects everyone in her personal orbit; '[t]he lives of people around her tumbled down like a house of cards' (2015, p.137). Her new diet creates a chasm between herself and her family, yet her sister In-hye comes close to achieving reconciliation with her. By escaping mainstream society, Yeong-hye also seeks to extricate herself from the carnophallogocentric order, creating her own myths. Adams describes 'mythopoesis' by independent women as a process of 'enlarging the meaning of an individual's actions so that it carries political importance, actions that are generally muted within a

dominant culture' (2015, p.5). In-hye's mythopoesis combines a number of utopian elements, pacifist as well as vegetarian, in a way that evokes the maternal nature of Korean shamanism and Adams' model of 'maternal pantheism' (2015, p.124).

This article argues that the utopian reconciliation between the estranged sisters is not only an escape from rigid gender roles, but also encompasses a fluid gender identity. This fluidity is suggested by Yeong-hye's androgynous features (Kang 2015, p.42). By replacing what Adams terms 'blood culture' with 'plant culture' (2015, p.122) where trees are regarded as siblings, Yeong-hye experiences insights similar to the English Romantic poet and vegetarian Percy Shelley's 'androgynous vision', characterized by a 'feminine insight and imagination to perceive the evil, and the manly strength and courage to oppose and finally annihilate it' (Barnefield and Carpenter 1925, cited in Adams 2015, p.109).

The estrangement of Yeong-hye through the simple act of giving up meat draws attention to the extent to which non-vegetarians unconsciously consume a dominant ideology. Her act of disobedience also enables her sister In-hye to dismantle patriarchal control over her own body. By establishing a nexus of solidarity, both sisters claim the agency to envisage a benign sylvan world that seeks to eradicate patriarchal violence.

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