BOUNDARIES

eSHARP 29

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Letter From The Editor

As a student-led publication, eSharp exists for the benefit of postgraduates, as well as the broader research community. We limit our publication to articles written by postgraduate researchers and recent graduates so that we may promote the work of new and emerging scholars from around the world.

We chose this year's theme for a host of reasons. First, we wanted to promote the discussion of important and sometimes challenging topics. 'Boundaries' often bring to mind images of distance, separation, access, opportunity, and segregation. For some a boundary is a window looking out on an exciting tomorrow. For others it is a wall to keep them in, or to keep them out. We also wanted to invite a wide array of papers from a multitude of disciplines. eSharp is at its core an interdisciplinary journal, and nothing that can be found under the broad umbrellas of arts, humanities, and social sciences is off-limits. Therefore, we chose 'Boundaries' specifically because of its relative ambiguity. As you will see, the result is a collection of high-quality articles from across a variety of disciplines.

I would like to thank the members of the eSharp editorial board for their hard work and dedication. This year has brought with it exceptional challenges and this issue would not have been possible without this extraordinary team of editors.

Caleb Rogers
eSharp General Editor, 2021

The Authors

Carolyn J McNamara recently completed their PhD in Celtic at the University of Glasgow, where their thesis examined the existed of a monastic Community related to St Comgall spanning across the North Channel zone from northern Ireland to western Scotland. They have presented conference papers at the Irish Conference of Medievalists, Leeds International Medieval Conference, IONA: Seafaring conference, and others. Carolyn's research interests focus on early medieval Ireland and Scotland, especially monasteries, saints' cults, networks, and travel.

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Carolyn J. McNamara (University of Glasgow)

Rethinking water as an inherent boundary in the early medieval west of Scotland

Abstract

The modern perception of land-focused travel is here challenged with the intention of prioritising water-based travel within a perceived seascape that would have been the focus of transportation in the early medieval period. This is done by first addressing the history of roads in Scotland before examining texts that indicate how early medieval peoples conceived of travel in the west of Scotland. Further evidence of travel in texts and archaeology are examined before turning to look at the specific groups of Dál Riata, the Community of Comgall, and the important position of the isle of Tiree. The seascape within which these entities existed is thereby described and highlighted.

Keywords: medieval, travel, seascape, landscape, monastic, Scotland, Ireland

Introduction

In the modern period we are more comfortable with travel by paved road, train, or even air than we are with travel by boat. Modern political boundaries also entrench this view of the sea as a boundary in the west of Scotland. However, shifting the perspective from land-focused to sea-focused travel enables a closer examination of the actual experience of medieval travellers in the west of Scotland. We begin with a brief overview of the development of roads in Scotland before turning to the evidence for sea-based travel in the early medieval period through both archaeological and textual sources, especially the annals and hagiographical works that include the *Lives* of Comgall (VCom), Cainnech (VCain), Columba (VC), Baithéne (VBaith), and Brendan (VBren). Then, we will look at two communities which appear to have existed across the North Channel, one secular and one ecclesiastical: the Dál Riata and the Community of Comgall, respectively. Finally, we will conclude our examination of the seascape within which early medieval peoples in the west of Scotland interacted by looking at the island of Tiree and its associations with early medieval ecclesiastical foundations and saints in both Ireland and Scotland.

Roads in Scotland

The history of roads in Scotland serves as evidence of the changing conception of central and peripheral space in Scotland. This is especially seen in the modern development of land-based transportation and the conceptualisation of the Central Belt as the centre of Scotland, with the highlands and islands now considered peripheral. This is not to suggest that there were no roads prior to the modern period, but that roads as we understand them today, and the ease of travel that comes with them, are fairly recent.

Travel routes would have existed throughout Scotland from pre-historic times, but these were far from the smooth paved roads we are familiar with today and which are easily traversed in most weather conditions. The limit of Rome's occupied territory extended only so far as the Antonine Wall, which stretches between the Firth of Clyde and Firth of Forth, and was in active use for up to 20 years [MacInnes 2020, p.53]. A road known as the Military Way was constructed as part of the Antonine Wall [Hanson and Breeze 2020, p.13-14], though one should not expect Roman roads to have been constructed beyond this point and certainly not to the north and west of the Firth of Clyde. A possible early medieval route across Scotland (stretching from Dunkeld in the east to Iona in the west) was suggested by Pamela O'Neill in 2005 and tested in 2017, which itself wends through Strath Tay, along Glen Lyon, and then crosses the Spine of Britain [O'Neill 2017, p.211-225].

Drove roads were recorded by A.R.B. Haldane (1952) which existed into the late eighteenth century, and likely follow routes determined far earlier. Looking in the west of Scotland specifically, we see that there were only a few routes through the western mainland towards markets in the Central Belt (Matthew, [Map]), highlighting 'the few difficult routes available for land-based travel towards markets' [McNamara 2021, p.196].

Roads of a quality beginning to approach what we might consider easily traversed in our modern perception truly begin with the military roads of George Wade, a man whose name is intrinsically linked with roadworks in the Highlands, and whose work started in 1725 [Miller 2019, p.45-55]. These roads were predominantly built east of the Great Glen, though Wade's successors did manage to tie Glenelg and Oban into the main system, and linked Poolewe to Contin [Miller 2019, p.58]. Modern roads have made travel across Scotland far more efficient and comfortable than ever before. Today it is possible to reach Inverness from Perth in two-and-a-quarter hours according to Google Maps. This is a far cry from the two-and-a-quarter days to complete the trip after the construction of the military roads, which themselves halved the time to take the same journey prior to their construction [Miller 2019, p.105]. Applecross, an early monastic settlement on the western coast of Scotland, survives today as a village and serves as an excellent example

of modern changes to the orientation of travel. The drove road near Applecross, which rises over the rough and rocky territory of *Bealach na Bà* or 'pass of the cow', was first turned into a modern road c. 1826 and provided the first road to connect the area with the rest of the Scottish mainland [McNamara 2021, p.175].

Our current expectation that islands should themselves be counted as a bounded unit is likely rooted in the modern or Western psyche, serving as a lens that affects our understanding of the past [McNamara 2021, p.42-43]. Indeed, topography and other circumstances which inhibit overland travel can cause islands to experience cultural division within their own landed boundaries:

> Their choice of route and method of travel would consider destination, labour cost, difficulty of terrain, and other factors. The possibility of rugged or difficult interior terrain may cause the coasts of adjacent islands to be considered closer or more accessible than the other side of the same island, arguing against island homogeneity and for the idea that the social or cultural line can be drawn through an island, not just around it [McNamara 2021, p.43].

Understanding that the present conception of islands and water-as-boundary is more recently constructed allows us to more clearly focus our analysis of early medieval evidence and thus better understand how this would have been conceptualised by those who lived during that time.

Evidence for Early Medieval Travel

The historical record is a useful beginning point to look at movement across water in the early medieval period. As early as the sixth century, Gildas mentioned 'two savage overseas nations, the Scots from the northwest and the Picts from the north' whom in their 'coracles that had carried them across the sea-valleys' had taken control of the entirety of the north of Britain [Gildas, §14-17]. In this period *Scoti* was a Latin (L) term that referred to Gaelic speakers generally, whether in Ireland or Scotland [Fraser 2010, p.43]. While Gildas' writing outlines a pseudo-historical view of a migration of Picts and Gaels from outside the island of Britain, there is still value in his belief that such a migration by boat was possible. That tells us that sea-based travel was familiar and accessible to Gildas. In the eighth century, the Northumbrian monk Bede further described how the sons of King Aethelfrith of Bernicia 'together with many young nobles, were living in exile among the Irish or the Picts', which could suggest that these sons had travelled across the sea to Ireland [Bede, III.1; McNamara 2021, p.46]. Adomnán (d. 704), ninth abbot of Iona, described a 'widely travelled community of Columba that spreads from Ireland to Iona, Hinba, Ardnamurchan, *Mag Luinge*, and even to Skye' [McNamara 2021, p.46]. In the early ninth century, Dícuil (fl. 795-825) described his own experiences with the islands in the north Atlantic:

> There are islands around our own island Hibernia, some small and some very small. Near the island Britannia are many islands, some large, some small, and some medium-sized. Some are in the sea to her south and some in the sea to her west, but they abound mostly to the north-west and north. Among these I have lived in some, and have visited others; some I have only glimpsed, while others I have read about.
>
> *Circum nostram insulam Hiberniam sunt insulae; sed aliae parvae, atque aliae minimae. Juxta insulam Brittanniam multae aliae magnae, aliae, parvae, aliaeque mediae sunt, aliae in Australi mari et aliae in Occidentali; sed magis in parte circii*

et septentrionis illius abundant. In aliquibus ipsarum habitavi, alias intravi, alias tantum vidi, alias legi (Dícuil, VII, ¶6).

In addition to these sources, evidence of water-based travel is also found in the Irish annals. The annals themselves are generally short-form reports of current events in chronological order that were kept at a monastery and are generally agreed to have become contemporary with recorded events between the mid-sixth century and the late-seventh century (McNamara 2021, p.52-53). Just looking at the *Annals of Ulster* (AU) and the *Annals of Tigernach* (AT) between AD 650 to 750 we note that just over 3% of all entries either directly mention water-based travel or must have necessarily involved it (such as travel between Britain and Ireland). While this number appears low, it is not intended to suggest that this percentage of entries indicates all water-based travel in the annals, as many trips which both begin and end in Ireland (or Britain, for that matter), could have involved water-based travel which was not mentioned in the annals. Therefore, this is an absolute minimum number of entries for water-based travel in these two annals. Indeed, these are only records of the events that were considered important enough to be included in the annalistic record. Any unexceptional uses of water-based travel would not be included in a record of significant events. The reasons for such water-based travel include monastic ventures (for example: an abbot making a circuit themselves or the relics of a saint being taken on circuit), secular military actions (such as the sea-battle mentioned in AU 719.7 and AT 719.5), the flight of conquered kings (such as Aurthuile's flight to Britain in AU 700.5), and even general shipwrecks due to foul weather (which caused the drowning of six of the Community of Iona in AU 691.5 or the wreck of 150 Pictish vessels in AT 729.2). Based on this textual evidence, we can surmise that water-based travel in early medieval Ireland and Scotland was commonplace.

Indeed, the traditional argument for a migration of Gaelic speakers from Ireland to northern Britain has been at least partially built upon a record in the Irish annals:

> AT 501.3: Fergus Mór son of Erc with the people of Dál Riata, possessed a part of Britain and died there.

> AT 501.3: *Feargus Mor mac Earca cum gente Dal Riada partem Britaniae tenuit, et ibi mortuus est.*

However, as noted above, this entry is not contemporary with the timeframe it purports to record and is accepted today as a much later insertion (Campbell 2001, p.288; McNamara 2021, p.23). Bede described the migration of peoples from Ireland to northern Britain as occurring under the leadership of one Reuda, who 'won lands among the Picts either by friendly treaty or by the sword', from whom he claims their name, Dál Riata, comes (Bede, I.1). Much like the Irish annals, Bede's explanation of the origins of Gaelic speakers in northern Britain is later, and we should not accept his story at face value. These stories are more likely to represent what the original author wanted to portray as true at the time of its composition (Fraser 2010, p.145).

Moving from the historical documents themselves, modern researchers have included additional evidence in their search for the early history of the west of Scotland. Indeed, we must now consider the high probability of mutual development across the north of Ireland and west of Scotland. This was spotlighted by Ewan Campbell, whose challenge to the traditional view of an early sixth-century migration to modern Argyll was also based on archaeological and linguistic evidence, upon which scholars have subsequently built, and which is reviewed briefly here. Campbell noted that:

> [a]t best, the evidence shows a shared cultural region from the Iron Age, with some subsequent divergence in the later 1ˢᵗ millennium AD. Any cultural influences could be argued as likely to have been going from Scotland to Ireland rather than *vice versa* [Campbell 2001, p.287].

The archaeological record, as it is currently understood, contains no evidence for a sixth-century migration. Both Campbell and Dumville note a continuity of the archaeological record [Dumville 2002, p.195], especially in the use of the hilltop dun as a settlement form from the first millennium BC to the advent of the Viking Age [Campbell 2001, p.287].

The hilltop dun is a distinct settlement form in northern Britain, as brochs and forts of other types are found elsewhere in Scotland and are similarly distinct from the raths and cashels which proliferate in Ireland [Campbell 2001, p.287]. Moving to a different type of archaeological evidence, the form of brooches in the fourth to sixth centuries in the west of Scotland (type G penannular) and Ireland (zoomorphic penannular) likewise does not align between these two areas [Campbell 2001, p.287]. It would be expected that an archaeological link between Ireland and the west of Scotland would be visible in the event of a migration, as that would involve a marked and rapid cultural shift. Further analysis of the physical evidence for cross-channel travel has been undertaken by Pamela O'Neill, with special attention paid to the possible use of cross-marked stones as water-focused travel markers (O'Neill 2005).

Traditionally, it was accepted that the migration of Goidelic speakers from Ireland to north Britain completely displaced the earlier Brythonic speakers, though Campbell again notes that the 'complete obliteration' of a prior language without evidence of a population movement 'would be almost unparalleled in onomastic history' [Campbell 2001, p.289]. Problems with Ptolemy's recorded names include the possibility that his informant provided Brythonic forms of Goidelic names, or that the divergence of the languages was less developed in that time [Campbell 2001, p.289]. There was a group of people known as *Cruithin* (later Dál nAraide) in the north of Ireland, who were Goidelic speakers; this is the same name by which later Irish annalists referred to the Picts [Woolf 2012, p.7]. This suggests linguistic overlap between the north of Britain and the north of Ireland from an early period. If we accept that the North Channel zone was an area of connection and movement of peoples, then we must accept the movement and development of language in that area as well. As Thomas Clancy notes, '[l]anguages are not afraid of the water' [2011, p.357], and what we perceive today as the separate geographical and political units of Ireland and Scotland did not necessarily exist in the Iron Age and early medieval period. Rather, it is more likely that the Grampian Highlands, also known in Scottish Gaelic as *Druim nAlban* or the 'Spine of Britain', would be more likely to cause a communication barrier than the North Channel. Indeed, Adomnán himself wrote that the Picts and the Irish in Britain were two 'races separated by the mountains of *Druim Alban*' [VC II.46]. The speed of travel overland versus by boat is markedly different, with early medieval boats able to cover a distance upwards of 90km each day in good weather [McNamara 2021, p.197]. In contrast, Pamela O'Neill, along with Simon Taylor and others, planned a walk from Dunkeld to Iona in 2017 in an attempt to reconstruct possible routes of travel for ecclesiastical members of the Community of Columba [O'Neill 2017]. O'Neill's reconstruction posited a 12 to 15km per day distance, which would have allowed for the performance of religious duties as well as the time needed to cross steep or boggy ground (and sometimes ground which is both at once) [O'Neill 2017, p.213]. Secular travellers may have been able to make some greater headway, presuming that they did not need to stop during the day for religious observances, though they would still have had to manage the same ground conditions.

Cross-Channel Communities and Polities

Multiple groups appear to have traversed and existed on both sides of the North Channel in the early medieval period, though only two, the Dál Riata and the Community of Comgall, will be thoroughly discussed here. The island of Tiree will also be briefly addressed as an important location within the North Channel seascape during the early medieval period.

Dál Riata was a secular polity that is evidenced in the annals, hagiographies, and other textual sources such as the 'Statement of the History of the Men of Scotland', better known in its Early Gaelic (EG) form as *Míniugud Senchasa Fher nAlban* [Dumville 2002; Bannerman 1966]. The Community of Comgall was an ecclesiastical community based around its founder, Comgall, and his primary monastery at Bangor in modern County Down [McNamara 2021, p.123-130]. The island of Tiree is the westernmost island in the Inner Hebrides and appears to have served as an important location within the early medieval ecclesiastical world of the west of Scotland.

In Ireland, Dál Riata held lands in the north-east (modern County Antrim), including land east of the River Bush and north of Glenarm [Charles-Edwards 2000, p.54; McNamara 2021, p.82]. On the other side of North Channel, Dalriadic lands included much of modern-day Argyll [Fraser 2010, p.251]. The continued existence of Dál Riata is indicated in its mention as part of the Convention of Druim Cete c. 592, which may have dealt with an alliance between Dál Riata and Uí Néill in Ireland [Fraser 2007, p.318-321; Fraser 2010, p.139]. Irish Dál Riata seems to have been subjected to Uí Néill influence after the Battle of Mag Roth c. 637 [Charles-Edwards 2000, p.494-499], though entries referring to Irish Dál Riata continue to be found in the *Annals of the Four Masters* (AFM) 910.3, 985.8, 1005.8, 1012.13, 1165.4, and 1247.4 [Dumville 2002, p.196]. Dál Riata in Argyll continued to exist despite coming under Pictish influence c.741, through the onset of the Viking Age, and eventually changed focus eastwards towards Pictland from the ninth century [McNamara 2021, p.166-170, 269-274, 278-281]. It is unclear exactly when Dál Riata split into separate polities in Ireland and Argyll, though it seems clearer that by the ninth century this was the case [Dumville 2002, p.196; McNamara 2021, p.270-272]. This split, however, seems less based on issues arising from the sea than it does the polity being subjected to the influence of their neighbours.

The Community of Comgall was an ecclesiastical group focused on St Comgall and centred on his primary foundation at Bangor in modern County Down. Before diving straight into a discussion of this Community, it is useful to first examine what exactly is meant by 'Community' and how this differs from other terms used to define ecclesiastical groupings in early medieval Ireland and Scotland: *paruchia* and *familia* or 'family'. Understanding these terms helps to show the organisational structures that underly their usage and assists in showing the connections that existed between disparate members of a *paruchia*, *familia*, or Community which could have stretched long distances and through seascapes. Traditionally, *paruchia* was understood to be based upon a bishop who was resident in a monastery, and the geographical area assigned to him which was subsequently overtaken by a head abbot who claimed authority over dependent foundations which said abbot controlled as his *paruchia* [McNamara 2021, p.14]. This understanding was subsequently challenged by Kathleen Hughes, though she still identified the bishop as the main authority within a *paruchia* of 'scattered houses' with increased control by an abbot after AD 549 [McNamara 2021, p.15; Hughes 1966, p.x, 50, 62-71, 77-90]. This perception was further challenged by Richard Sharpe, who argued for the continuing existence of evidence for administrative power by bishops even into the eighth century [Sharpe 1984, p.237; McNamara 2021, p.16-17]. His ultimate position was that the hierarchy for bishops was similar to that observed for local secular rulers (*rí* 'king', *rurí* 'over-king', *ard-rí* 'high king'), and that the monastic *paruchia* was a separate entity from the episcopal *paruchia*, in that it made a proprietary claim over dependent foundations rather than one of episcopal jurisdiction [McNamara 2021, p.16-17; Sharpe 1984, p.244]. While there was a concept of the *paruchia Patricii* 'the family of Patrick' in the *Book of Armagh*, it is also noteworthy

that the Community of Iona described itself as *familia Iae* 'the family of Iona' rather than as a *paruchia* [Sharpe 1984, p.244-245], as seen at AU 691.5 717.4, 749.7, 806.8, and 817.7. This indicates that there were additional options for how communities centred on a founding saint and monastery might conceptualise themselves. This understanding further suggests the existence of a lay monastic sphere which focused on its own members and worked underneath the authority of a bishop [McNamara 2021, p.17]. Most recently, *paruchia* has been re-examined by Colmán Etchingham, who determined *paruchia* to refer to an episcopal sphere of jurisdiction with a geographical-based authority that did not have to be contiguous. Separate from this jurisdiction, he examined four different types of relationships that could exist between head and dependent foundations: *eclais fine érlama* 'church of the founding/patron saint's kin', *eclais fine griain* 'church of the landowner's kin', *cell manach* 'church of the *manaig*', and *déorad Dé* 'pious outsider', though due to space we will not delve any further into their particulars [Etchingham 1993, p.153-157]. The use of 'Community' as a term here is separate from *paruchia* in that there is no requirement of episcopal involvement, and consciously separate from *familia*, which has been noted to refer variously to the community of a single foundation and also to a wider connected group that can in many ways overlap that which constitutes the *paruchia* [Etchingham 1999, p.126-130]. Community as it is used in this paper follows that laid out in the author's doctoral thesis, which is defined as

> a group of people who have a shared characteristic (such as an ideology
> or way of life) in common or some sense of cultural sharing or belonging
> together [McNamara 2021, p.18-19].

Comgall's Community can be shown to include foundations in the north of Ireland as well as the west of Scotland. Perhaps the most concrete of these examples are those successors of Comgall at Bangor who are explicitly noted as coming from other foundations. These include two successors who were noted to have come from Antrim (an ecclesiastical foundation on Loch Neagh in Ireland): Fintan of Antrim, whose death is recorded in AU 613.1 and Flann of Antrim, whose death is recorded in AU 728.3. A third successor was noted as coming from Applecross, an ecclesiastical foundation on the western coast of Scotland opposite the Isle of Skye (in modern Ross and Cromarty) called Mac Óige of Applecross, whose death is recorded in AU 802.5.

Antrim was further connected with Comgall in the annals following an attack by 'heathens' in AU 824.2, when the relics of Comgall were taken to Antrim for safekeeping [McNamara 2021, p.125]. Other sites in Ireland which have been associated with Comgall include Camus, near Coleraine, which Adomnán specifically connects to Comgall in his *Life* of St Columba (VC I.49); *Rechru* (which is likely a reference to Rathlin Island), which is mentioned in Comgall's *Life* (VCom §50); Castledermot (EG *Dísert Diarmata*), in modern County Kildare was noted as 'one of Comgall's places' in the *Fragmentary Annals* (FA) c.908 in FA 423. Moving eastwards across the North Channel, the strongest association with Comgall is at Applecross. Lismore (EG *Lios mór*), on an island of the same name in Loch Linnhe off the western coast of Scotland, is also sometimes connected to Comgall, though this connection is very tenuous [McNamara 2021, p.282-283]. Comgall's *Life* also places him at a foundation on Tiree (L *Heth*) c. 562 (VCom §22), an island which will get more attention below. Comgall is further claimed to have travelled in the north of Britain in his own *Life* (VCom §13, 51) as well as in the *Life* of St Columba (VC III.17). The sixteenth-century *Aberdeen Breviary* also associates Comgall with Paisley and its founder, Mirren, though the lateness of this association also makes it tenuous [McNamara 2021, p.129; Macquarrie 2012, p.212-213]. As this evidence shows, Comgall's Community can be evidenced throughout the North Channel seascape.

Having considered the seascape which made up part of the Community of Comgall in a more general sense, we now turn to considering more concrete details about the realities of attempting to travel from a site such as Applecross to the central foundation of Bangor. This projected route underscores the reality of travel between the north of Ireland and the west of Scotland in the early medieval period and the swiftness with which long distances can be traversed by sea. Indeed, the water can be seen to act as a kind of early medieval 'motorway' enabling travel and contact across areas viewed today as highly isolated. As mentioned above, it is possible that a ship could have travelled as many as 90km in a day, given good weather. Based on this projection a possible route, including overnighting locations, has been identified which could be traversed in as few as five days (Figure 1).

   The route begins at Applecross, with the first day's travel covering 79km to Arisaig on Loch nan Ceall on the Scottish mainland. Arisaig possesses a sheltering harbour as well as two Maelrubha hagiotoponyms (Maelrubha was the founder of Applecross and possible student of Comgall) [McNamara 2021, p.198]. From Arisaig, the second day's trip would be approximately 70km to the island of Tiree. A possible landing site is at modern Gott Bay, which boasts an easy, sandy beach and is very near one of the sites postulated as *Mag Luinge*, a dependent foundation associated with Iona and St Columba [McNamara 2021, p.318-321]. The third destination is Loch Gruinart on Islay, a distance of approximately 77km, near the site of the Kilnave Cross which indicates the area was in use in the early medieval period [McNamara 2021, p.199]. Day four reaches Machrihanish Bay, Kintyre, 75km distant, which has a beach attractive for landing boats and sits approximately 2km from Killarow, another Maelrubha hagiotoponym [McNamara 2021, p.199]. Finally, the fifth day would cut across the North Channel and wind down the Antrim coast for a distance of 93km to Bangor.
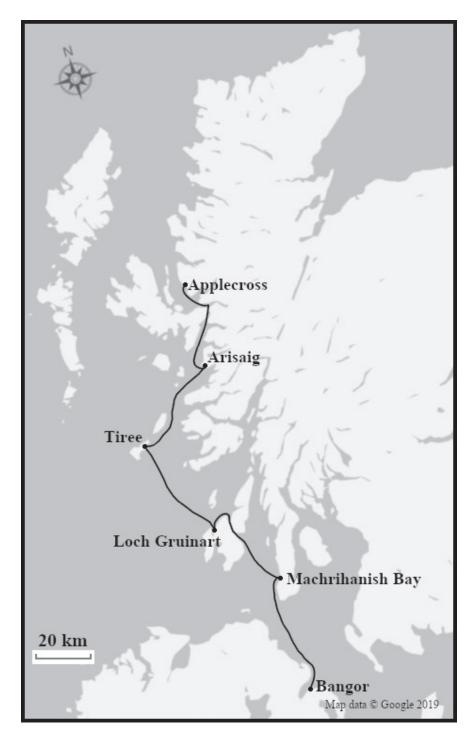
Figure 1. Suggested travel route from Applecross to Bangor [(McNamara 2021, p.198)]

The island of Tiree itself is further indicative of the high degree of connectedness that existed between the west of Scotland and the Hebridean islands in the early medieval period. As mentioned above, Tiree is the westernmost island in the Inner Hebrides, and sits conveniently in this western seascape to facilitate travel in all directions. Further, it is the sixth largest island of the Inner Hebrides, with a large proportion of fertile and useful land [McNamara 2021, p.284], making it an even more attractive site. Tiree is mentioned in the *Lives* of Columba, Cainnech, Comgall, Baithéne and the *Vita Altera* 'Alternate Life' of Brendan as L *Heth* or *Ethica* (VC I.19, I.36, II.15, II.39, III.7; VBaith §9; VCom §22; VCain §26; VBren §15). It has also been confidently identified as the location of Iona's dependent foundation of *Mag Luinge*, though the specific location on the island is still less clear [McNamara 2021, p.288, 341-342]. What makes Tiree even more interesting is the survival of numerous sites which have associations with the early medieval period, though only three will be discussed here briefly.

Kirkapoll is one of the possible sites for *Mag Luinge*. It is located on modern Gott Bay and has a surviving church and chapel (which date to the fourteenth century), two graveyards, and two incised crosses which stylistically suggest they are much earlier than the church and chapel [McNamara 2021, p.318-321]. Soroby, the second possibility for *Mag Luinge*, also sits near a beach, and today consists of a burial ground with two potentially early cross-carved slabs, known as Soroby 1 and Soroby 2. A previously existing church was demolished in the early nineteenth century [Fisher 2001, p.238]. Soroby 1 is the stylistically earlier stone, though it cannot be securely dated, and has been compared with similar stones at Monymusk, Lochgoilhead, and Iona [McNamara 2021, p.327]. Soroby 2 also shows wide stylistic links as far as *Cille Bharra*; Killevin; Iona; and *Riasg Buidhe*, Colonsay, though the similarity especially to *Cille Bharra* suggests a likely tenth century date [Fisher 2001, p.107, 117, 140, 148; McNamara 2021, p.325-326]. *Teampall Phàraig* 'Patrick's temple/ church' has a perhaps obvious dedication to Patrick, though it is unclear if this is an enduring dedication or a more recent one. A visual relationship with Iona exists at this site, as Iona can be seen from *Teampall Phàraig* on a clear day. The site today consists of 'an early enclosure with three cross-incised stones, remnants of small huts, and a nearby well', and may indicate a settlement or monastery active in the early medieval period [McNamara 2021, p.333]. The carved stones on the site consist of two pillar stones with Sunken Latin crosses on two opposite faces, while the third stone contains a single carved Latin cross. The designs on the stones are very simple, though they are different from the crosses at Kirkapoll, as the width of the carved arms is greater. These stones have stylistic similarity to carved crosses at Iona; Kilmory, Rum; and elsewhere on Tiree [Fisher 2001, p.95, 123, 127, 129; McNamara 2021, 334-335]. The stylistic connections seen across Tiree with other parts of the west of Scotland indicate that there was an active movement of people and ideas throughout this seascape as long ago as the early medieval period, continuing right through to the early modern period. As William Reeves has noted, we might not have pinpointed dates for the sites on Tiree, but 'there can be little doubt ... that this island was well known and much frequented at a very early stage of Christianity in Scotland' [1854, p.243]. The existence of the Dál Riata, the Community of Comgall, and the volume of likely early medieval sites on Tiree indicates that the west of Scotland and the north of Ireland were part of a well-connected seascape.

Conclusion
The focus has been to confront assumptions on travel based on what feels natural to us today as modern or Western people. This has been undertaken by first examining the history of the development of roads in Scotland, which have served to focus more recent concepts of travel towards land and the Central Belt. With this understanding, it becomes possible to better understand and analyse evidence for the lived experiences of people in the early medieval

period in the west of Scotland. It thus becomes clear that early medieval people such as Adomnán and Dícuil perceived themselves as living in a traversable and familiar seascape. This understanding is further supported by looking at additional evidence in the annals, hagiographies, and the archaeological record. Finally, the existence of the polity of Dál Riata and the Community of Comgall which each spanned the North Channel, and the importance of Tiree in its early medieval seascape come together to ultimately support the view that sea-based travel and seascapes were themselves understood as areas of connection and accessibility in the early medieval period rather than as barriers or hard boundaries.

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Contemplating Italian Renaissance Magic: Can Theurgy Usefully Blur the Boundaries Between Religion and Magic?

Abstract

The relationship between religion and magic holds a precarious position in history. One common understanding is that religion petitions while magic coerces. This understanding has seen magic stand diametrically opposed to religion, a viewpoint which appears to develop in the early centuries of the Christian era. The Christian tradition has often regarded narratives of spiritual ascent, particularly accounts of the practice known as theurgy, as controversial, particularly due to concerns that they might clash with Christin doctrine. The term theurgy (Greek θεουργία or theourgia), which appears to have originated in the *Chaldaean Oracles*, is a compound word which literally translates as 'god work'. It was adopted in late antiquity to differentiate between the ritual acts and practice, in contrast to theology, which can be literally translated as 'god speech' or speech about god. The act of contemplation has been viewed as orthodox by Christian thinkers, while acts of theurgy have generally been rejected as magic. This paper explores how ideas of spiritual ascent and theurgy found in the narratives of the ancient philosophers and Jewish Kabbalists can contribute to a better understanding of the complexities of the relationship between religion and magic and blur the boundaries of magic as defined by Renaissance mages such as Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) and Giovanni della Mirandola (1463-1494). This paper explores the benefits the boundaries between religion and magic of setting a new definition for the practice of theurgy for our understanding by comparing this ancient practice with the ideas of Ficino and Pico.

Key words: Magic – Religion – Ritual – Renaissance.

The relationship between religion and magic holds a precarious position in history.[1] Magic and religion are often treated as separate practices, but the boundaries between what constitutes the concept of "magic" and "religion" are fluid and ever-changing. In exploring the idea of spiritual ascent through contemplative practice and its relationship to the Neoplatonic practice of theurgy, a deeper understanding of the boundaries between the Renaissance understanding of "religion" and "magic" may be possible. Focusing on two key thinkers, Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), at the heart of these discussions is a quest for divine truth, which centres on their understanding of misdated texts and the development of the *prisca theologia*. The *prisca theologia* or 'ancient religion' was first proposed by Ficino in the fifteenth century who believed that 'from such founding-figures and representatives as Moses, Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Plato, and Orpheus, who had supposedly bequeathed this unitary wisdom tradition to humankind in times immemorial' (Goodrick-Clarke 2008, p.6). Ficino and Pico are the focus of this paper given the intellectual contribution of both men to this area of the Renaissance. In considering how Ficino and Pico integrated ideas of ancient religion, wisdom and revelation with the practice of spiritual ascent and theurgy, it can be seen that although some of these practices were perceived as magic and condemned by the Christian Church, they also came to be understood by both Ficino and Pico as aids to deepening their understanding of Christian faith, and demonstrated that the Christian message has been with humanity since creation, although somewhat veiled until the coming of Christ. This is not an exhaustive study of the complexities across history of the ever-changing boundaries between "religion" and "magic" but instead a case study of two figures of the Italian Renaissance to in order to open conversations between the field of Esoteric studies and theology. This paper argues that the concept of contemplative spiritual ascent and its relationship to the concepts of "religion" and "magic" should be brought into theological discussions, something which is not yet commonplace in theological studies.

The Italian Renaissance Humanist Project.
The Renaissance humanist project of recovering sources from classical antiquity led many thinkers to investigate notions of true knowledge and wisdom while grappling with definitions of magic and its relationship to practices found in classical antiquity. Saint Augustine (354-460 CE), who was greatly admired by Ficino, wrote that 'the very thing which is now called the Christian religion was with the ancients, and it was with the human race from its beginning to the time when Christ appeared in the flesh: from then on the true religion, which already existed, began to be called Christian' (*Retractationes* 1.12.3). In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the influx of newly discovered ancient Greek texts into Western Europe, quickly translated into Latin, allowed for a revival of Platonic discourse as well as a renewed interest in the Church Fathers. Ficino, who lived under the patronage of Cosimo de Medici (1389-1464) in Florence, is distinguished by contemporary scholars for his extensive translations of and commentaries on the Platonic and Neoplatonic corpus'. Most notable is Ficino's translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* (1463; published 1471), which renewed interest in Hermeticism (Hankins 1990, p.267-360). At the same time, the philological interests of humanists led to an increase in engagement with Hebrew texts by such scholars such as Pico leading to the development of Christian Cabala.[2] Through his extensive translation work, Ficino began to see a pattern

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1. This article draws from my unpublished masters by research thesis, Ideas of Spiritual Ascent and Theurgy from the Ancients to Ficino and Pico, available at http://theses.gla.ac.uk/id/eprint/81873. My sincerest thanks to Prof. Charlotte Methuen for her continued support and guidance.
2. There are many variations on the spelling of Kabbalah. However, there appears to be a general rule in modern scholarship; even although within this rule are further variations. The Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah appears throughout scholarship beginning with the letter 'K', with variations such as "Kaballah", and 'Kabballa'. The Christianised version of the Jewish tradition tends to begin with the letter 'C', with variations such as 'Cabbalah' and 'Cabalah'. A third spelling, 'Qabalah' is often used to denote the hermetic tradition. For the purposes of this paper, the Jewish tradition will use 'Kabbalah'. The Christianised tradition will use 'Cabala'. The only variation from this will be within a direct quotation.

in ancient discussions on wisdom which included ideas about spiritual ascent through contemplative practice, a practice known as 'theurgy'. Narratives of spiritual ascent, particularly accounts of theurgy, were controversial in the fifteenth century due to concerns that they might clash with Christian doctrine. The term 'theurgy' (Greek θεουργία or *theourgia*), which appears to have originated in the second century CE *Chaldaean Oracles*, is a compound word which literally translates as 'god work'. It was adopted in late antiquity to allow a distinction to be made between these practical ways of communing with God – i.e., ritual arts and practice – and theology, which can be translated as 'god speech' or speech about God, which was viewed as the theoretical approach. The act of contemplation has been viewed as orthodox by Christian thinkers, while acts of theurgy have generally been rejected as magic. However, can a deeper understanding of theurgy usefully blur the boundaries between "religion" and "magic", opening a dialogue between historians of magic, scholars of religion and theologians? One aspect that illustrates these issues is the way that "religion" and "magic" have been explained in scholarship.

The Problematization of "Religion" and "Magic".

In today's culture it is often assumed that terms such as "religion" and "magic" have a coherent meaning. Nonetheless, problems arise in scholarship when we try to set out clear definitions highlighting the instability of the term's "religion" and "magic" and the fluidity of the boundaries between these concepts across time. The difficulty with defining "magic" as J.N. Bremmer argues, is that it 'assumes that the definition of religion is already agreed upon' [(2002, p.268)]. The intellectual history of "magic" began to receive serious academic consideration at the end of the nineteenth century. The "intellectualist" understanding of magic evolved from two pioneering anthropological works; *Primitive Culture* (1871) by Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917) and *The Golden Bough* (1890; 1900; 1906-1915) by James George Frazer (1854-1941). For Tylor "religion" was defined as belief in spiritual beings. Frazer expanded on Tylor's approach developing an evolutionist triad which proposed that "magic" was the primitive stage in human development giving way to "religion", which in turn was superseded by "science" [(Hanegraaff 2006, p.716)]. Frazer argues that 'magic typically sought to coerce or command spiritual forces while religion aimed to supplicate their aid' [(1994, p.26-44)]. Against this background sociologists Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) and Marcel Mauss (1872 – 1950) developed the "functionalist" approach to magic. For Durkheim magical acts were conducted in private and for personal gain, while 'religious beliefs proper are always held by a defined collectivity that professes them and practices the rites that go with them' [(2001, p.42)]. However, these generalisations are not always helpful since the boundaries between what is regarded as "religion" and what is regarded as "magic" are, and always have been fluid, and ever-changing.

The concept of "magic" remains a central feature in scholarly discourse as a tool to aid in the defining of "religion" [(Styers 2004, p.6-25)]. However, it is important to note that the concept of "religion" is closely intertwined with Christian culture, more specifically Protestant ideals. Wouter Hanegraaff argues that 'the concept of "religion" emerged, during the early modern period, in response to a crisis of comparison caused by the increasingly overwhelming evidence for global diversity in human belief and modes of worship' [(2016, p. 597)]. Through the works of Protestant reformers, the period of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries developed discourse that would become an important feature of reformatory and counter-reformatory discourse. It should be noted that these discussions are not commonplace in theological discussions of this period. The ideas presented by Protestant discourse in turn led to people in various social and historical contexts being categorised as engaging with magical practices when they themselves would not consider themselves to be performing magic at all [(Bailey 2006, p.1-23)]. The period of the reformations would witness established traditions of the church, such as the

doctrine of transubstantiation, condemned as magic, redrawing the boundaries between the "correct religion" and "magic", and the ushering in of a new era of Christianity [Scribner 1993, p.475-94]. Those who remained faithful to Catholic doctrine were therefore seen as operating outside of the new "right" religious doctrines. The notion of magic as an "outsider" practice was not new to Christianity. To further understand this perspective, an understanding of the etymology of the word magic is helpful.

Hanegraaff suggests that 'the Greek complex of words relating to magic is derived from the Old Persian *magu-*, the exact meaning of which is unclear although it must have referred to a religious functionary of some kind [2012, p.169]. This shows that the etymological foundation of the word implies something that is both religious and "foreign". The best-preserved classical Greek source using the term magi is the mid-fifth century BCE text *Histories* by Herodotus (c.484-c. 425 BCE), (1.101, 1.132). The connection between the magi and Zoroaster was made when Pliny the Elder (23/24-79 CE) named him as the inventor of magic in his *Natural History* (30.2.3). Hanegraaff notes that 'these origins became highly important from the Renaissance on, as seen in the attempts of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola ... to promote a positive understanding of magic as the "ancient wisdom" of Zoroaster' [2012, p.169]. This correlates with Augustine's understanding mentioned above that there was an ancient religion that was perfected with the coming of Christ. For Ficino and Pico, the ancient wisdom was coherent with Christian Theology, and informed the way in which both thinkers defined religion.

Ancient Wisdom and the *Prisca Theologia*.

The Renaissance understanding of an ancient wisdom is linked to the development of Ficino's *prisca theologia*. As previously noted, the notion of the *prisca theologia* rests on the tradition of misdated texts. One of those texts that was crucial to the Renaissance understanding of the *prisca theologia* was the *Chaldaean Oracles*. Ruth Majercik explains they are 'a collection of abstruse, hexameter verses purported to have been "handed down by the gods" to a certain Julian the Chaldean and/or his son, Julian the Theurgist, who flourished during the late second century CE' [1989, p.1]. During the Renaissance, the *Oracles* came to be attributed to the Persian Zoroaster through a translation by the Byzantine scholar Georgios Gemistos Plethon (ca. 1355-1472). However, as C.M. Woodhouse notices, scholars now recognise that 'there is no authentic ground for associating them with Zoroaster or the Persian Magi' [1986, p.48]. Ficino followed Plethon's understanding of the *Oracles* connection to Zoroaster. The effect being that the term theurgy was attributed to a much earlier date than the second century CE.

The second misdated text is that of the *Corpus Hermetica* translated by Ficino who believed that the author Hermes Trismegistus was a contemporary at the time of Moses [Campanelli 2019, p.54]. The preface to Ficino's *Corpus Hermeticum* contains a clear example of his *prisca theologia*:

> Mercurius Trismegistus [Hermes] was the first philosopher to raise himself above physics and mathematics to the contemplation of the divine ... Therefore, he was considered the original founder of theology. Orpheus followed him and held second place in ancient theology. Aglaophemus was initiated into Orphic mysteries. Aglaophemus' successor in theology was Pythagoras, and his pupil was Philolaus, the master of our divine Plato. So, six theologians, in wonderful order, formed a unique and coherent succession in ancient theology, beginning with Mercurius and ending with the divine Plato [as translated in Walker, 1972, p.25-6].

The chain of transmission was understood by Ficino as not as a transmission from person to

person, but as individual cases of ancient theologian and philosophers who had received a similar revelation from God, even although this message was veiled. What Ficino believed these thinkers had in common are descriptions of contemplative spiritual ascent and the practice of theurgy. Pico draws from the same ancient sources as Ficino but included ideas from the Jewish Kabbalah. For Pico, the 'Christian Kabbalah was a specific manifestation of *prisca theologia*' [Hanegraaff 2012, p.9]. Pico saw the Kabbalah as a living tradition, one that remained until his own time, in contrast the religions of the Egyptians, Persians and Greeks which survived only through texts [Hanegraaff 2012, p.56]. Therefore, Pico incorporates his understanding of the kabbalah into his own genealogy, suggesting:

> That divine philosophy of Pythagoras, which they call magic, belongs to a great extent to the Mosaic tradition; since Pythagoras had managed to reach the Jews and their doctrine in Egypt, and knowledge of many of their sacred mysteries ... Zoroaster, the son of Oromasius, in practicing magic, took that to be the cult of God and the study of Divinity; while engaged in study in Persia he most successfully investigated every virtue and power of nature, in order to know those sacred and sublime secrets of the divine intellect; which subject many people called theurgy, others Cabala or magic [as translated in Walker, 1972, p.23].

Not only does Pico consider the Mosaic tradition of the same lineage as the doctrines of Pythagoras and Zoroaster, but also suggests that the sacred knowledge that was transmitted was theurgic, which he equates with Cabala and magic. This understanding therefore informed the way in which Ficino and Pico defined their concept of religion.

The concept of "Religion" for Ficino and Pico.
In an undated letter to his fried Antonio Zilioli, Ficino argues that 'philosophy and religion are true sisters' [letter 18 1999, p.32]. Ficino goes on to explain:

> The philosopher should be called wise when he raises us to the contemplation of God, and pious and religious when he kindles within us the love of divine goodness. For this reason, the whole philosophy of the ancients is simply religion united with wisdom [1999, p.32].

Two important features of Ficino's thought emerge here. Firstly, he assumes that there is an ancient wisdom. Secondly, he proposes that there was an ancient notion of religion which is connected in some way to the ancient religion, to which philosophy can 'raise us up'. The discovery of new sources in the Renaissance allowed thinkers to appreciate ancient wisdom as a *praeparatio evangelica*. As noted previously, the wisdom bestowed upon the ancient theologians and philosophers was veiled. The coming of Christ revealed these great mysteries. One aspect which all of Ficino's *prisci theologi* consider in their writings is discussions and practices of spiritual ascent. Thus, "religion" and "ancient wisdom" are intertwined for Ficino and can be traced through similarities in the narratives of spiritual ascent through contemplative practice. Pico draws similar conclusions demonstrated in his *prisci theologi* incorporating the Jewish Kabbalah. In a world in which correspondences were seen as part of God's design, the idea of an ancient wisdom and religion could flourish. To understand how ideas of spiritual ascent and theurgy were viewed by Ficino and Pico, an assessment of the history of theurgy is required.

Re-framing Theurgy.

Fritz Graf notes that 'the decisive step toward blending magical and philosophical traditions was made by the creation of theurgy, as expressed in the *Chaldean Oracles*' [(2006, p.721)]. These ideas were further developed by the Neoplatonists, in particular by Iamblichus (c.245-c.325 CE) whose understanding of theurgy shapes his understanding of Plato. According to Andrew Louth, the term θεουργία (theurgy) 'seems to have been fashioned in analogy with θεολογία [theology]: as a θεολόγος [theologian] is one who can speak of the divine or declare divine things, so a θεουργος, a theurgist, is one who can do divine things, or tap the divine power on a human level' [(1986, p.432)]. Iamblichus held that theology was *logos*, "talk about the gods", which was a human activity. However, theurgy was the work of the gods 'capable of transforming man to a divine status' [(Shaw 2014, p.5)]. It is the idea that the act of theurgy is divinely given that is important for this discussion. Therefore, an understanding of what makes a practice theurgic is necessary.

Claire Fanger suggests there are three basic 'elementary structural traits' to the practice of theurgy. These 'involve rituals to affect the soul's purification, tend to involve intermediary beings (gods, angels, daemons) and culminate in a revelatory experience [(2012, p.16)]. Fanger's traits provide a broad generic approach to identifying rituals that come under the term theurgy. Given the importance of the *Chaldean Oracles,* an assessment of the features of Chaldean theurgy should be considered. Majercik places the *Oracles* in a 'middle Platonic milieu' suggesting 'affinities with both Gnosticism and Hermeticism' [(1989, p.3)]. Thus, Majercik identified key features that these ideologies have in common:

> a) their elaborate and often exasperating metaphysical constructions; b) an extreme derogation of material existence; c) a dualistic understanding of human nature that envisions the mind as a "spark" of the Divine trapped in matter; d) a method of salvation or enlightenment that generally involves a spiritual and/or ritual ascent of the soul; e) a mythologizing tendency that hypostasizes various abstractions into quasi-mythical beings [(1989, p.4)].

George Luck considers theurgy as 'an initiation into the highest mystery of all, union between man and god' [(2000, p.111)]. Fanger's traits makes no mention of a union between the practitioner and divinity focusing on "revelation", while Majercik hints at the possibility of a transformative experience yet it is not specific that the practitioner is the focus. This article argues that the aspect of deification is a vital component of the Renaissance conception of theurgy. If ideas of spiritual ascent and theurgic practice are the vehicle by which ancient philosophers and theologians received knowledge of the ancient religion, a revival of their practices would raise serious questions for the Church in crisis during the Renaissance. Who has the authority to decided what is a genuine revelation from God, or a false revelation from the devil in disguise (2 Cor. 11:14)? Using Fanger and Majercik as a guide I propose a new framework by which to assess the theurgic nature of texts. This expanded seven-point framework has been developed with Ficino and Pico's understanding of correspondences in mind and is based on a Christian theological understanding of theurgy.

By expanding on Fanger's traits and drawing on the observations of Majercik, this framework is designed as a more robust framework by which to assess texts. 1. Humanity is perceived as inherently flawed. 2. One ascends through a hierarchical system. (The hierarchy is linked to the theory of emanation found in the Enneads by Plotinus which describes the origin of the material universe, which is multiple, generating from the One, which is unitary. The Plotinian fourfold scheme suggests this hierarchy is found in the One, Intellect, Soul and Nature). Within the hierarchical system there may be beings (gods/angels/daemons) that

mediate between man and the ultimate Good/God. 3. The soul's ascent through the hierarchy is made possible through the acts of ritual and prayer. 4. God/The One, is the Ultimate Good and the highest level of reality. 5. The language used is apophatic (negating concepts that might be applied to the One/God) with a cataphatic (positive) emphasis on God/The One as light. 6. There is a strong emphasis on inner experience and the knowledge of self. 7. The goal is a union with God/the One, culminating in a transformative experience (deification). On the surface, all these tenets sound "religious". However, theurgic practice draws on so-called "magical" practices to achieve them, such as the use of "magical formulae" (*voces magicae*), interaction with spiritual beings, and the ability to draw deities into inanimate objects such as statues and stones. Opinions regarding the orthodoxy of such practices in the Christian West rests on traditions of Christian doctrine, many of which were born in the spiritual milieu of late antiquity.

Theurgy in Late Antiquity.

In Greek late antiquity, theurgy was an intrinsic part of philosophy. According to Algis Uždavinys, 'Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy was not simply a discourse about gods and the world, but an anagogic path leading the soul to a concrete union with the divine Intellect and the ineffable One' [(1994, p.xiii)]. The contemplative practice of Platonic philosophy did not originate with the Neoplatonists. Plato writes in *Theaetetus*, 'to escape is to become like God, so far as this is possible; and to become like God is to become righteous and holy and wise' (176b). These ideas were developed by Neoplatonists Plotinus (c.204/5-270 CE), Iamblichus (c.245-c.325 CE), Proclus (c. 410 – 485 CE) and Damascius (c. 458- c. 538). For Plotinus, the process of emanation out from the one also encompasses the process of return which establishes perfect balance in the Universe (*Enneads* V.1.1-12). Plotinus argues that because part of our soul remains in the intellectual realm, an ascent is possible through the practice of philosophy. Both Iamblichus and Proclus reject Plotinus' claim of a partially descended soul and with that the rejection of the idea that philosophy alone could aid the soul to the One. Iamblichus argues in *De Mysteriis*, 'it is the accomplishment of acts not to be divulged and beyond all conception, and the power of unutterable symbols, understood solely by the gods, which establishes a theurgic union (II 11.96-97.2). The techniques and understanding of who or what enables the ascent of the practitioner vary depending on which thinker is read.

Porphyry (c. 234-c.305) claimed that the act of theurgy was an attempt to coerce the gods. Shaw notes that Iamblichus' position was a response to Porphyry's claim [(1999, p.579)]. In chapter twelve of *De Mysteriis* Iamblichus writes, 'the gods in their benevolence and graciousness unstintingly she their tight upon theurgists, summoning their souls to themselves and orchestrating their union with them' (I.12). Proclus' discussion of theurgy stems from his readings and understanding of the Chaldean Oracles. Within the Chaldean way, 'Faith, Truth, and Love are also understood in a theurgic sense, as it is through these three virtues that the theurgist is said to unite with God' [(1989, p. 11; C.f. Frag 28)]. Hermeticism discusses similar practices within its texts. In the first text of the Corpus Hermetica known as *Poimandres*, a conversation between an unnamed character and a deity known as Poimandres takes place. The overall theme of their discussion is the ascent. Verse twenty-six of *Poimandres* states, 'They rise up to the father in order to surrender themselves to the powers, and having become powers, they enter into God. This is the final good for those who have received knowledge: to be made God' (C.H. 1:26). The common features found within the three traditions relate to what Ficino identified as a universal religion. Therefore, it is possible that Ficino believed that the practice of theurgy was the pinnacle of religious wisdom. However, with the growing spread of Christianity, and the desire for a unified Christian faith, theurgy, along with other pagan traditions would find themselves up against the charge of magic.

The Christian Perspective of Theurgy.

The Neoplatonic-Chaldean-Hermetic conceptions of theurgy allow a practitioner to transcend to the One/God and thus become like God. However, in what had become defined as orthodox Christian theology by the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE, the incarnation of Christ was a unique historical experience brought into being by the substance of the father. The ability of Christ to absolve sin is dependent on his divine status. If anyone could become God-like, Christ would have no soteriological significance. Tertullian (c. 155-c.220 CE) argued in *De Idolatria* that, 'Idolatry is the chief crime of mankind, the supreme guilt of the world' [1987, p.23]. Both old and new Testaments take a clear stance on idolatry with Galatians 5:19-21 placing idolatry and sorcery/witchcraft together in the list of practices that would prevent those from partaking in the kingdom of God. Both Irenaeus (c.130-c.202 CE) in *Adversus Haereses* and Origen (c.184-c.253) in *Contra Celsum* theorised about magic in their works. However, it was Augustine's conclusions regarding theurgy as a magical practice that would become prevalent in western Christendom. Augustine begins his attack on theurgy in *City of God* (c.426 CE), Book Ten, criticising 'spells and charms composed according to the rules of criminal superstition, the craft which is called magic, or sorcery – a name of detestation – or by the more honourable name of "theurgy"' (*Civ. Dei* X.9). For Augustine, this art is false and to be refuted: 'What a wonderful art this "theurgy"! What a marvellous way of purifying the soul, where foul envy has more success in demanding than pure benevolence has in obtaining a result! We must beware of it; we must abhor it; we must listen to the teachings of salvation' (*Civ.Dei* X.10). Augustine exhorts Christians to 'listen to the teachings of salvation', propounding the view that the practice of theurgy cannot aid the practitioner in attaining salvation; any claims to salvation through this practice he considers false and aided by demonic powers. Demons are presented in Augustine as intermediaries between the gods and humanity, and it was this intermediary position that encouraged humans to engage in magical practices (*Civ. Dei* VIII.18). According to Robert Markus, it is Augustine's discussion of magic that 'allow[s] us to understand the more or less permanent state of competition between what any particular society recognised as "religion" and "magic"' [1994, p.381]. In Augustine, theurgy is firmly on the side of demonic magic.

To further understanding the uncomfortable relationship between Christianity, the sixth-century Greek theologian known as pseudo-Dionysius must be explored. Unlike Augustine, pseudo-Dionysius uses the language of theurgy positively to set forth his views on divine meditation. Writing in Greek, pseudo-Dionysius uses the term *theourgia*; however, Latin translations of his texts never use *theurgia*, instead the translators use terms such as '*divina operatio*' or '*operatio Dei*' instead. Shaw asks, 'why are Christian theologians reluctant to admit that Dionysius was a theurgist?' [1999, p.542]. The answer to Shaw's question is clear: the rhetoric against the practice of theurgy by Augustine placed theurgic practice so firmly in the category of "magic" that theurgy was hence-forth perceived in the Latin West as using demonic forces to achieve its goals and was therefore avoided. Shaw notes that even in Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem's translation of the *Complete Works of Pseudo-Dionysius* (1987), the term *theurgia* and its cognates were not translated as such, even though they appear in the Greek text forty-seven times. Ficino translated works of Pseudo-Dionysius in the fifteenth century and avoided using the word theurgy. Ficino held Dionysius to be the disciple of Paul mentioned in the Book of Acts (17:34), the embodiment of the way the Pagan message is perfected in Christ for those who open their heart to Christianity. Given Augustine's denunciation of the practice of theurgy, Ficino's position as a theologian deeply rooted in the ecclesiastical tradition may have caused him to refrain from using the term "theurgy" itself, although throughout Ficino's work influenced of Neoplatonism are found.

Ideas of Ascent in Ficino and Pico.
Ficino read Plato through the lens of Neoplatonism and believed that true philosophical wisdom is, and can only be achieved, through a process of spiritual ascent, divinely ordained by God and can be traced across history through ancient religion. As noted above, the most controversial aspect of theurgy is the transformative experience. Ficino explains in his *Theologia Platonica* what happens when the soul is joined in unity with God:

> Through this unity the soul is united to God, to the centre of all, to the pure unity; through this unity to soul reconciles the elements not only of this [human] body but even of the world's body; and through this unity alone is able to attain God (*Theo.Plat*. XIII.5.3).

The quest of the ascent and the desire to unite with God is 'no less natural to men than the effort to fly to birds; for it is always and everywhere present in all men' (*Theo. Plat*. XIV.1.1). Ficino held that humanity strives to unite with God because it is God who 'has sown this endeavour in our souls' (*Theo. Plat*. XVI.1.2). Ficino understood aspirations towards deification to have existed in the Old and New Testament as well as in the Platonic, Hermetic and Chaldaic texts. Sears Reynold Jayne suggests that for Ficino, deification involves 'not the mystic ecstasy of Plotinus, in which the man loses his identity; it is a rational changing of personality, from that of man, to that of God. Humanity and divinity are united as potentiality and actuality' (1944, fn.p.141). Humans can achieve this because God has enabled them to do so. The entire process belongs to God, as Ficino notes:

> But the blessed neither hurl their rays at God nor do they receive God Himself. Rather, they derive light from God Himself, and once they have derived it, God is not joined to the blessed person but the blessed person to God. For the blessed person does not take God in; rather God takes up the blessed person [Ficino, 1944: p.141].

This passage corresponds with the traditional understanding of theurgy as "God-work". It is not the coercion of the practitioner that draws down the power of God; rather, it is God who has recognised the divine light within the practitioner and allows the union to take place. The process is God-given, as is the experience of unification. Although Ficino avoids using the term 'theurgy' in his works, he is deeply indebted to this concept. Ficino's synthesis of ancient traditions with Christianity alludes to a perceived inherent truth that has been in existence since the beginning of time. The universal concept of truth can be accessed through spiritual ascent, that is, by processes or practices known as theurgy.

As discussed above, for Pico, magic, cabala, and theurgy are all synonymous, part of the ancient religion rooted in ideas regarding spiritual ascent to acquire wisdom. Magic and cabala provide the power for and efficacy of the act of ascent, which from the very beginning is aided by the angelic hierarchies. This process allows for a unification and transformative experience. While Ficino discusses unification without explicitly using the term 'theurgy', Pico uses the term to a limited extent. However, this is likely due to the lack of written material left by Pico due to his untimely death by poisoning at the age of thirty-one that leaves us wanting for a more detailed account of how he viewed notions of spiritual ascent and the practice of theurgy. What we do find in Pico is a discussion of a transformative process, namely in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, written as the opening speech to his Nine Hundred Theses to be presented at Rome (1486). Pico proposes a transformative experience which allows humans to

become 'angel-like'. Drawing a comparison of unification with the Greek tradition, Pico argues in his *Commentary on a Canzone of Benivieni* that 'this is the friendship that the Pythagoreans call the end of all philosophy, that peace which God makes in His heavens, that which angels who came down to earth announced to men of good will so that these men would, ascending to heaven, being transformed by it into angels' [1984; p.153]. Pico confirms this transformation, contending in his Oration that: 'if man then goes on beyond even the perfect form of human love, rising from one perfection to another, he will arrive at a level where he unites his soul entirely with its intellect, and become an angel instead of a man' [2012; p.125]. The transformation into an angel is for Pico connected to the Enochian and Kabbalistic tradition of the Biblical Enoch (Gen. 5:21-24). As Copenhaver notes: 'this angel magic – a theurgy to emulate Enoch's transformation into Metatron – is a joyous surrender of human personality when all traces of the individual dissolve in God's supernal peace' [2019; p. 383]. Pico suggests that when human existence passes to intellectual existence, 'he is by that death transformed into an angel,' and that this is what is meant by the Kabbalists when they say 'that Enoch was transformed into Metatron, the angel of divinity, or in general, that any other man is transformed into an angel' [Pico, 1984; p. 147]. Thus, in Pico's understanding, ascent culminates in a transformative experience. However, it is not an experience with the One or the Ultimate Good, nor a deification as such, but it does allow for man to transform into a divine power. Ficino's discussion regarding spiritual ascent was not challenged by the Church authorities. In contrast, while the initial condemnation of Pico only questioned one of his magical conclusions, his subsequent *Apologia* (1487) resulted in the banning of all nine hundred theses as heretical and the to the damning publication of Pedro Garsia's *Determinationes magistrales*, which denounced both Pico's *Conclusions* and *Apologia*. One man's Christian orthodox writings are perceived as another man's magic.

Conclusion.

As has been shown, Ficino and Pico held that the tradition of an ancient wisdom was tightly bound with the notion of spiritual ascent, the practice of theurgy. Ficino argued that 'philosophy and religion are true sisters', and this paper argues that one of the ways Ficino came to this conclusion was through ideas of spiritual ascent and theurgy found in the texts of the *prisci theologi*. The similarities that Ficino and Pico saw in their respective *prisca theologia* suggest that both men developed a syncretic approach to Christian theology which blurred the lines between the concepts of "religion" and "magic". In expanding the framework by which the Christian approach to theurgy is defined, it is evident that the boundaries between religion and magic are not stable, blurring and ever-changing depending on who is writing and what era they are writing in. Therefore, exploring the ways that Renaissance thinkers such as Ficino and Pico viewed "religion" and "magic" may be useful in understanding the way theological issues surrounding ideas of spiritual ascent and theurgy were discussed in the reformations and counter-reformations period.

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3

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Opening the Casket: Transcending Boundaries of Interpretation in Mary Stuart's Casket Sonnets

Abstract

The Casket Sonnets, allegedly written by Mary Queen of Scots, were used by Marian detractors to justify her deposition and imprisonment on the grounds of her adultery and purported murder of her second husband, Lord Darnley. Their public presentation alongside George Buchanan's diatribe against Mary in the 1571 edition of *Ane Detectioun...of Marie Quene of Scottes* sealed their meaning as expressions of an inordinate female passion. These readings remain unchallenged in literary analysis of the sonnets, as Sarah Dunnigan notes in *Eros and Poetry* (2002): 'possibilities of interpretations other than the one in which contemporaries encased them is rarely explored.'

In *Seuils* (1987) (published in English as *Paratexts* [1997]) Gerard Genette explores how authors and publishers use the material surrounding a text as a way of influencing its reception. Genette is distinct in describing paratexts as a threshold rather than a sealed border; a point of entry which offers possibilities of meaning to a literary text and reader. Yet, in the Casket Sonnets their paratextual material has instead imposed a boundary on meaning: one inflicted without the consent of their apparent author.

This paper utilises Genette's work to explore the potential for alternative readings of the Casket Sonnets when removed from their unauthorised prefatory material and presentation. By reading the sonnets out of sequence and alongside works of other contemporary female writers in Scotland, such as Elizabeth Melville, I analyse several of the poems as displaying religious themes, questioning studies which frame the sonnets only in terms of feminine secular lyrics, yet do not acknowledge their explicitly anti-Marian, anti-feminist publication.

Keywords: Scottish Literature; early modern; women's writing

'Paratext is the term used to refer to the additional material which surrounds a literary text to present it to a reading public. It was coined and brought into widespread critical use by Gérard Genette, whose influential 1987 *Seuils* (translated into English as Paratexts [1997]) studied the myriad forms of these materials and how they influence a reader's approach to the text they surround:

> For us, accordingly, the paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public. More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a threshold, or - a word Borges used apropos of a preface - a "vestibule" that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. [1997, p.1-2]

If a paratext is a threshold as Genette states, then it is an open door through which the reader enters a text – one which can ultimately influence their reading of the text. Indeed, Genette argues that the paratext:

> constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of transaction: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that - whether well or poorly understood and achieved - is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies). [p.2]

> This focus on authorial agency carries throughout Genette's theory; he openly declares that 'something is not a paratext unless the author or one of his associates accepts responsibility for it' [p.9]. Though Genette concedes that 'the ways and means of the paratext change continually, depending on period, culture, genre, author, work, and edition' [p.3], his study almost exclusively refers to the modern book and a modern notion of authorial agency. If we agree with his contention that 'a text without a paratext does not exist and has never existed' [p.3], this single-minded attention to modern conventions is problematic, as it defines adaptive textual features by a very narrow, concrete definition. More recent critics acknowledge that *Seuils* pays insufficient attention to changing print conventions throughout history [Smith & Wilson 2011, p.2], and have extended Genette's work in reference to different historical periods. Helen Smith and Louise Wilson, for example, argue that rather than constituting a 'vestibule', renaissance paratexts can be described as:

> an ever-expanding labyrinth, as likely to lead to a frustrating dead-end as to a carefully built pathway, or to deposit the reader back outside the building rather than guide him or her into the text. [2011, p.6]

This article utilises this notion of the threshold to argue that the paratexts surrounding the print presentation of the Casket Sonnets, attributed to Mary Queen of Scots, have historically acted as a boundary to their interpretation – a closed door, in place of an open one. As literary texts in which their alleged author cannot be considered present in their publication, the Casket Sonnets contain the potential for alternative readings to those which their paratexts assigned them. Namely, considering that the paratextual material which attempts to prescribe only an amatory reading to the sonnets were not authorised by the sequence's alleged author,

I promote the possibility of re-reading the sequence's desiring voice as devotional, rather than amatory. By understanding their complex publication history but removing them from their unauthorised prefatory material and reading them anew, the sonnets can stand as literary texts in themselves, free from the confines of their historical-political context.

The Casket Sonnets are a sequence of eleven sonnets and a sestain, in which an unnamed female speaker declares her constant love and desire for an unnamed male beloved who is married to another woman. In this, the sequence notably reverses the conventional gendered relationship between male desiring subject, and female desired object of early modern erotic verse. Unlike the typical speaker of Petrarchan love, she has already physically and intimately known the beloved, yet he, in the tradition of the beloveds of Petrarchan desire and Ovid's *Heroïdes*, remains distant from her, inconstant and unfaithful.[1] They are also, as noted by John Durkan, the first sonnet sequence uncovered in Scotland [(1987, p.79)]. Discovered in 1567 in 'one small gilt cofer nat fully ane foote lang' [(Buchanan & Wilson 1571)], they and the letters they were discovered alongside apparently implicated Mary Queen of Scots in the murder of her second husband, Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley, and an adulterous relationship with James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, the man who had become her third husband. She had allegedly written them to Bothwell 'quhile hir husband [Darnley] lyuit' [(Buchanan & Wilson 1571)]. Mary neither accepted nor refuted the claims of her authorship of any of the casket documents, though she was never allowed to examine them [(Giles 2004, p.19)]. This, alongside the disappearance of the original documents in 1584, apparently at the hands of Mary's son James VI [(Wormald 1988, p.176)], has led to centuries of conjecture and debate as to whether either the letters or sonnets were authentically hers. As inverted Petrarchan sonnets, their content is tantalisingly close to the details of the Marian sexual controversy of 1567, whereby Mary had been accused of having had relations with Bothwell before Darnley's murder, and before Bothwell's divorce from his wife. This apparent convergence of real-life and poetic content has fed both sides of the debate surrounding these sonnets. On one hand their closeness to that real historical controversy has lent credence to the reading of them as simplistically autobiographical declarations of desire. The Duke of Norfolk certainly thought them genuinely by Mary, in 1568 describing them as 'divers fonde ballades of her owne hand', which alongside the letters 'do discover suche inordinate love betwene her and Bothaill, her loothsomnes and abhorringe of her husband that was murdered, in suche sorte, as every good and godlie man cannot but detest and abhorre the same' [(cited in Smith 2012, p.154)]. On the other, the perception of the sonnets and letters as a readily-packaged assertion of Mary's guilt in adultery – and potentially murder – has led many to question their authenticity. Prominent supporters of Mary in her day thought she could not have written them, including her close friend the French poet Pierre de Ronsard, and biographer Pierre de Bourdeille, Sieur de Brantôme, who stated they were 'too coarse and too ill-polished to have come from her beautiful making' [(Brantôme 2013)]. Additionally, historians like Antonia Fraser take issue with the elements of the sequence which do not align with Mary's biography – for example, she never gave her son into Bothwell's care, as sonnet ii seems to suggest [(1985, p.478)]. In this school of thought, the sonnets may instead be considered forgeries by the Scottish Lords, meant to discredit Mary and offer crucial justification for her deposition from the throne.

Among the major reasons for their uncertain attribution is their initial publication and circulation. Although the manuscripts were allegedly discovered in 1567, they were not printed until 1571 when they appeared in *Ane Detectioun of the duinges of Marie Quene of Scottes*

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1. For those unfamiliar with the concept of Petrarchan love, The Cambridge Companion to Petrarch (Ascoli, 2015) offers a holistic study of Petrarch's work and his literary afterlife, whilst Petrarch in Britain: Interpreters, Imitators, and Translators over 700 years (McLaughlin et al, 2007) offers an intriguing set of essays reflecting on Petrarch's influence in Italy, England and Scotland across centuries.

thouchand the murder of hir husband, and hir conspiracie, adulterie, and pretensed mariage with the Erle Bothwell. And ane defence of the trew Lordis, mainteineris of the Kingis graces actioun and authoritie. Translatit out of the Latine quhilke was written by G.B. The volume had been printed covertly in London by John Day, a well-known Protestant press and the official printer to the city authorities [McElroy 2012, p.52; Pettegree 2008]. As the title suggests, the volume in its entirety was constructed as a case against Mary, with prose tracts entitled the 'detectioun' and 'oratioun' outrightly accusing her of collusion in the murder of Darnley and her adultery with Bothwell. The sonnets were included within this volume as supporting evidence for Mary's guilt, as outlined in the preceding tracts, of 'mad loue, infamous adulterie and vile parricide' [Buchanan & Wilson 1571].

The 'detectioun' had originally been written in Latin by Scottish classicist, historian and Marian supporter-turned-detractor George Buchanan as a 'covering letter' [Phillips 1964, p.62; McElroy 2012, p.51] for the Casket Letters and Sonnets when they were presented as evidence against Mary at the conferences at York and Westminster in 1568, ordered by Elizabeth I to ascertain whether Mary's removal from her throne had been legitimate [Wormald 1988, p.175].[2] Buchanan, however, had likely never intended the tract for print, at least initially, and neither had he authored the 'oratioun' [Phillips 1964, p.68]. When the conference ended with Elizabeth's refusal to render a verdict on Mary's guilt, Buchanan's 'detectioun' and copies of the casket material remained in London, whilst the original documents returned to Scotland, where they would disappear in 1584. Buchanan's tract had only been sanctioned for print three years after it had initially been presented to the Elizabethan government, at the moment that the Ridolfi conspiracy had been discovered and put to rest [McElroy 2012, p.51-2]. The 'oratioun' had been written, apparently on the direction of William Cecil, Elizabeth's chief minister, by Thomas Wilson, an English scholar who was later to become Elizabeth's secretary of state [Phillips 1964, p.62]. Wilson too had been responsible for translating both his and Buchanan's Latin tracts into what he referred to as 'handsome Scottish' (cited in Phillips 1964) for publication as *Ane Detectioun*. This pseudo-Scots presentation was meant to authenticate the volume as the work of Mary's former Scottish subjects rather than the Elizabethan government who had actually sanctioned its printing yet allow it to still be widely understood in England where it was circulated. [McElroy 2012, p.52-53]. The inclusion of the sonnets within this politically and historically contentious printed volume has served to solidify their status as historical-political, biographical texts, as opposed to purely literary artefacts. Rather than being published by Mary, their alleged author, on her terms, the sonnets were explicitly weaponised against her, used to discredit her public reputation, first in England, then also in Scotland and France.[3]

Despite this absence of authorial control in their actual publication, the presentation of the sonnets within *Ane Detectioun* by their paratexts works tirelessly to assert their Marian authorship unquestioningly. In doing so, they argue unambiguously the status of the sonnets as biographical documents relating to the queen's amorous relationship with Bothwell. The sonnets and letters are first introduced as items 'auowit to be written with the Scottishe Quenis awne hand' [Buchanan & Wilson 1571]. This unequivocal connection to Mary is only strengthened by the printing of the sequence in first the apparently 'original' French, and then in Wilson's Anglo-Scots translations; even after her return to Scotland in 1561 Mary continued to be strongly associated with her upbringing at the French court and status as dowager Queen of France. Furthermore, the volume explicitly links Mary's guilt in the crimes of which she is accused in the prose tracts with her status as author of the sonnets, introducing the sequence as:

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2. The matter being discussed was whether or not she was guilty of Darnley's murder, as that was considered straightforward grounds for her deposition from, or restoration to, the Scottish throne.

3. A more authentic Scots version of Ane Detectioun was published by Robert Lekpreuik at St Andrews in 1572, alongside a French edition published at La Rochelle the same year - both printed the Casket Sonnets and Letters in full (Phillips 1964, p.62-63). I will be referring to the 1571 London edition unless otherwise stated.

> Certaine French Sonnettes written by the quene of Scottes to Bothwell,
> befoir hir mariage with him, and (as it is sayd) quhile hir husband lyuit, But
> certainly befoir his diuorce from hys wife as the wordes tham selues shew,
> befoir quhom she here preferreth hir selfe in deseruing to be beloued of
> Bothwell. (Buchanan & Wilson 1571)

Not only does this tell the reader that they should read Mary as poetic speaker and Bothwell as beloved before they have a chance to read the texts for themselves, but it also introduces the desire housed within the sonnets as adulterous before the sonnets themselves ever announce it as so. By tying the language of the sonnets to Mary's alleged adultery with Bothwell, this paratext explicitly links her status as author with the prose section's character study of her immorality, tied to her gender:

> Sic are the natures of some wemen, specially sic as can nat bruike the
> greatnesse of thair awne gud fortune: thay haue vehement affections baith
> wayes, thay loue with excesse, and hait without measure, and to quhat side
> sa euer thay bend, thay are not gouerned by aduised reason, but carried by
> violent motion. (Buchanan & Wilson 1571)

This connection corroborates the charge of adultery, but also suggests Mary as a woman capable of displaying 'uvnnaturalnesse, hatreit, barbarous fiercenesse, or outragious crueltie' (Buchanan & Wilson 1571), and thus one who could have been capable of plotting murder as the prose tract asserts.

This biographical reading ascribed to the sonnets is perhaps the single most significant achievement of their paratexts. Although modern literary scholarship takes the view that Mary's authorship of the sonnets does not necessitate her guild in Darnley's murder, and thus her deposition from the throne, the reading of Mary as speaker alleging her adulterous desire for Bothwell as beloved remains a primary reading of the text, even in studies which privilege their literary status over historical.[4]

Peter Herman's study of the subject/object relationship in the sequence consistently references Mary instead of poetic speaker and Bothwell instead of beloved throughout (2002), and where *The Mercat Anthology of Early Scottish Literature* presents sonnet viii it footnotes the first mention of the beloved as 'James Hepburn, 4th Earl of Bothwell' (Jack & Rozendaal 1997, p.348). There is no room for nuance or an opposing critical interpretation. Thus, whilst Genette claimed that paratexts were always thresholds to a text, opening up their authorial interpretation to the reader, the paratexts of the Casket Sonnets instead created a boundary between the text and alternative meanings. As Sarah Dunnigan has noted, the casket not only represents the initial concealment of the poems, but also 'the symbolic "enclosure" put

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4. Sarah Dunnigan's chapter on the Casket Sonnets in Eros and Poetry at the Courts of Mary Queen of Scots and James VI (2002) set the tone for future literary attention to the sonnets by asserting that reading them as Marian literary artefacts need not align them precisely with the details of her personal life or render her guilty of murder. Other scholars writing at the same time do read the sonnets as relating to Mary's personal circumstances, but still reject their status as evidencing her 'crimes'. Mary Burke's chapter in Women, Writing, and the Reproduction of Culture in Tudor and Stuart Britain (2000) is concerned with how the sonnets attempt to balance the disparate aspects of Mary's selfhood - her sex and her status as monarch - within the power dynamic of a romantic relationship, referring to Mary's subjectivity in the sonnets as an act of 'poetic cross-dressing' (p.102). This concern with the speaker's monarchical status is one shared by Peter Herman (2002), who reads the transformation of the speaker into Petrarchan desiring subject as highly problematic, because it contradicts Mary's own status as monarch. Danila Sokolov's chapter on the sequence in Renaissance Texts, Medieval Subjectivities (2017) shows that a focus on sovereign marriage and Petrarchan submission still preoccupies many literary critics of these sonnets. Though Rosalind Smith's early chapter on the sonnets in her monograph Sonnets and the English Woman Writer, 1560-1621 (2005) aligned with Dunnigan's work in not pushing a biographical reading onto the sonnets, and acknowledging the difficulties over authorship whilst still alleging the sonnets exist as Marian literary artefacts, her tack has changed in recent years. Her 2020 article views the sonnets as prosopopoeia - poems written in the abstracted voice of Mary as pertaining to specific events, but having not actually been authored by her. Other recent writers who have discussed the Casket Sonnets, such as Marianne Micros (2009) and Jessica Devos (2017) both also view the sonnets in amatory contexts - though Micros believes them as having been written by Mary to a man she loved (p.54), and Devos takes a less personal view, reading them as French imitations of Ovid's Heroides.

upon their meaning' [2002, p.16]. An awareness of the context in which they were published is undoubtedly necessary in the case of the Casket Sonnets; without it, a reader may remain unaware of the ulterior motives behind their printing, and thus come to them ill-equipped to deal with their complex authorial, historical, and political status. Equally though, these poems are owed the chance to be studied as fictive literary artefacts, free from the Marian-biographical reading which plague them – an approach their complex printed presentation refuses to allow.

Though critics like Sarah Dunnigan (2002) and Rosalind Smith (2005) initially did foundational work in advocating for study of the Casket Sonnets as fictive literary artefacts, continued revision of their literary status can yet go further. Each, for various reasons, continued to read the sonnets within the amatory, sequential format printed in *Ane Detectioun*. The task of fully transcending the boundaries their paratexts placed around these sonnets requires further, more radical, revision and rereading. The one indisputable fact that *Ane Detectioun* reminds of, even if Mary did indeed write these sonnets, is that she was completely powerless as to their printing and presentation to a reading public. Therefore, even if we disregard the charge of outright forgery, the potential for their having been subject to non-authorial additions, redactions and tampering within the sequential order are high. Scholars of early modern publishing have acknowledged that sonnet sequences can conceivably be considered one cohesive poetic work or several individual ones, and that presenting poems in sequence versus alone can drastically change their meanings [McCarthy 2020, p.39-40]. Dunnigan herself also recognises that the sequential order of the Casket Sonnets is unverifiable, and that there may be other interpretations yet to be explored [2002, p.18; p.16]. This invites a more open interpretation of the desire housed within individual sonnets. In particular, as the rest of this article will argue, when removed from their unauthorised paratexts and sequential order, these sonnets can be reimagined as devoutly religious poems.

In *Claustrophilia: The Erotics of Enclosure in Medieval Literature*, Cary Howie writes:

> Indeed, not only do fear and fascination go hand in hand when enclosures
> are at stake; fear is often alloyed with desire. Claustrophobia is, at bottom,
> in part a denied love of confinement: that is to say, it is always alloyed with
> claustrophilia. The Middle Ages had a particularly sensitive, and sensory,
> understanding of this. In the devotional texts discussed below, it will
> become clear that enclosure was unavoidable for high-medieval
> religious culture; it was not only secretly desired (through repression) but
> openly courted, constructed, lived in. [2007, p.14]

In his all-encompassing study of English, French and Italian medieval texts which also pairs with contemporary theoretical and pop culture references, Howie views enclosure as a mode that actually intensifies desire, rather than hiding it. This contention is a particularly interesting one to explore in the Casket Sonnets, where enclosure has been configured in both literal and literary ways. The sonnets have always been associated with enclosure – both in their metonymic association with the physical casket in which they were discovered, and in the non-authorial paratexts which accompanied their printed form and enclosed their meaning to the reader. It is this enclosure of meaning by their paratexts which has amplified the vocalisation of erotic desire within the Casket Sonnets. Mary's later poetry demonstrates that she was a writer concerned with religious subject matter, and this religious poetry is distinctly Catholic in its devotions – concerned at varying points with proving her devotion to God through works and not just faith alone. In Protestant Scotland Mary was the only person legally allowed to

hear mass [(Walton 2007, p.12)], rendering her effectively a religious outcast in her own country. Simon Ditchfield and Helen Smith have pointed out that religious difference in this era was often imagined in gendered, sexualised terms, and that 'sexual "deviancy" was tied to ideas of erring or heretical religion' [(2017, p.4)]. Given the suspect publication history of the Casket Sonnets, it is highly possible that, if written by Mary, they displayed the devotional Catholic verve of her later poetry but were tampered with in their publication by the Protestant lords who deposed her. It presumably would not have been difficult to imagine Catholic devotion in the same sexually deviant terms later ascribed the Casket Sonnets, given the numerous Knoxian references in his *History of the Reformation in Scotland* to the papacy not only as the Antichrist, but explicitly as the Whore of Babylon [(ed. Dickinson 1949, p.83-84)]. To reverse Howie's contention: by removing the Casket Sonnets from that physical and literary enclosure, erotic desire can quite easily be diminished in favour of more overtly religious devotional poetics.

Sonnet ii is considered the most controversial of the Casket Sonnets as, when read in sequence, it appears as the sovereign renouncing herself, her kingdom and her heir to the male beloved:

> In his handis and in his full power,
> I put my sonne, my honour, and my lyif,
> My contry, my subiects, my soule al subdewit,
> To him, and has none vther will
> For my scope, quhilk without deceit,
> I will folow in spite of all enuie
> That may ensue: for I haif na vther desire,
> But to make him perceiue my faythfulnes,
> For storme or fayre wedder that may come,
> Neuer will it chainge dwelling, or place.
> Schortly I sall geif of my trueth sic profe,
> That he sall know my constancie wtout fiction,
> Not by my weping, or faynit obedience,
> As other haue done: but by vther experience. (ii, l.1-14).[5]

This is a damning political act if made by Mary verbatim, subjugating herself and her country for the love of the beloved. Yet, when taken out of sequence, the sonnet can instead be read as a declaration of religious devotion rather than a politically controversial act of submission to a sexual lover. The opening line particularly displays these religious undertones, 'In his handis' for instance, linking to numerous biblical references to humanity as held in the palm of God's hands, as Jesus says in John 10:28-29:

> And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall
> any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is
> greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

And in Isaiah 41:10:

> Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will
> strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right

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5. All references to the sonnets are to the translations as they appear in the 1571 edition of Ane Detectioun. Sonnet number and line numbers are given in parenthesis.

hand of my righteousness.

The speaker's giving over of all that she has in both the material and physical worlds also evokes the bible as well as Mary's later poetry. Placing the soul in God's hands is a common motif in prayer and religious poetry, and the speaker's willingness to place her son into God's hands can be compared to Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son to prove his faith in the almighty (Genesis 22). This is substantiated further by the speaker's assertion that she has no desire 'But to make him perceiue my faythfulnes' (ii, l.8); like Abraham she seems willing to give anything to God to prove herself faithful and worthy of his love. Her claim in lines 9-10 can also be read in this way, as the speaker telling God that no matter the obstacles and trials he places before her, her devotion and faith in him will never cease. In renouncing her country and her subjects she can be seen to offer up all her material worldly wealth, which compares directly to Mary's later poem 'Méditation sur l'inconstance et vanité di monde', where she writes:

> In short, all worldly goods in human life
> Are quickly lost, and gained by bitter strife:
> How doth it serve our purpose to believe
> In vanities that flatter to deceive.
> We must attempt to seek a higher place
> For true repose, for pleasure and for grace.
> Where those who, pure of heart, find their reward
> When they return to the true Saviour Lord; (ed. Bell 1992, p.67-77, l.39-46).

The speaker renounces a life of luxury in favour of seeking a higher reward in heaven for her suffering and penitence on earth, directly comparable to God's testing of Abraham's faith and sonnet ii's insistence that the speaker will remain faithful despite the ways God tests her. Mary wrote the 'Méditation' in response to a tract from her close friend and fellow Catholic John Leslie, Bishop of Ross, who then published it and the accompanying sonnet 'L'ire de Dieu' in his *Libri duo: Quorum uno, Piae afflicti animi consolationes remedia: altero, Animi tranquilli munimentum et conservatio Continentur* (1574). This gives an added significance to the comparison of this poem with the Casket Sonnets: if she were capable of writing similar assertions in a devotional context in the 'Méditation', it seems likely she could also have done so earlier in the Casket Sonnets. A devotional reading of the Casket Sonnets seems less unlikely when that same devotional fervour can be traced in her other writings. Moreover, if reading the voice in this sonnet as authentically Mary's, placing her subjects in the hands of the God she prays to could be seen as a political as well as religious act. Mary was a Catholic queen of a Protestant country, so the sonnet could be construed as praying for the immortal souls of her subjects who no longer worship in the way she believes correct. Similarly, in saying that she will give her son over to the beloved, Mary could be construed as hoping that her country will retain a Catholic monarch even after she is gone, in raising her son – the future James VI – as a Catholic, against the wishes of Protestants in Scotland. That her son's religion was a real concern of Mary's is clear in the fact that she had James baptised by Catholic rites (Walton 2007, p.134), which suggestively gives this sonnet a very real religio-political significance. The closing lines of the sonnet, stating that she shows her devotion to God by her actions rather than tears or performative words can be read as explicit reference to one of the major theological differences between Catholics and Protestants during the reformation, faith alone versus good works. These lines seemingly demonstrate Mary's own Catholic stance, that good works are necessary alongside faith for individuals to achieve salvation, against the Protestant conception of *sola fide* (by faith alone). It

would not be radical to assert that Mary referenced these reformation doctrinal debates in the Casket Sonnets, as she also alludes to them in her later published devotional poetry. The sonnet 'L'ire de Dieu', a paraphrase of Psalm 51, makes a similar assertion about the efficacy of good works, with the speaker alleging:

> Those who seek to please you must maintain,
> O Lord, their faith in immortality
> And to mankind bear hope and charity
> And do good works, nor take thy laws in vain. [ed. Bell 1992, p.78-79, l.5-8].

Additionally, in the middle of the 'Méditation', the speaker reflects on whether salvation is earned through acts of penitence, as Catholics believed, or if it is preordained in the faithful, as Scottish Calvinists believed:

> For our eternal lot awaits in heaven,
> Preordained, a birthright to us given.
> But which of us, O kindest Father, still
> Can claim this fortune, save it be thy will
> That he abandon sin and all offence
> By having made a worthy penitence?
> Who can renounce the world upon his own
> To honour, love and cleave to thee alone? (l.47-54).

When considering the Casket Sonnets as authentically Marian poems within this wider corpus of Mary's poetry, their potential as explicitly Catholic devotional texts seems more likely, offering a completely different poetic context than the one *Ane Detectioun* ascribed them and arguably offering a more fitting thematic reading of their desiring voice.

In sonnet viii the speaker similarly renounces her worldly wealth for the beloved:

> My loue increaseth and more and more wil increase,
> So lang as I shall lief, and I shall holde for ane greit felicitie
> To haue onely pairt in that hart,
> To the quhilk at length my loue sall appeare,
> So clearly, that he sall neuer doubt.
> For him I will striue against wan weard,
> For him I will recerse greitnes,
> And sall do so mikle that he shall know
> That I haif no wealth, hap, nor contentation,
> But to obay, and serue him truely.
> For him I attend all gude fortune.
> For him I will conserue health and life,
> For him I desire to ensew courage,
> And he shall euer finde me vnchangeable. (viii, l.1-14).

In her assertion in lines 9-10 that she has no happiness or desire for anything other than to serve the beloved she again constructs herself in biblical terms as a loyal servant. The closing line of the sonnet ends with another pronouncement of the speaker's unwavering faith in the addressee, promoting a similar devotional reading to sonnet ii. This sonnet also demonstrates

distinctly erotic undertones in its opening line, displaying a desirous tension mounting almost as if to reach climax. Much early modern feminine spiritual poetry expressed religious love through the intimacy of erotic relationships [Dunnigan 2012, p.14]. This has its roots in the biblical Song of Songs, which figured the relationship between the human soul and God in sensual terms since even before the beginning of Christianity [Flinker 2000, p.12-13]. In this tradition Dante and Cavalcanti rooted their trope of the *donna angelicata*, which would later also be established in Petrarch's Laura, inspiring generations of western writers:

> Together these biblical passages provided inspiration for later western poets interested in women as a spiritual force with clear erotic desirability... The echoes of the biblical passage allude to a tradition that moves back and forth between carnal and spiritual, even as it plays oral against written in terms of the intertextual echoes of biblical texts that resound without being literally present. [Flinker 2000, p.22]

In *Claustrophilia*, when writing about medieval French hagiography, the writing of saints' lives, Howie also states that 'sex perpetually threatens to disclose itself together with, or in the place of, sanctity' [2007, p.38]. Particularly in lyric poetry are the lines between sacred and profane love blurred. David Fuller argues that modern divisions between the categories of 'sacred' and 'secular' are misleading when considered in a medieval, or early modern, context, as for contemporary readers and writers 'there was no entirely secular realm':

> Religious feeling was often touched with feeling that might now be regarded as secular, and vice-versa: love had a religious aspect, because human and divine love were seen as ultimately having some relationship (whether of continuity or contradiction), or because certain sorts of love, or love in certain contexts, were sinful. [2010, p.14].

In her study of Scottish women's spiritual writing, Sarah Dunnigan has stated that Mary Stuart rarely eroticises her relationship with God, perhaps due to her self-censorship after the controversy of the Casket Sonnets [2012, p.14-15]. However, when studying the Casket Sonnets themselves as devotional works, their interplay of spiritual and profane is given new weight. When read as addressed to a secular beloved, the speaker seems to sacralise her love for the beloved; her desire is, unlike male Petrarchan desire, never described as moral error, but is almost equated with the divine. In sonnet i, for example, when she prays to God to cease her pain by making the beloved believe her faithfulness, she equates submitting herself to the beloved as submitting herself to God – suggesting she sees them as one and the same. It therefore does not seem radical to assert that this sacralising of her connection with a secular beloved could be inverted to instead constitute an eroticisation of the sacred. This is present not only in the eroticised language of the speaker's increasing love in sonnet viii, but also in sonnet xi which openly evokes God at the end in a reverse prayer-like format, asserting her fear of others undermining her faith:

> My hart, my bloud, my soule, my care,
> Helas you had promisit that I should haue that pleasure.
> To deuise wyth you at leysure.
> All the night quhair I lye and languishe here,
> My hart beyng ouerset wyth extreme feare

> Seing absent the butte of my desire.
> Feare of forgetting sometyme taketh me,
> And vther tymes I feare that louesum hart,
> Be not hardenit agaynst me
> By sum saying of ane wickit reporter,
> Uther tymes I feare sum auenture,
> That by the way should turne abacke my loue
> By sum troublous and new accident.
> O God turne abacke all vnhappy augure. (xi, l.1-14).

The speaker's opening depiction of the addressee as her body and blood evokes the imagery of the eucharist, in which bread and wine becomes the symbolic body and blood of Christ received by participants at mass. The 'hart' allusion also has a particular significance in the Catholic church, where the sacred heart references the literal sacred heart of Jesus. The speaker thus lays claim to Christ's heart as her own beloved. Furthermore, in dividing herself into parts, she again depicts the addressee in divine terms as the upholder of her life – he is her blood, her beating heart, without him she will die. She creates an erotically charged image of the divine literally being inside of her, the two merge into one entity, intertwining as if in the act of love. The speaker thus fuses religious rituals with implicit erotic undertones, creating an intense intimacy of desire for the divine. In lines 4-6 the speaker evokes a Petrarchan lover in the languishing pain she feels for the absent beloved, but the absence of God as the object of desire is also a trope used in other spiritual poetry. In Elizabeth Melville's 'Love's lament for Christ's absence', for example, the speaker states of her beloved Christ:

> My martyred mynd doth turn and tosse
> Oh if I could lament my losse
> ...
> What wonder though I ever mourne
> My sweetest sun will not returne
> Who once did shyne so clear
> Since he alace did first depart
> Who can inflame this frozen heart?' [ed. Reid-Baxter 2010, p.43-60, l.32-48].

Though Melville was operating within a very different religious and cultural tradition from Mary in her radically reformed Presbyterianism, there are fascinating parallels in the way each writes in relation to God here. Melville's speaker's mind tosses and turns in the same way that sonnet xi's speaker literally tosses and turns in bed. Although the speaker in sonnet xi does not explicitly refer to the beloved Christ as the light or sun, setting her tormented waiting for him in the night has a similar effect to Melville's lines, constructing the beloved as the light of her life in Petrarchan terms. Each mourns and fears the absence of this light, rendering themselves martyr-like (explicitly in Melville's speaker's case) in the suffering they have endured for the almighty. These parallels to Melville's expression of her own passionate faith add another dimension to the Casket Sonnets as existing within a tradition of women's spiritual poetry in Scotland, yet due to the political and religious circumstances of their apparent author, they were not allowed to exist as such.

Although depicted in a less erotic way, this notion of suffering for love of God is also present at the opening of Mary's 'Méditation' in the same languishing Petrarchan terms: 'A memory of my bitter life doth creep | And robs me of all desire to sleep' (l.3-4). Again, the

speaker is left sleepless and fearful in the night worrying for the fate of her immortal soul. Going on to plead with God to understand and believe her faithfulness, the speaker in the 'Méditation' is constructed with many of the same fears as sonnet xi's speaker:

> Remember me and grant to me, I pray,
> Thy mercy's power and trust in it always,
> My love for you engraved upon my heart,
> An offering to replace my just desert.
> Therefore, my God, do not forsake me now,
> And when I reach my final end also,
> Following in thy paths, grant that it be my due
> That at the last I draw near unto you. (l.93-100).

Here, the speaker is anxious to ensure that God will not forget her love and faithfulness, she begs him not to leave her or to forget her love, which parallels sonnet xi's fatigue at the absence of God. Her declaration that her love for God is etched upon her heart also compares directly to the opening invocation of sonnet xi, but with a double meaning. On one hand the knowledge, and love, of God is literally inside her on her heart, and therefore loss of that love and faith would end her life; on the other, her love for God is imagined as being etched directly onto the sacred heart of Christ – her love for God is both close to her heart, and close to that of Christ. Similarly, in sonnet x the speaker states 'Of you I say only upholder of my lyfe | I onely seke to be assuerit' (x, l.1), mirroring the anxiety of the 'Méditation' in the speaker's need to have her faithfulness and love validated by the almighty. The reference to the addressee as the upholder of her life again has distinctly religious undertones, mimicking the opening to sonnet ii with the biblical references to being held up by God's hand – God is her rock, and she needs him and his approval to be able to go on living. Furthermore, the speaker of sonnet x also asserts that she will follow the addressee with all her heart as the speaker in the 'Méditation' does:

> For that is the onely desire of your deir loue,
> To serue and loue you truly,
> And to esteme all wan hap lesse than nathing,
> and to follow your wyll with myne, (x, l.5-8).

Here, the speaker paints herself as a devout believer, promising to follow God's will with her own and to hold his word above that of all others. She again channels the same idea from sonnet ii, depicting herself as Abraham in promising that she is faithful enough that she will do all God asks, no matter what he asks her. Like in the 'Méditation', in openly declaring her faith she hopes to gain reassurance from the almighty that he recognises her adoration of him. Finally, the ending of sonnet x solidifies the speaker's faith and her martyr-like status, stating of the addressee:

> Louying nothyng but you, in the subjectioun
> Of quhome I wyll, without any fiction,
> Liue and die, and this I consent (x, l.12-14).

The speaker again shows that it is this divine love for the almighty which keeps her alive, and in order to prove this declares that she will literally live and die according to God's will. In renouncing her heart, soul and all her worldly desires for the almighty she depicts herself in

religious martyrdom or Christ-like abnegation. Once again the religious nature of this desire can be substantiated through the similar claims the speaker makes in the 'Méditation', where she states that her heart is no longer with earthly possessions, but with the divine in order to assert her true faith in God: 'In taking my heart from a world like this, | I'll seek to make it win eternal bliss' (l.65-66). Desire in Marian poetics can thus always be configured as ethereally spiritual.

Studies which conform to the biographical reading given to the sequence by its publication in *Ane Detectioun* are reductive to their status as fictive literary artefacts. However, readings which simplistically study the sonnets as an amatory sequence, without acknowledging their publication history, are equally complicit in constricting their interpretative possibilities. By refusing to recognise their material history, in which their supposed author had no part, the reading which their paratexts attempted to promote is allowed to continue unchallenged. In the introduction to *Writing Women's Literary History*, Margaret Ezell takes the view that 'critical studies should enable and enhance future studies, should enlarge opportunities for discovery and interpretation, not negate or erase possibilities' (1993, p.11-12); in the case of the Casket Sonnets this is only possible by acknowledging the boundaries placed around them and which much previous criticism has operated within. Knowing where these boundaries are and why they were placed in turn equips us with the knowledge to transcend them: to open the casket and shed new light on these complex historical, yet nonetheless literary, artefacts.

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4

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Boundaries of (dis)belief: Past and present in period television drama and its cultural reception

Abstract

In recent years, the 'historical' or 'period' television drama has enjoyed particular success. Though always popular in Britain, these programmes now attract global audiences through streaming services. International creations have followed in the footsteps of British network television commissions, and streaming platforms have likewise capitalised on this trend by offering their own productions. The market for period drama seems as expansive as the genre itself. Historical television (both fiction and non-fiction) offers a representation of the past, as understood in the present. In so doing, it engages with boundaries of audience (dis)belief. The version of history realised on screen may conform to or challenge public interpretations. Straying from accepted perceptions is not always badly received; indeed, some programmes are labelled innovative for doing so. This seems largely motivated by genre — expectations of historical satire, for example, do not match those of period drama. This leads us to ask: what are the boundaries of the period television drama, who sets these, and why? While history on film has enjoyed a longer tradition of scholarly attention (such as Rosenstone 2006, and White 1988), history on television has not always been so popular. In recent years, however – in line with the legitimisation of television studies more generally – researchers have taken an interest in how and why the past is televised [Landsberg 2015; Hills et al. 2019]. To explore cultural understandings of the relationship between the period drama and history, I suggest three case studies: *Downton Abbey* (2010-2015), *The Crown* (2015-), and *Bridgerton* (2020-). The popularity of *Downton Abbey* has undoubtedly been instrumental in the last decade's swathe of period dramas: the blueprint for *The Crown* and *Bridgerton*'s success. All three have been markedly popular, are rooted in British history, and have seemingly stretched the limits of historical interpretation. These series, therefore, provide an excellent platform for discussing cultural perceptions of the past, the boundaries of (dis)belief, and the wider issues of televising history.

Keywords: history, television, audience, interpretations

To talk of history is to talk of the past. But it is also, for scholars of film, or television, or both, to talk of the present.[1]

So attest Mee & Walker in the introduction to their edited volume exploring history on screen [(2014, p. 3)]. This quotation gets to the core of filmic representations of the past: though presenting history, they inevitably involve the modern day. The obvious response is that history films or television (excluding actual historical material, of course) are present-day creations. However, the present affects historical productions in more ways than we might anticipate. In offering viewers a tangible experience of the past, history films and television flout strict divisions of then versus now. Some regard this with suspicion, like the 'historian-cop' poised to correct the inaccuracies of such productions [(Sklar, cited in Edgerton 2005, p. 370)]. Generally, however, most are receptive to following White's advice that researchers should mine history film and television not for authenticity, but to explore how and why the past is interpreted in wider culture [(1988, p. 1199)]. This is similar to growing acceptance among academics that all forms of history are, at their foundation, 'speculative' [(Edgerton 2005, p. 375)]. By virtue of existing in our present, we are excluded from fully understanding the past. Therefore, while forms of history may differ radically in intention or execution, they remain 'overlapping parts of the same whole' [(Edgerton 2005, p. 370)]. As Mee & Walker show above, film and television historians are reconciled to – if not actively interested in – the blurring of past and present. Aware of the diverse range of material that exists, many have dedicated attention to examining how different genres and sub-genres interpret and use the past. For example, Rosenstone has designated three main branches of historical production, each with its own standards: the period, 'mainstream' drama; the 'opposition or innovative history'; and the 'compilation documentary' [(2006, p. 12)]. While Rosenstone's categories are based on the history film, the focus here is on three period drama television programmes: *Downton Abbey* (2010-2015), *The Crown* (2016-), and *Bridgerton* (2020-). Used as case studies, these series will help to explore the boundaries of past and present as understood by period drama's producers and viewers.

Though public audiences are increasingly interested in all manner of visual and written historical material [(Edgerton 2005, p. 362)], the period drama – a hallmark of British television since the 1960s [(Redvall 2019, p. 132)] – has recently enjoyed the spotlight. Looking at the BBC in the past decade offers various examples, among which *Poldark* (2015-2019) and *Peaky Blinders* (2013) have proved particularly popular. In addition, other British channels have contributed to the canon. *Downton Abbey* stands out as ITV's most successful production – audience figures for its final episode peaked at 9.5 million (Sweeney 2015) – and the more recent *Victoria* (2016-) has also been well-received. These programmes, accessible through various streaming services, now boast global audiences. Companies beyond the United Kingdom have also capitalised on this trend. For example, American company STARZ has released – among others – *Black Sails* (2014-2019), *Outlander* (2014-), and *The Great* (2020-). The Anglo-American market for period drama seems as expansive as the genre itself. As more tune in, audiences develop a greater connection with the past.

At the core of most cultural reception is the belief that all historical productions (even blatantly fictional ones) wish to educate, an expectation which can foster both positivity and negativity. Broadly speaking, perceived authenticity inspires praise, while absence thereof invites critique. The 'historian-cop' may have retired, but general audiences have assumed the post; policing accuracy, therefore, remains prevalent. Though there is no comprehensive and accessible historical truth, that does not preclude viewers from looking for it. This article

will begin by reviewing key theories from secondary literature that inform its analysis, as well as outlining the methodology of its own research. It will then move to explore *Downton Abbey* (hereafter *Downton*), *The Crown,* and *Bridgerton* in turn, examining the role history plays in the production and reception of each.

Setting the Sound Stage for a Period Piece: Theories and Methodology
While publications that specifically address cultural perceptions of the past-present relationship in period drama may be scarce, literature on its component parts (televising history, costume drama, audience studies and so on) is abundant. Material therefore exists for this text to draw on in order to address key issues. How is period drama defined? How does the televising present interact with the historic past? With what expectations in mind might people approach period drama? Considering these themes sketches an understanding of the boundaries of time, belief, and truth against which the historical drama tends to be measured; certainly, they are recurring in reviews of *Downton, The Crown,* and *Bridgerton.* Defining 'period television' seems easy – perhaps deceptively so. 'Period', 'historical', and 'costume' drama are roughly interchangeable; upon hearing any one term, most could easily conjure up the same idea of something set, however loosely, in the past. Returning briefly to the STARZ examples mentioned in the introduction illustrates the breadth of period television. *Black Sails* acts as a prequel to Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island,* set in and around New Providence Island in the early eighteenth century. *Outlander*'s story (while made possible through time-travel) is grounded in strong historical settings: in the first five seasons alone, this includes 1740s Scotland; pre-French Revolution Paris; post-Culloden Britain; pre-Revolutionary War America; and post-WWII Britain and America. *The Great* perhaps strays farthest from traditional expectations of a period piece in its comedic exploration of the life of Catherine the Great. As its own tagline proclaims, it is only an 'occasionally true story'. Period television is varied, but what of period drama specifically? Brundson offers four key tendencies: the period drama legitimises television through adapting something with 'cultural respectability' (such as classic literature); employs actors who are well-established in the more respectable theatre world; benefits from significant financial backing; and concerns itself with the projection of social and national identities [cited in Chapman 2014, p. 136]. According to Chapman, a further trademark of period drama is its cultural reception as 'middle-brow' despite its significant overlap with soap opera, a genre not typically well-respected [2014, p. 132]. *Downton, The Crown,* and *Bridgerton* all fit this categorisation in one way or another; for instance, each is to some degree concerned with elite subjects and ideas of 'Englishness'.

The potential dynamics between historical drama and the past are varied. Some use history as inspiration: a story's background, not its agent. Such programmes employ what Dhoest labels 'surface realism', constructing a superficial historicity recognisable for public audiences [cited in Landsberg 2015, p. 67]. Similarly, Ellis highlights period dramas are not evidence-based histories but stories operating on 'plausibility', something dependent on society's 'prevailing beliefs' at the time [2014, p. 16]. While some programmes aim for this somewhat passive or neutral believability, others are what Landsberg terms 'historically conscious' productions which 'reconstruct' everyday, lived experiences of the past for modern viewers [2015, p. 67]. This approach parallels wider trends in television, a medium increasingly interested in personal rather than social arcs [Dahlgren 2005, p. 416]. This experiential quality is well documented in the secondary literature, as is the idea that historical productions often serve as educational [Edgerton 2005, p. 363; Warner 2009, p. 724]. However, some question how critically period drama presents its information. For example, Warner argues that the historical drama often takes the theory of history (how and why we perceive the past in given ways) 'for granted' [2009, p. 724]. In fact, non-historical shows

– science fiction programmes like *Dr Who,* for instance – are more likely to offer commentary (Warner 2009, pp. 726-727). Other cases since Warner's publication reinforce her argument. For example, *Outlander* constantly reflects on whether its protagonists can or should influence history with the knowledge afforded to them by time travel. Just as historical drama is diverse, so too is its engagement with the past. Naturally, no label or description will fit all productions. Nevertheless, they are useful in mapping the past-present relationship in history on screen. To develop this further, reflection on the audience's role and position is essential.

Many assume that by using the past, period productions wish to teach history. This is surely what fuels interest in pinpointing anachronisms, even in clearly fictional drama. Inaccuracies are not always poorly received, however. This seems largely motivated by genre: if a programme is marketed as comedy, fewer accusations of inauthenticity generally emerge; or, better put, anachronisms are more likely to be accepted. Another common trade-off is language. In order to be understandable to the modern viewer, the language must of course be comparable, translatable, or familiar, even if this means stepping out of a given historical setting. To raise this point is not to suggest we all learn Old English to better immerse ourselves in the Anglo-Saxon set *The Last Kingdom* (2015-), nor Franco-Italian to truly understand the adventures of *Marco Polo* (2014-2016). Rather, it is to underscore that all historical representations make certain compromises from the very first, and these are implicitly accepted by most viewers. Yet, policing the 'truth' of history on screen remains rife; and if the audience-cop perceives challenges to cultural norms, this can be disruptive. Warner suggests that this is because revisionism is less frequent in the public sphere:

> Within the history profession the revision of history is constant and, to an extent, uncontroversial. [...] However, in the wider society this process is significantly more traumatic – the revision of history can threaten the interpretations that people rely on for their identities. (2009, p. 730)

Although new interpretations may not always be welcomed or accepted among academics, the idea of (sometimes significant) revisionism is not taboo. Indeed, this is often the point of research: to improve on past knowledge, to address a gap, to refute a popular claim. In contrast, questioning cultural interpretations of history can be more 'traumatic', as it threatens to disrupt how people view the world. If wider societal understandings of history are challenged, so too are the lessons that we have learned from them (Warner 2009, p. 732). How period dramas are seen to use history is far from unimportant, then, but even dangerous.

As Esser underscores the usefulness of combining creator and audience interviews to assess the cultural reception of programmes (2013, p. x), this article has deliberately cast a wide net for sources to include both the 'official' and unofficial, from creator to critic to audience. It refers to quality publications in the United Kingdom and the United States, makes use of fan reviews on websites like *IMDb, Rotten Tomatoes,* and *Metacritic*, and even cites YouTube videos. One important omission is material from social media. This is for the simple reason that the volume of data generated by these platforms warrants its own study. Moreover, the material on review websites is arguably more deliberately 'published': offering and encouraging commentary is these sites' core premise. Furthermore, such sites try to regulate users and data to ensure fair scores and verifiable information (*IMDb* n.d.; *Rotten Tomatoes* n.d.; *Metacritic* n.d.). In combination with the other highlighted sources, they allow for a fuller examination of *Downton, The Crown,* and *Bridgerton* as case studies on the boundaries of period drama, who imposes these, and why.

Pressing 'Play' on Historical Drama: Ideas of Past and Present from Creator to Critic

Downton Abbey (2010-2015) follows the aristocratic Crawley family and their servants from 1912 to 1926, exploring both their personal journeys and the wider socio-cultural context. During its initial broadcast, it was extremely successful both domestically and abroad. It attracted a strong American audience after it was broadcast on PBS' *Masterpiece* channel and has since continued to gain popularity around the globe through streaming services like Netflix and Amazon Prime. Its *IMDb* (n.d.) user score sits at 8.7 out of 10; on Metacritic (n.d.), critic opinion is 'generally favorable' with a score of 80 out of 100, while user scores show universal acclaim at 8.2 out of 10; and *Rotten Tomatoes* (n.d.) shows critic and audience ratings of 86% and 93%, respectively. In many ways, *Downton* is the odd one out of the three programmes featured here. While it has been exported to other countries through streaming, it was not created for this market. Furthermore, while all three programmes undoubtedly foreground elite subjects as principal characters, *Downton* dedicates a significant portion of its runtime to the stories of the working class. *Downton* can certainly be credited with reviving interest in the period drama, especially a 'new' kind. While it receives the least amount of criticism for how it portrays the past – that is, critiques of 'inauthenticity' are less vehement than for *The Crown* or *Bridgerton* – the common criticism of its 'soapiness' nevertheless addresses the past-present boundary, as it disapproves of the influence of a modern genre.

Downton consciously combines British period drama standards with the pacing and 'style' of American programmes in order to confer 'a contemporary feel' on the past [Redvall 2019, pp. 131-132]. *Downton*'s writer and creator Julian Fellowes opted for this approach as he believed the standard British model to be too slow [Redvall 2019, p. 138]. In this way, *Downton* sets itself apart from traditional period dramas. Chapman argues it distinguishes itself further from other examples by not prioritising aesthetics over plot or characterisation [pp. 137-138]. Likewise, it is not a literary adaptation but an 'authored' drama [Chapman 2014, p. 136]; Fellowes, single-handedly responsible for the programme's scripts, could not be more central (Kamp 2012). Moreover, taking inspiration from soap operas means *Downton* is in many ways more 'progressive' than most of the canon, as evidenced by its range of characters and social themes [Chapman 2014, p. 138]. These deviations from the period drama norm have been both praised and criticised. The Critics' Consensuses, short summaries of critical reception on *Rotten Tomatoes* (n.d.), almost give the impression of enjoying the programme against some better judgment. Half the seasons are described as 'soapy', though the script, cast, and costume keep *Downton* worth watching. 'Melodramatic' also appears in the descriptions for series three and six, implying *Downton* as occasionally too extreme in its dramatics. Of the first 25 ten-star user reviews on *IMDb* (n.d.), five positively mention the show's use of history. Two refer to *Downton* as either educational or accurate, and the remainder commend it for exploring history through fiction (and vice versa). One reviewer comments:

> I believe it is to his credit that Fellowes doesn't belabor or preach to us on the issues of the day, rather he looks at how people live [...] in the shadow of historical events because they do not control them, but instead are caught up with events in how they impact their lives. (*IMDb*, n.d.)

To this reviewer, then, *Downton*'s focus on the fictional rather than the historical narrative is a real strength. It does not ignore history; but nor does it prioritise it at the expense of the characters' stories.

Having been off-air for six years, *Downton* benefits from a scholarly interest that *The Crown* and *Bridgerton* cannot yet boast. One particularly interesting article sees *Downton*

as a case study for the 'compatibility' and overlap between scholarship and fan culture (Upchurch, p. 28). Beyond this, it campaigns for scholars to capitalise on the popularity of such programmes to reach wider audiences (Upchurch, p. 28). This goes beyond the idea of the historian as a corrector of period drama and points to what they can learn from audiences as well as teach. Ji & Raney's research (2014) concentrates on perceptions of morality in *Downton*, but some of its analysis and conclusions could be broadened out. For example, they discuss moral foundation theory, which states that instinct (not developed judgement) is what underlines views of morality [p. 228]. One wonders to what extent reactions to history on screen might also be instinctive. Ellis' argument on the difference between history and story seems to support this theory, as it states the public will immediately judge historical interpretations by plausibility, using basic knowledge from broader cultural understandings. Furthermore, Ji & Raney conclude that viewers are more likely to comment when they see morals being violated rather than upheld [2014, p. 231]. Again, this could be applied to the limitations of history: are audiences more vocal when they see their version of the past challenged than confirmed; if so, why? After the release of the first series and subsequent criticisms of the programme's inaccuracies, *Downton's* creator Julian Fellowes initially reacted with anger: 'They think to show how smart they [the programme's critics] are by picking holes in the programme and to show that their knowledge is greater than your knowledge' (cited in Press Association, *The Guardian* 2011). He later partially reneged on this comment by proving that some perceived inaccuracies, such as using 'boyfriend', were supported by historical evidence; while admitting that other critiques, like drawing attention to an aerial appearing in a shot, were justified (cited in Press Association, *The Guardian* 2011). While this example proves that audiences will speak up when they see history being challenged or wronged, it does not illustrate that they are more likely to do this than comment positively. Qualifying that would take a much larger study. However, it is certainly evidence of the push-and-pull between producers and viewers of period drama over whose version of history is correct and desirable.

The first four seasons of *The Crown* cover the reign of Queen Elizabeth II from 1952 to 1990. While reviews and ratings have fluctuated slightly between the four instalments, the overall scores indicate approval and success. On *Rotten Tomatoes* (n.d.)*,* for example, both the critic and audience score sit at 90%; its *IMDb* user score gives an average of 8.6 out of 10; and *Metacritic*'s critic and user scores both indicate 'universal acclaim' (at 84/100 and 8.7/10, respectively). In terms of its historical narrative, *The Crown* is the most recent of the three programmes discussed here, meaning it is uniquely placed for scrutiny by those who lived through the periods it depicts. Unlike *Downton* and *Bridgerton*, it tells the personal stories of real, still-living individuals. Thus, *The Crown* challenges the boundaries of past and present in a different way, something recognised by series creator Peter Morgan. Speaking in 2020, he expressed caution about where to bring the show up to in 'real time', saying: 'You need at least a decade, in my view, to separate yourself from the events that you're writing about' [quoted in Bentley 2020]. Presumably, he is referring to achieving some sense of objectivity as a writer, but the lack of detail here does allow room for interpretation. What is clear is that he perceives a particular dynamic between his programme and history which requires managing. At its most basic, *The Crown* follows the personal journey of one character and her family; since that character is a reigning head of state, however, it is a unique story. The mix of unlocking access to both a historical setting and character is what Dahlgren has labelled 'arational', a mode of engagement that involves both 'head' and 'heart' [2005, p. 418-419]. There is no doubt that that *The Crown* seems to offer some degree of authenticity in its official description, which credits 'masterfully researched scripts' as lifting the curtain to 'reveal the private journey behind the public façade' (n.d. *IMDb*). However, Stanford Abbiss argues *The Crown* continually shores up its ambiguity

and encourages its audience to make up their own minds [2019, p. 13]. Others, in contrast, do not believe *The Crown* does – or should – afford its viewers that liberty.

Although accusations of inauthenticity have emerged in relation to previous seasons, series four of *The Crown* – which dealt with the relationship of Prince Charles and Princess Diana, and the Thatcher government – has received particular attention at fan, critic, and even governmental level. In November 2020, the British Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden urged Netflix to advise viewers that the programme is, in fact, fictional (BBC News). This call has met with mixed reactions. One cast member agreed that creators should highlight *The Crown* is 'not a dramadoc' [quoted in Harrison 2020]. Though Rosenstone has disproved the notion that the documentary is inherently more truthful for academic audiences [2006, p. 17-18], the idea evidently remains fixed in wider culture. One reviewer on *IMDb* reinforces this, stating there is 'only one way to do justice to history and that is as a documentary' (n.d.). However, other cast members and critics have spoken out against Dowden [Harrison 2020; Lewis 2021a]. Writing for *The Guardian,* Higgins (2020) defended *The Crown* as 'a tight weft of fiction woven round a very sparse warp of fact'. This metaphor works well: the series is underpinned by real events but primarily deals with the imagined, unprovable realities of its characters. Higgins cites the Princess Diana-Prince Charles storyline as especially controversial because it presents both provocative characterisations and events which still feel contemporary to many. Her conclusion seems justified: cultural interest in Princess Diana has not dissipated in the twenty-three years since her death and this undoubtedly fuelled sympathy towards her character. 'Character' and 'storyline' may feel like uncomfortable terms to use, but characters and storylines they are: however inspired by our reality, they are still imagined, constructed, diegetic. Whether this needs to be explained to the viewer is quite another matter.

While Higgins outlines what some were angered by, she does not explore why. For this, it is best to turn to the critics themselves, such as Sir Simon Jenkins (2020). In his opinion, the latest series too liberally mixed fact and fiction. His evidence is a list of inaccuracies composed by historian Hugo Vickers which constitute 'eight complete fabrications [...] all caricaturing the royal family in the worst possible light.' To Jenkins, these are particularly upsetting because they are avoidable. Tellingly, he states that contemporary history must not be allowed to set itself on the wrong path – misinterpretations should be pre-empted and resolved while suitable people are here to do so. Yet the implicit concern of Jenkins and Dowden is not the pursuit of historical truth, but that *The Crown* might encourage people to feel negatively about the real British royal family. Warner argues: 'If the history of a person, a nation or a society is disturbed, then the person, nation, or society will also be disturbed' [2009, p. 731]. *The Crown*'s protagonists represent all three. If one believes that the monarchy merits a particular place and reputation in modern British society, *The Crown* 'misrepresenting' these individuals is disrespectful, even dangerous. Therefore, in agreement with Dowden, Jenkins sees a need for establishing a clearer line between fact and fiction. This is misguided on two levels. As previously discussed, *The Crown* is mostly concerned with the personal and private, the exact details of which are unknown and thus have to be invented. Its fictional aspect is clear. Secondly, this grossly underestimates audience intelligence. To assume 'seeing is believing' undermines the critical awareness and thinking of the public, who are capable of recognising fiction and evaluating media. The contrasting opinions of Dowden, Jenkins, and Higgins are in fact proof of viewer freedom and ability to interpret *The Crown*. As Monk reminds us, there is no such thing as a 'homogenous audience' [cited in Bondebjerg 2016, p. 14], nor a universal audience intention or reaction. Further evidence of this is that critique of *The Crown* is not limited to those worried about viewer miseducation; for example, there are some who are concerned about its potential to act as a 'vehicle of Britain's colonial amnesia' in how it treats its characters of colour (Sarkar

2020). Against the backdrop of calls to decolonise school curriculums, and the proliferation of postcolonial studies in the humanities and beyond, this view reinforces that the boundaries of belief or engagement are changing. Undoubtedly, it constitutes a very different disapproval from Jenkins and Dowden.

Bridgerton (2020-) follows the eponymous fictional family during one social season in early nineteenth-century England. Originally predicted to be watched by 63 million households (Otterson 2021), 82 million had tuned in by the end of January 2021 (Porter 2021). As Netflix defines a 'view' as anything which is watched for at least two minutes, not all 'viewers' in fact took in the whole series (Otterson 2021). Nevertheless, *Bridgerton* did break the traditional streaming pattern of an initial frenzy which tapers off after a fortnight or so; instead, viewing patterns remained stable (Porter 2021). Despite this popularity, *Bridgerton* is – by the reckoning of critic and user reviews – the least favourably received of the three programmes discussed here. Interestingly, it seems that the bulk of poor reviews comes from the general public rather than official critics. On *Rotten Tomatoes,* for example, the average critic score is 89% while the average audience score is 72% (n.d.). Similarly, its *IMDb* (n.d.) score sits at 7.3 out of 10 (taken from over 82,000 ratings, an impressive figure given only seven months have passed since its release). On *Metacritic,* its audience score is even poorer: while critic ratings average at 75 out of 100, the user score is 5.6 out of 10 (n.d). In many respects, it seems to be a polarising programme: while many champion its approach to sex, gender, and race, there are also strong opponents. Only critiques involving explicit references to history are included here. As will become clear, past and present are even more intertwined in *Bridgerton* than *The Crown* and *Downton Abbey. Bridgerton* is set in Regency-era London, a fact established in its first sentence: 'Grosvenor Square, 1813'. Yet showrunner Chris Van Dusen's intention was to 'reimagine the stuffy world' of the period drama (quoted in Valentini, 2020). Though respectful of and inspired by period pieces, he felt compelled to make *Bridgerton* different. The past depicted is not a distant one: elements are deliberately constructed to show a history that is very much in conversation with the present day. This supersedes Edgerton's 'useable past' [(2005, p. 268)]; arguably, it is an example of Eder's 'reflexive' mode of learning, which promotes 'more dialogic approaches to history and the opening up of controversies' [(cited in O'Leary 2016, p. 11)]. Far from avoiding presentism, *Bridgerton* actively revels in it, shown in its approach to music, costume, and casting. Dhoest's 'surface realism' seems suitable here: *Bridgerton* uses just enough of the past and the conventions of the period drama to be recognisable. Of course, Van Dusen highlighting *Bridgerton*'s intentions has not protected it from the audience-cop. While some praise its differences, many disapprove, and still others find it does not go far enough.

As previously discussed, certain historical elements are deemed more dispensable than others. Music as a creative element is often malleable. *Bridgerton*'s soundtrack features modern songs rearranged in a Classical style; era-appropriate music; and other instrumental pieces from after 1813 (Macdonald 2020). This has been mostly well received: only two of the first 25 one-star user reviews on IMDb mention their irritation at this choice, compared to four positive mentions in the ten-star reviews. Stronger indications of audience approval are evident in the over 230,000 likes on the show's official Spotify playlist, and the 350% increase in streams of Vitamin String Quartet, who play many of the Classical-modern covers (Tangcay 2021). Reactions to *Bridgerton's* costuming have been more varied. Designer Ellen Mirojnick has openly stated that she concentrated on fulfilling the directors' vision rather than loyally reproducing Regency-era dress (quoted in Hampton 2020), and director Julie Anne Robinson has confirmed that fashion was never intended as a focal point (Andreeva 2021). Even so, this has not stopped both amateur and professional fashion historians from analysing the costumes' authenticity. For instance, Karolina Żebrowska and Bernadette Banner – two

prominent YouTubers in dress history, each with over a million subscribers – contributed to the discussion. Banner (2020) commented: 'It was a design choice. [...] It's not to do with actual historical events, so there is a bit of leeway, I think'. Żebrowska's video ultimately concluded that though the costumes were a 'historical mess', they 'kinda work' (2020). Between music and wardrobe, it seems that many are willing to overlook, if not appreciate, creative liberties. 'Surface realism' can be acceptable. When other elements are changed, however, the same reception is not guaranteed.

By far the most provocative 'anachronism' of *Bridgerton* is its racially diverse cast. Its creators have not shied away from acknowledging that present-day ideals motivated this: they wished to improve upon the white-dominated period drama and present a cast that more fully represented society (*BBC News* 2021). Its actors have championed this (Lewis 2021b), and Netflix's diversity and inclusion chief considered it a positive step towards representation both off- and on-camera (Bakare 2021). Moreover, this approach even engages with historical debates, as Van Dusen cites contentions that Queen Charlotte was mixed race as inspiring this 'what-if' interpretation wherein a Black Queen Charlotte married King George IV and single-handedly raised the status of people of colour in Britain, even conferring aristocratic titles on some (quoted in Jacobs 2020). According to its producers, *Bridgerton* is not colour-blind because race is a part of its very premise (Jacobs 2020). In a sample of one-, five-, and ten-star user reviews on IMDb, 33 out of 75 directly commented on the casting. In the ten-star reviews, all sixteen mentions were positive or neutral: for example, some actively enjoyed the casting ('it added a nice touch') while others were willing to accept it as part of the fantasy ('This wasn't ever meant to be a documentary'). At the bottom end of the scale, nine of the first 25 one-star reviews mentioned the casting as factoring into their decision. Some did not object but felt *Bridgerton* did not deliver in other senses. Two mentioned the programme did not sufficiently address the issue in-text, and another took care to point out that the casting was not what drove their poor review. Predictably, some saw this decision as borne by 'political correctness', the transference of American modern-day ideals to a British past, or plain historical inaccuracy. This data is sorted by 'helpfulness', meaning other IMDb users approved it as useful. If the one-star reviews are sorted from least to most helpful, ideas of 'wokeness', 'political correctness', and misguided 'revisionism' become much more prevalent. This article has no interest in measuring the 'truth' of these programmes either to prove or disprove audience claims. At this juncture, this becomes uncomfortable as many of the negative reviews are, plainly, bigoted. To deny the existence of people of colour in Regency England is incorrect. Insisting that period drama uphold its standards of all-white casts is misguided and yet a prevailing opinion on how the genre should interact with the past, as one review shows:

> Producers of 'Historical' fiction should have a morale [sic] responsibility to
> portray historical periods as accurately as possible otherwise our children
> and young people, who may never have studied the dramatised time period,
> will be taught wild inaccuracies about our past. They will believe this
> American 'Woke' version of Regency England as is portrayed. (n.a. 2021)

In this one review, three key issues are raised. Firstly, historical accuracy should not be a feature but a duty of period drama. It proves that historical fiction is often assumed to be educative (though inferring *Bridgerton* as intended for 'children' with its age rating of 15 and warnings for sex, sex references, sexual violence references, and violence, is misleading). Lastly, it identifies present-day 'American' ideals as a corrosive influence on the presentation of the British past. For other commentators, *Bridgerton* does not fully commit to presenting a world

where race has no social, cultural, or political significance; nor deal with the ramifications of a sudden equality between races (Komonibo & Newman-Bremang 2021; Kini 2021). For Kini, *Bridgerton* is only 'dipped in color' and overlooks race in a way that not only seems implausible in-text but is insulting to the lived experiences of real people of colour. Komonibo and Newman-Bremang speculate that *Bridgerton*'s creators may have felt unwilling to address race for fear of making racism the driving force behind all the character of colour's stories; however, they point out that this is not inevitable. These conversations of representation in period drama precede *Bridgerton* (Manivannan 2020)*,* without a doubt, but the show's popularity has brought the divisive issue once again to the fore.

    Bridgerton shows that the boundaries between past and present and belief and disbelief can be moveable in the name of artistic vision. What critique of some elements reveal, however, is that if promising to break out of traditional moulds, the detachment must be radical. For some, *Bridgerton* has not delivered on this promise and is therefore disappointing; yet for others, it has already gone beyond plausibility. Establishing a useable past in conversation with the present is clearly a fraught task. Stating that audience engagement with television is influenced by current socio-political climates as well as personal biases is in no way revolutionary. Still, bearing in mind that it dominates their engagement with historical television, too – no matter how much the intention of chasing 'accuracy' is cited – is paramount.

After the Credits: Conclusions and Suggestions

Scannell has commented that not all audiences recognise or care about how programmes are made: '[...] we are not aware of the manufactured character [...] except when they malfunction' [(2005, p. 55)]. While the 'malfunction' he describes refers to technical difficulties, this can be applied to the idea of inaccuracy in period drama television. Inaccuracies challenge the idea that any history programme, regardless of genre, intends on educating its viewers about the past. Yet this is reductive, as the relationship between television and history is much more nuanced than that. Creators are not united in their intentions, nor can we speak of a cohesive audience. Both general and individual ideals of past and present and fact and fiction are not fixed. Nevertheless, these concepts continue to haunt historical television, even if defining what they are and how to manage them seems difficult. Bondebjerg excellently summarises the tensions of history on screen [(2016, p. 16)]:

> We seem to have a kind of double vision on the historical: on the one hand history is something far away, a distant and very different world, with other values and norms; and on the other, history is somehow part of our present, helping to define a collective sense of social identity. In a way, we cannot help but project our contemporary mentality onto the past, either critically or in a more nostalgic mode, as a contrast to our modern form of life.

Historical productions must strike a balance between provoking interest in the past without alienating present-day viewers [(O'Leary 2016, p. 80)]. Simultaneously, they are usually expected to avoid blatant presentism, even as the audience is encouraged to put themselves in another's shoes. While lack of clear demarcations perhaps complicates definitions, it offers much more room for analysis. Rosenstone (2006) and White (1988) are right to recommend asking what historical productions tell us about cultural understandings of the past, and audiences are key sources. Uncovering viewer opinions may previously have been difficult to achieve (Richards 2009); but in 2021, with masses of online data, this is no longer true. Though omitted here, social media platforms – as Ji & Raney prove (2014) – offer a wealth of information. Going forward,

using sites like Twitter to examine cultural reception would prove fruitful. Reckoning with these sources is, in many ways, uncomfortable for the historian. Undertaking such research would encourage interdisciplinary work; a particularly apt process for such a layered topic as cultural reception of the period drama. That it challenges the discipline is proof of progress, and it helps us take another step further away from the 'historian-cop' to instead consider how we 'move through the window' to the past ^(Gallimore 2014, pp. 260-261). Will audiences move with us? That remains a question for the future.

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5

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Janet Frame: Fiction, Reality, and the In-between

Abstract:

This article attempts to unveil some of the mysteries and controversies surrounding the public image of Janet Frame. It looks closely at Frame's posthumously published autobiographical novel *Towards Another Summer* and her autobiography, both of which portray a female writer as a protagonist, modelled on the author. It explores the relationships between the author and her fictional proxies in connection with Frame's idea of personality and her understanding of truth and reality, as expressed in interviews, autobiography, and fiction.

It is normally expected that nonfiction writing be aligned with real facts, characters, and life events, while the world of imagination is more likely to be associated with fiction. The article, however, demonstrates that in Frame's case, the distinction between fiction and reality is impossible and unhelpful. The absence of clear boundaries between facts and imagination becomes a characteristic feature of both the author's fiction and autobiography and is a deliberate technique that she uses to convey her ideas on the subjectivity of reality. Generating both interest and confusion, this feature of Frame's writing feeds the aura of mysticism around her, adding to the development of her public image that may have very little to do with her private self.

Key Words: genre, truth, reality, identity, boundaries

In 2014, following the posthumous publication of Janet Frame's novel *In the Memorial Room*, C.K. Stead wrote a review in which he highlighted the resemblance between the book's fictional characters and real people—a resemblance that he found biased and offensive. Taking a strictly autobiographical perspective, he treated the novel as a *roman-à-clef*, claiming parts of it as 'a literal recounting of Frame's experience' and 'a vehicle for her personal grumbles and deeper anxieties' (p.173). Besides the similarity with factual events and circumstances, Stead found it 'difficult to see [. . .] quite as "fiction"', the protagonist's philosophical speculations too closely resembling 'half-serious self-inspection by Frame in her own person' (p.174). Admitting that mockery and the unflattering portrayal of recognised people alone cannot be enough to condemn the novel, he claimed the work was 'unsatisfactorily incomplete' on grounds of its lack of shape and uncertainty of direction. Lastly, at the end of the review, Stead expressed his doubt about whether Frame herself would have wanted the novel published (p.178).[1]

The autobiographical nature of Frame's work intrigues many of her readers who, like Stead, become conscious of the extent to which the author draws on her life experiences. Ironically, as a writer of autobiographical fiction himself, Stead was aware of the complexities of the relationship between fiction and reality. When asked how much the characters in his autobiographical novel *All Visitors Ashore* took after real people, he replied:

> Of course it is true that, to some extent, I drew on Janet Frame for Skyways and I drew on Frank Sargeson for Melior Fabro but they became fictional characters and went their own way in the novel. (cited in Gabrielle 2015, p.17)

Like Stead, Frame too insisted she only used real stories and people as a starting point for her novels. In her autobiography, she claimed she felt alarmed that her fiction was perceived as autobiographical:

> Pictures of great treasure in the midst of sadness and waste haunted me and I began to think, in fiction, of a childhood, home life, hospital life, using people known to me as a base for the main characters, and inventing minor characters [. . .] later when the book was published, I was alarmed to find that it [Owls Do Cry] was believed to be autobiographical . . . (1991, p.148)

As most of Frame's other comments on autobiographical truth, a statement like this cannot be fully trusted. Stead and Frame are not the only writers who blur imagination and reality in their fiction. In her writing, Frame complicates a common and already complex issue, which confounds even a critic as sophisticated as Stead.

This article discusses Frame's public image as a reclusive and 'exceptional' figure. It focuses on Frame's novel *Towards Another Summer* and her autobiographical trilogy, *To the Is-Land* (published in 1982), *An Angel at My Table* (1984), and *The Envoy from Mirror City* (1985). The novel and autobiographies engage actively with the ideas of truth and reality, identity and belonging. They portray a female writer as a protagonist, who is modelled after the author and refer to numerous analogous events from Frame's childhood in New Zealand (*To the Is-Land*) and her life as a writer in London (*The Envoy from Mirror City*). This article explores the relationships between the author and her fictional proxies in connection with Frame's idea of personality, as presented in her interviews, autobiography, and fiction. It looks at how differences in narration, including the temporal aspect of narration, affect the image and reliability of the protagonist in the novel and the autobiographies. It argues that fiction

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1. Frame never offered In the Memorial Room for publication. It was published by Pamela Gordon, the author's niece, in 2013.

and reality inform one another in Frame's writing, and that the origins of this feature stem from the author's views on truth as a blend of facts and imagination. It demonstrates how the consistency of Frame's ideas on truth and reality across different time periods and genres lays the groundwork for the formation of her public persona, which might influence the reader's perception of her fictional works.

Frame was famously unwilling to give interviews or public speeches. Her characteristic avoidance of publicity and social situations compounded a perception of her as an unreal and mystical figure. She was seen as 'New Zealand's most reclusive author' [Smellie 2000, p.80] who 'expressly prefers seclusion to self-promotion' [Rivers 2001, p.33]. Patrick Evans, Frame's first literary biographer, confessed that through all the years that he had been writing about her, he had hardly got to know the 'real', authentic Frame [1993, p.16]. Frame's refusal of publicity suggests the common belief that the literary critic acts as a stalker, persecuting the author with unwelcome and obsessive attention. In her letter to Evans, Frame accused him of being 'one of the Porlock people' [King 2000, p.419], referring to the unwanted visitor who interrupted Samuel Taylor Coleridge as he was writing his poem 'Kubla Khan'. It is possible that Evans's early criticism on Frame was one of many contributing factors to her withdrawal from public life.

Another work of nonfiction that vastly contributes to the myth of Frame's solitary disposition is Michael King's biography of her *Wrestling with the Angel* (2000), which heavily relied on Frame's autobiography. The book was well received and praised as an 'impressively detailed research [that] closely tracks Frame's life' [Rivers 2001, p.33]. According to Andrew Dean, King's reading of Frame was conducted through a strictly literal model as if her autobiography was a historical document, 'one subject not to literary analysis, but to the ordinary problems of historical exegesis' [2011, p.53]. Harry Ricketts notes that Frame only agreed to collaborate with King on the condition that there would be neither analysis of her writing nor quotes adopted verbatim from her interviews with him. Thus, Ricketts refers to King as a 'framed' biographer, 'writing with his subject at his shoulder, and able at any point to produce the red pencil. Hardly ideal' [2001, p.1653]. The idea of the partiality of King's text further bolsters Frame's enigmatic persona.

Encouraged by notorious literary critics, like Evans and King, the image of Frame as a recluse has boosted her celebrity status significantly. Not everyone, however, has been satisfied with the widespread public 'version' of Frame. In an interview, the author's niece Pamela Gordon criticises Evans' portrayal of Frame as 'someone who was gifted in a feral mad way', insisting instead that Frame's work was 'a product of her discipline, ambition and education' and that she was 'a self-directed, conscious artist' (Gates 2013). The fact that Frame did not want to be a national author does not mean that she was not well-travelled, connected and supported by friends and family.

Jane Campion's movie *An Angel at My Table*, a 1990 film adaptation of Frame's autobiography contributes to Frame's public image. Originally produced as a television mini-series, the film has won multiple local and international awards and introduced Frame's writing to a broader audience. In her article, Alexis Brown explores what happens when an autobiography is taken up by film. She argues that from a project of faithful adaptation, the movie has become 'an unconscious projection of Campion's own emotional landscape', a 'hybrid existence of both identities, melded into an apparent unity in the filmic personage of Frame' [2016, p.111]. Like all previous attempts to 'capture', interpret Frame, whether through literary criticism or historical enquiry, the cinematic adaptation of Frame's text extended, distorted, and reshaped the image of the author, offering another 'version' of her.

As a writer, Frame was never interested in ostensibly 'pure' genres of nonfiction, such as an interview or a critical essay, which require a greater degree of straightforwardness, clarity, and comprehensibility. Notably, of all genres of nonfiction, she chose the one that

is closest to fiction to address a wider audience. On the one hand, in proposing to tell the story of a 'real' person, autobiography claims to be factually 'true'. On the other hand, being largely retrospective, autobiography cannot avoid being creative, imaginative, and blurring the borderlines of the genre. Refusing to follow the conventions of autobiographical writing, Frame allowed herself a higher degree of freedom, playfulness, vagueness, and irony by merging aspects of the 'real' and the 'imaginary'. Not only did Frame deliberately avoid genres that might have potentially restricted her flexibility, she continued mixing facts and her imagination in both her 'nonfictional' autobiography and her 'fiction' novels to the extent that the distinction between the two no longer seemed relevant.

  Towards Another Summer (1963) was not offered for publication during Frame's lifetime. In the acknowledgement section of this posthumous publication, Pamela Gordon, Frame's literary executor and niece, pays tribute to her fellow board members of the Janet Frame Literary Trust for 'sharing the responsibility for the decision to offer this manuscript for publication' [2007, p.205]. She notes that the novel was 'too personal' to publish during the author's lifetime. Likewise, in his biography of Frame, King refers to the text as 'embarrassingly personal' [2000, p.245]. The gap of forty-four years between the time that the novel was written and introduced to the public has a major impact on its perception. In 1963, Frame was at the beginning of her writing career, and was unknown to a wider audience. By 2007, three years after the author's death, she had become a celebrity, whose life story was familiar to the public.

  Following King, most reviewers of *Towards Another Summer* took autobiographical perspective on the novel. For instance, Catherine Taylor remarks that the book 'feels personal to [her] too, although [she] never knew or met Frame' (2015). Rachel Cooke describes the novel as 'a piercing, poetic revelation', possessing a 'visceral honesty all of its own' (2008). Typically, reviewers point out the likeness between the protagonist and the author, reading the novel as a very personal story about loneliness, which has corresponded well with the public image of Frame as a recluse. A few critics approached the text as a work of fiction. Kim Worthington suggests that the novel be regarded as 'a self-deprecating comedy of manners, the tale of a social misfit' as well as 'a display and celebration of creative prowess' [2008, p.7]. Likewise, omitting any assumptions about the author's life in his analysis, Marc Delrez examines the text through its use of embarrassment 'as a decentring strategy allowing [it] to work towards an exposure of so-called social normality' [2015, p.579].

  Towards Another Summer belongs to the category of texts identified by Dorrit Cohn as 'indecisive' or 'intermediate' in terms of genre. The existence of such narratives, however, does not mean they cannot be classified either as fiction or nonfiction. In *The Distinction of Fiction* (1999), Cohn contests popular poststructuralist views that *all* narratives are fictional. She argues that a fictional narrative 'achieves something entirely alien to historical narrative' [p.9] and that it is 'unique in its potential for crafting a self-enclosed universe' (p.i). This article adopts Cohn's understanding of fiction in its constrained sense of a non-referential narrative rather than a narrative in general. Despite the widespread perception of *Towards Another Summer* as a 'true' story, the text remains a work of fiction since its speaker does not identify with the author in whose name the text was published.

  While the question of whether and to what extent *Towards Another Summer* can be seen as 'personal' remains to be discussed, Frame's autobiography was both intended to be and received as personal, as was clearly suggested by its genre. Its first volume, *To the Is-Land*, was first published in the USA in 1982, close to the end of the author's writing career. According to King, the publication was extremely successful, turning Frame from 'unrecognised and unhonoured by the community at large [...] [to] a nationally known figure, a best-selling author and holder of one of the country's [USA] highest civic awards' [2000, p.451]. In New Zealand, the

sales of the book were unpredictably brisk and reviewers' responses, in general, were highly positive. In the *New Zealand Listener*, Lydia Wevers wrote:

> As her fiction is the work of a rare imagination, so her autobiography is a work of rare intelligence [. . .] many literary autobiographies concentrate on the development of a refined sensibility and an illustrious group of friends at the cost of a sense of the real life from which talent has drawn its material. But Janet Frame [. . .] recalls her past selves with such honesty that it seems to illuminate one's own life. (cited in King 2000, p.461)

While seeing imagination as an exceptional quality in Frame's fiction, Wevers praised the author's autobiography for her 'sense of real life' and 'honesty'. Likewise, in her conversation with Frame, Elizabeth Alley highlighted the writer's 'honesty' by giving the interview the title 'An Honest Record'. Although this event was a rare occasion of Frame speaking publicly about her writing, which the title supposedly suggests, the interview came across as inconsistent and contradictory. On the one hand, Frame insisted that she was 'always in fiction mode', looking at everything 'from the point of view of fiction' (Frame to Alley 1991, p.161). On the other hand, she repeatedly claimed her autobiography was a 'true' story, 'my story', 'ordinary me without fiction or characters' (p.158). By claiming her autobiography was a 'true'—as opposed to 'untrue'—story about her 'real' self, Frame simultaneously reaffirms the autobiographical nature of most of her fiction, as her autobiographies frequently recall episodes from her earlier novels. *In Towards Another Summer*, although the characters have fictional names, most of the places (Fifty-Six Eden Street, Oamaru, for example) correspond with place names in the autobiographies. The families of a young female protagonist depicted in *Owls Do Cry*, *Towards Another Summer*, and *To the Is-Land* have much in common, including the character of an epileptic brother, the event of an elder sister's death, and the internment of the protagonist in a mental hospital.

Janet Frame, the autobiographical character, shares many characteristics and views with her fictional protagonists, such as Grace. Frame, as an actual writer, is and is not each of her fictional proxies. Most of her protagonists reveal a part of her but never the whole 'real' Frame. While a fictional character is locked within the story and limited, the identity of any living person is never fixed. However, fictional characters surpass the author in a way that they can further explore hidden perspectives and unrealised possibilities of a real person by having a range of experiences that she cannot possess. As Frame puts it in her interview, the difference between herself and her character Greta in *The Adaptable Man* is that she—the actual writer—is only interested in gardening, as she is interested in everything, while the character she creates is, in fact, an intense gardener (Frame to Alley 1991, p.158). By half self-replicating and half-inventing her fictional characters, the writer lives through various experiences and breaks the limitations of one single personality. The process of writing fiction broadens and blurs one's personality.

While opinions of Frame's characters are not necessarily her own, there is a consistency of her ideas on truth, reality, and identity in her interviews, autobiographies, and fiction. This reveals the blurring of different genres in her works. In her interview, Frame emphasises how important it was for her to write the 'true' story of her life in her autobiography (Frame to Alley 1991, p.158). A similar longing for truth and authenticity is shared by her protagonists Janet and Grace. In *The Envoy from Mirror City*, Janet identifies herself as the person who is 'always searching for the "truth"' (Frame 1985, p.72). Likewise, in *Towards Another Summer*, Grace is a 'passionate seeker for Truth' who 'would have the world without and the world within stripped of all deceit [. . .] carefully removing deceit layer by layer' (Frame 2007, p.142). Whether in

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Frame's interviews, autobiographies, or fiction, it is important not to anchor oneself to the literal meaning of truth. To Frame, truth is a complex philosophical concept, which has less connection with fact or reality:

> Why should she not speak the truth at least once in her life? The need to tell Phillip and Anne, to stand in the big untidy kitchen and say, aloud, I saw a woman change to a bird, was so desperate that Grace did not know how she would be able to prevent herself from telling. (2007, p.104)

In her early literary career, Frame said that she found it impossible to reconcile 'this' and 'that' world, and so she had to choose 'that' world [(1965, p.31)]. By 'that' world she implies the world of bedtime stories, songs and tales she grew up with, the 'pocket' of poetry where words are 'instruments of magic', while 'this' world is the world of 'depression and wealth' [(1965, p. 26-27)]. Over time, the amalgamation of the two worlds, reality and imagination, becomes a characteristic feature of her writing. She no longer needs to choose one world over another, since the two worlds do not oppose each other but are mutually inclusive.

Throughout *Towards Another Summer*, Grace claims to be 'a migratory bird, not a human being' [(2007, p. 23)], implying that one could be anything and that the notion of personality is fluid, and its borders are blurred. Her definition of identity as a set of daily habits is nothing but ironic:

> Her eyes were shining, her face was flushed. Oh how wonderful to possess an identifying characteristic! Late, early, tidy, untidy, I'm fearfully slow, I'm always ready on time, I'm so good with children . . . [(Frame 2007, p.47)]

Grace seems excluded from society because she does not possess a sense of belonging and a stable self-awareness. And yet, for her, what the reader might think of as defining characteristics are actually enclosures. While longing to belong and have an identity of her own, Grace continuously rejects the notion of fixed identity comprised of unchanged characteristics.

The autobiographical Janet and the fictional Grace are not exactly the same person. While neither of them can stand in place of the actual writer, the differences in the way their stories are narrated affect the image and credibility of each protagonist. *Towards Another Summer* is seemingly written in an objective limited third-person point of view, voiced by a covert narrator. This impression, however, is rather misleading. Even though the narrative voice belongs to a third-person narrator, the entire story is presented from Grace's perspective. Two other characters, the journalist Peter Thirkettle and his wife Anne, at whose place Grace stays for a weekend, are portrayed exclusively through Grace's perspective. The main character's inner conversation, thoughts, and memories dominate the text, and the reader is hardly able to form an independent opinion of the Thirkettle family through their brief remarks in conversation with the protagonist. For example, when Phillip suggests that after the kids grow up, Anne should return to teaching so that he can devote himself to writing, the only response from Anne that is available to the reader is '[w]e'll see about that', which is barely enough to form any definite conclusion about the character's feelings and views on the topic. Meanwhile, it is Grace's thoughts and assumptions in response to Peter's statement that take about half of a page: 'Grace felt alarmed and afraid at his words [. . .] I don't want to return to teaching, she thought, trying to subdue her panic. I can't.' [(Frame 2007, p.126)]. For a time, Grace becomes Anne; hence, her emotional response to Phillip's remark is as follows: 'Phillip had been speaking to

Anne. Yet Grace had been Anne. It was Grace whom Phillip addressed now' [Frame 2007, p.127]. The secondary characters' inner worlds remain inaccessible to the reader. The narrator's portrayal of the couple's life tells the reader more about Grace than them.

In the middle of the story, Grace's monologues become longer and more frequent, taking up to a few pages or even a whole chapter (Chapter 19, for instance) with omitted quotation marks. This omission creates confusion for the reader to know who is speaking. For example, it might be hard to say whether 'she', suddenly emerging in the middle of Grace's monologue, refers to Grace or whether Grace talks about herself in the third person:

> I like reading. Once the words are on the page they never change; when you open the book the print never falls out. She's learning to read; she's in the primers; she's going to be a school-teacher when she grows up; she goes to Wyndham District High School . . . [Frame 2007, p.154]

Grace's several long internal monologues reveal her desire to take control of her personal story. Yet, the author prefers not to grant her protagonist the authority to narrate, watering down her voice with the voice of a subjective and unreliable narrator. The fact that the narrator entirely shares the protagonist's point of view reduces the narrator's role to a mere formality. By using a third-person narrator to tell Grace's story, Frame draws a line between herself and the protagonist as if to suggest that 'Grace is not quite me'. Meanwhile, the protagonist's active presence increases her reliability.

The narrative techniques that Frame uses in her autobiographies are essentially antithetical to those which are used in *Towards Another Summer*. The first-person narration gives autobiographical Janet Frame the authority and control that fictional Grace lacks. Most critics have interpreted Frame's formal attempt to create an autobiographical self as her desire to gain control of her public image. The image of Frame as a feminist and public intellectual mostly derives from her autobiographies, where she takes the active position of a privileged interpreter in contrast to the more passive, third-person narration employed in her fiction. Both Susan Ash [1993, p.30] and Gina Mercer have viewed Frame's shift towards autobiographical narration as a conscious act that unravels the myths surrounding the author's persona, which were constructed by male biographers and critics. The attempt at creating an autobiographical self has been seen by Mercer as particularly successful due to the seemingly simple and accessible format of autobiography [1994, p.225].

The protagonist and the narrator of the autobiographies, who are formally the same person—Janet Frame—become two distinct characters: '[w]riting now, I am impatient with my student self that was so unformed, ungrownup, so cruelly innocent' [Frame 1991, p.25]. The narrator is the grown-up successful writer Janet Frame recalling her younger self—Janet the protagonist. The past tense reduces the spontaneity and immediacy of the character's experience in the past. The author admits the impossibility of recalling a authentic past experience :

> Many of my student days and experiences are now sealed from me by that substance released with the life of each moment or each moment's capture of our life. I remember and can relive my feelings but there is now a thirst for reason in what had seemed to be so inevitable. [Frame 1991, p.25]

The perspectives of the protagonist and the narrator may not always be in agreement when this happens; the older Frame 'refines' the story of her younger self. For example, the use of brackets sometimes facilitates this refinement:

> The ignorance of my parents infuriated me. They knew nothing of Sigmund
> Freud, of The Golden Bough, of T. S. Eliot. (I forgot, conveniently, that at the
> beginning of the year my knowledge of Freud, The Golden Bough, T. S. Eliot,
> was limited.) (Frame 1991, p.27)

There is, of course, a profound difference between how the protagonist felt or thought in the past and how, at the time of narration, the narrator thinks she previously felt and thought. In the autobiography, the narrator's point of view dominates while the protagonist's role remains submissive.

The choice of genre imposes certain constraints on the relationships between the protagonist and narrator. According to Ash, while in her fiction Frame avoids encasing her characters in any authorial consciousness; in the autobiographies, she sets up a relation of transgredience (being outside of the other) between the narrator and the narratee:

> The writing-I grants itself the privilege of all-encompassing knowledge of
> the self it creates through art. And from this vantage point, naturally, it can
> claim authority to finish off, to complete, that self. (1993, p.34)

The completed submissive image of the protagonist in the autobiographies has a contrast to the image of Grace as being present and disobedient, free to express herself and 'be herself':

> I was four. We explored under the house and found it 'good' [. . .] Life in
> Wyndham was full of excitement! [. . .] Oh my mother was so brave and so
> swift! [. . .] You see it was my father who drove the train . . . (Frame 2007, p.75-77)
> Mother and Father, then. Mother leaving school early to become a dental
> nurse [. . .] Mother, a rememberer and talker [. . .] Mother, fond of poetry and
> reading [. . .] Father, known as "Dad" . . . (Frame 2000, p.14-15)

In *Towards Another Summer*, Frame's emphasis on the consciousness of her protagonist, the extensive use of monologues with minimum narratorial comments and omitted quotation marks create a kind of character who is real and believable. In comparison with Grace's childhood stories, narrated in her own voice with the use of exclamation marks and informal language, the memories of Janet Frame in the autobiography come across as less immediate, more orderly, and even-tempered.

By the end of the first volume of the autobiography, there is a short chapter called 'Imagination', which begins with a passage where the narrator contemplates the nature of time, memory, and writing:

> Where in my earlier years time had been horizontal, progressive, day after
> day, year after year, with memories being a true personal history known
> by dates and specific years, or vertical, with events stacked one upon the
> other, 'sacks on the mill and more on still', the adolescent time now became
> a whirlpool, and so the memories do not arrange themselves to be observed
> and written about, they whirl, propelled by a force beneath, with different
> memories rising to the surface at different times and thus denying the
> existence of a 'pure' autobiography and confirming, for each moment, a
> separate story accumulating to a million stories, all different and with some
> memories forever staying beneath the surface. (Frame 2000, p.178)

The two concepts of time are seen here as characteristics of different stages in life: time is linear during childhood and a whirlpool during adolescence. Time is also linked to literary genres. Autobiography demands horizontal, progressive time, while fiction can be used to describe a whirl of memories. The notion of 'a separate story accumulating to a million stories' can be connected with an important metaphor of a 'mirror city', which appears later in the third volume. On the one hand, Frame challenges the idea of a 'pure' autobiography, suggesting that her autobiography cannot belong to this category. On the other hand, she hints at the artificiality of her autobiography, and present events in a chronological order: childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

In *Towards Another Summer*, memories of childhood intervene into the protagonist's present outside a particular order. These are unwanted 'dangerous memories' which 'her past life keep[s] erupting and spilling on her' [Frame, 2007, p.98]. For instance, fear-filled childhood memories of industrial school, where Grace's father used to threaten to send her sister Isy, overcome her when she suddenly spots a building with the same name on a map of Winchley [2007, p.98]. Overwhelmed by images from the past, Grace starts walking towards Winchley Industrial School. On her way, she continues to recall her past school years, family conversations, her sister Isy and her death. Her journey is both physical and spiritual. The example of Winchey Industrial School also demonstrates Frame's view on the nature of truth and reality. The industrial school in Winchley is real in the sense that, according to the map, it exists as a place in the neighbourhood. Yet, for Grace, it is only a replica, a shadow reminding her of the 'real' industrial school from her childhood and her past trauma and fears. The school has no particular significance for the protagonist. These fears constitute what is 'real' for the protagonist. They belong to the inner reality with only a partial, relative connection to the outer world of objects. Notably, Grace's attempt to find the industrial school in Winchly ends up being unsuccessful. Unlike the map that she follows in the book, there is no industrial school in the town, meaning that the past is gone, the 'real' destination that Grace thought she was approaching can never be reached.

Narrative and time in Frame's autobiography are different from those in her fiction. Yet, from time to time, in her autobiographies, Frame returns to familiar 'fiction' devices, giving way to the symbolic—as opposed to realistic—mode to convey her thoughts. The analogous moments between *Towards Another Summer* and the autobiographies demonstrate the consistency of the author's ideas of truth and reality across different genres and time periods, verifying her words that she is 'always in fiction mode' [Frame to Alley 1991, p.161]. This consistency sets up a foundation for the formation of the curiously public private author that we associate with Frame. It is a celebrity figure whose face is easily recognised by people who may have never read her.

Stead's assessment of Frame's *In the Memorial Room* could be accurately extended to all her works. Indeed, many of Frame's characters take after real people; the philosophical speculations of fictional protagonists and the writer, based on her ostensible nonfiction, tend to closely resemble each other. Although Stead sees this tendency as particularly problematic in Frame's *In the Memorial Room*, the similarities are hardly exclusive to any of Frame's texts. Frame understands the value of multiple personas and uses them throughout her writing to blend autobiography and fiction. Like her character Grace, she is 'a migratory bird, not a human being' [2007, p. 23]. She is always in between, in a state of transition, expanding boundaries of identity and belonging. Any attempt to interpret, categorise, find the 'real' Frame only creates another 'version' of her. There is a wider compulsion, throughout Frame's writing, to fly beyond, evade or confound formal categories which corresponds to her views on truth, reality, and the role of the imagination as an 'in-between'.

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Jenna Houston (University of Sheffield)

'I flake up papers that breathe like people': Blurred boundaries in the poetry and letter writing of Sylvia Plath

Abstract

The study of Sylvia Plath comes with the realisation that there are a plethora of interpretations of both her work and the life that she lived. She is famed for her poetry but is often forgotten in her role as a prolific and frequent letter writer and diarist. The recent publication of *The Letters of Sylvia Plath* in two volumes in 2017 and 2018 has allowed Plath scholars and letter writers alike to consider the wider significance of letter writing both from an academic and a communicative perspective. The letter as an object occupies an interesting position within literature. It is neither entirely factual, nor does it venture into fiction; rather, it sits on the boundary between the two. Letter writing is therefore an activity that is innately liminal because letters struggle to occupy one singular genre. In this essay I aim to discuss the evolution of the letter poem within the realm of confessional literature focussing specifically on Sylvia Plath. The influence of the epistolary throughout Plath's writing is clear and is demonstrated by the way that Plath's letter writing permeates her poetry in the form of her 'letter' poems. Notably, 'Love Letter' (1960), 'Letter in November' (1962), and 'Burning the Letters' (1962). This essay focusses specifically on the idea of a 'note to self', or, in other words, a 'self-letter'. Even when there is a direct address present, Plath's lyric poetry mirrors the self-letter form influenced by her correspondence and seen explicitly in her journal entries, thus creating blurred boundaries between writing and life itself.

Keywords: Letter Writing, Poetry, Autobiography, Epistolary, Sylvia Plath

In 1962, Sylvia Plath writes: 'I flake up papers that breathe like people' [1981, p. 204-5]. While she is talking about physically burning letters here, I think that this line serves as an interesting metaphor for the ways in which Plath's poetry plays with language. Her writing is simultaneously attached and detached from its roots in reality, and Plath ties the physicality of letters to the humanity of writing. Having 'papers breathe like people' in her poem immediately closes the gap between subject and object, and consequently blurs the boundaries between writing and reality.

Plath's poetry and prose come under the wider umbrella of confessional writing: a literary movement pivotal in bringing typically 'taboo' personal or emotional subjects such as sexuality, suicide, and trauma to the forefront of American literature in the late 1950s. Discussing the rise of confessional writing, Christopher Beach [2003, p. 155] notes that: 'The mode of confessionalism – whether one approved of the term or not – served as a model for poets who chose to reject modernist difficulty [...] in favor of a more relaxed or personal voice.' This introduction of a 'personal voice' to poetry and prose alludes to a new style of writing that is interested in the personal lives of those who are writing. As a younger member of the movement, Plath exploits the confessional mode to her benefit, taking inspiration from her own surroundings and writing with a 'personal voice', an approach to writing that made her name in literature posthumously. Plath explains in an interview with Peter Orr (2018) that: 'I think my poems immediately come out of the sensuous and emotional experiences I have [...] I believe that one should be able to control and manipulate experiences, even the most terrific, like madness'. Here, Plath explicitly identifies the boundary between life and writing for her, alluding to the confessional writing genre and highlighting that she is not afraid to discuss 'terrible' experiences. However, she simultaneously notes the importance of being able to 'control and manipulate' these life experiences into writing, which suggests that Plath was acutely aware of how to manipulate and blur the lines between writing and reality.

What the confessional writers have in common is the importance of letters in their writing lives; sometimes between each other in a personal/professional capacity, and other times to loved ones, just like Plath. It is no surprise, then, that the frequent correspondence of these poets is eventually translated into their writing – if letter writing is an art, then the influence of correspondence on poetry is inevitable. However, Plath was not the only poet to have blurred the boundaries between correspondence and writing and bring two different forms of writing together. Plath's letter poems were published in 1960 and 1962, however, also acknowledged for his prolific letter writing and letter poems is Robert Lowell. Lowell wrote the poem 'The Dolphin' (1973), which controversially makes reference to his ex-wife, Elizabeth Hardwick's letters within it.[1] Lowell [2003, p. 594] also penned a sequence of four letter poems to Elizabeth Bishop, (along with other poems inspired by her writing, or dedicated to her). Lowell's poem 'For Elizabeth Bishop 3. Letter with Poems for Letter with Poems' is self-consciously a letter both in its title and in its content - blurring the lines not only between poetry and letter writing, but also public and private. By contrast, Plath's letter poems do not always have a clear addressee, therefore making the lines between writing and reality harder to discern than Lowell's letter poems. The absence of a clear addressee in Plath's letter poems gestures towards different epistolary styles within her writing. Plath writes letters to herself as a 'Spoiled Baby', open letters with a more universal address, and letters with a direct address, all of which are in conversation with one another and illustrate the influence of the epistolary in Plath's work. Essentially, much of Plath's writing follows this self-letter form and the self-letter

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1. Thomas Mallon in an article for The New Yorker explains how the 'The Dolphin' 'Paraphrased and versified, some of Hardwick's letters, along with her spoken words from that supposedly merry phone call of June 25, 1970, would find their way into the book, without her permission.' (Mallon, 2019)

becomes a reflective act for Plath, which in turn mirrors the boundary breaking confessional writing genre. From 'Burning the Letters' to 'Love Letter' (1960), to 'Letter in November' (1962), Plath's letter poems demonstrate a blurring of boundaries between confessional writing and letter writing, creating a fusion of genres.

Plath's epistolary practice infiltrates most of her writing and its influence spans different genres illustrating that her writing, in any capacity frequently crosses literary boundaries. In connection to this, Tracy Brain warns that:

> [t]here is a danger here of erecting false and overly rigid boundaries between Plath's different types of writings, of believing that the poems could not possibly share qualities with, or even arise from, her epistolary practices. (2006, p, 142)

Brain makes an important point: creating boundaries between Plath's letters, journals, poetry, and prose, obstructs the fluidity that is innate to Plath's writing. Her epistolary writing also spills over into her journal entries and poetry, and I would argue that everything Plath writes is a form of self-letter, emphasising the influence of the epistolary on most of her writing. However, this is not to say that Plath never has a specific address in mind, but what it does mean is that Plath's writing is inherently reflective. This is most obvious in her writing of lyric poetry because it is concerned with thought and feeling in the same way that Plath's self-letters and letter poems are. Discussing lyric poetry more generally, William Waters [2003, p.1] argues that '[t]he poem persistently revolves around, or thinks about, the contact that it is (or is not) making with the person to whom it is speaking.' This is true of Plath's writing. Whether consciously or unconsciously, there is a central gravity which the poems move around; this sense of gravity tends to be Plath's own internal monologue – the 'you' of Plath's poetry might not be someone else, but a note to self, highlighting that for Plath, the idea of the self-letter is a poetic model.

During June 1953, Plath penned a letter looking forward to July and addresses it to 'an Over-grown, Over-protected, Scared, Spoiled Baby' [2014, p. 543]. The prolonged time span for which this self-letter was penned suggests that Plath was working through something, demonstrating her innate inclination to write in order to process the events in her life. In this entry, her words are self-critical, harsh, and seem to be an attempt to rationalise. The letter form functions as a 'note to self' – an entry that is there to remind and hold herself accountable, but this journal-letter also demonstrates how Plath's epistolary practice naturally spills over into her journal entries. However, 'Scared' in the middle of the self-critical language she uses, illustrates a moment of fragility, where she simultaneously seems to want someone else to protect her. She continues: 'It is not the time to lose the appetite, feel empty, jealous of everyone in the world because they have fortunately been born inside themselves and not inside you.' [2014, p. 543]. The context of this statement within the form of a self-letter also shows Plath trying to process the character flaws she sees within herself. She continues the entry telling herself that '[i]t is a time to balance finances, weighty problems: objectives and plans for the future' [2014, p. 543]. This neatly encompasses the ambition and drive that Plath had, even at twenty-one, and her ability to work through the problems she encountered through writing it down. Plath was no stranger to candour in her journals and letter writing. In a letter to Edward Cohen dated 28th of December 1953, just four months after Plath's first documented suicide attempt, she details the loneliness she feels during her time at McLean psychiatric hospital:

> I do miss you to talk to [...] (even though she is incarcerated temporarily she still has her lucid ... and very lonely ... moments) --- please do write me

frankly and fully what's been with you the last months or so. I would like somebody to talk to again very much. (Plath, 2018, p. 658)

This letter and the earlier journal entries illustrate that despite the common portrayal of Plath as hysterical, irrational, and suicidal portrayed in connection with her later poetry, it is far from the rational woman she documents herself to be at twenty-one and twenty-two. The frequency with which Plath's writing is taken out of its context to present her this way is unnecessary and further highlights the importance of representing her with her own words.

Furthermore, Plath wrote another self-letter in a journal entry five years later, illustrating her affinity for the epistolary form and its influence on all of her writing. On 1st October, 1957 Plath wrote a 'Letter to a demon:' explaining that:

> Last night [...] I could not sleep, although tired, and lay feeling my nerves shaved to pain & the groaning inner voice: oh, you can't teach, can't do anything. Can't write, can't think. And I lay under the negative ice flood of denial thinking that voice was all my own, a part of me (2014, p. 618).

This 'Letter to a demon' alludes to a destructive inner monologue that tells Plath she 'can't do anything.' This kind of self-criticism mirrors that of the journal-letter above but most of all demonstrates her perfectionistic inclination to do everything right, while also opening up a wider conversation surrounding a feminine tendency to believe you are not enough. Ironically, she writes about not being able to write, and while this writer's block is likely in connection with creative writing, it illustrates again that writing is a form of processing for Plath. The documentation of her 'ice flood of denial' is poetic in description and such descriptive language shows Plath's talent for allowing the reader to see exactly the image she tries to evoke; while her depiction of her 'nerves shaved' evokes the feeling of anxiety Plath is processing in this journal entry. Both examples further illustrate the ways that the epistolary, the autobiographical, and the poetic permeate one another. The journal entry gradually becomes more light-hearted as she writes 'I can say I am easier, more confident & a better teacher than I was the first day, I have done enough. I must face this image of myself [...] and not freeze myself into a quivering jelly', which further highlights the clarity this process of self-letter writing brings for Plath. (2014, p. 619). These journal entries are an important puzzle piece in understanding the role that the epistolary plays in all of Plath's writing, but they also explicitly identify the ground-breaking work she was doing by bridging the gap between the epistolary and poetry.

The self-letters that Plath penned are most self-conscious in her journals but are also translated into her poetry, as letter poems. Just as Plath's letter writing differs in tone depending on the recipient, her letter poems are also an example of the ways in which Plath utilises the skills she has learned through letter writing and translates them into her other works. Plath's poems differ in tone depending on the subject matter – something that her letter correspondence helped to develop. Plath's letter poems are unique because they all use the letter form to address an unspecified someone in different ways, whereas the rest of Plath's poetry, by comparison does not explicitly and directly address a 'recipient'. Not only does this emphasise the significance of letter writing itself but it further highlights the ways in which art and life overlap. In connection to this, Hermione Lee (2012, p. 461) argues that '[t]he familiar gestures of traditional letter-writing – "all my love", or "thinking of you" – tell us that it is a mistake to think of a letter as a solitary, independent, free-standing document.' While Lee is discussing letter writing more generally here, she emphasises that a letter is one half of a conversation and cannot therefore be read or understood as 'independent' or whole. Letters

require two people, but by contrast, Plath's letter poems do not. They take the form of an open letter, and are self-consciously one half of a larger, unreciprocated, conversation.

Letters as a form permeate Plath's writing; she writes a set of poems illustrating that letter writing does not have to exist between two individuals, but can also take the form of a poem or epistolary narrative – further complicating and blurring the boundaries between epistolary writing and poetry. Plath's letter poems are not only letters because of their titles, but also due to the way they are written. Both 'Love Letter' and 'Letter in November' address an unknown somebody, a recipient unaccounted for – making their letter form closer to a normal letter than initially meets the eye because they have an addressee in mind, even if as readers we do not know who that somebody is. This recipient unaccounted for also echoes Lee's argument that a letter should not be considered a 'free-standing document' because both poems illustrate that Plath's thoughts are not always extended onto the page. The opening line in 'Love Letter' illustrates this: 'Not easy to state the change you made.' (Plath, 1981, p. 147). The direct address to a 'you' immediately highlights that the poem is addressed to someone that is not disclosed. Unlike a regular letter which is addressed, signed, and sent, Plath's letter poetry is closer to an open letter – addressed to an individual, yet consciously intended for more eyes to read upon publication. By comparison, 'Burning the Letters' reads more ambiguously with no direct address, however what becomes clear in all three poems, is that despite their capacity for a universal address, they all fall under Plath's poetic model of the self-letter, which makes these poems simultaneously outward and inward looking. This means that Plath's letter poems occupy a unique position within literature because their epistolary nature means that the boundaries between writing and reality are constantly shifting. In connection to this, Waters discusses lyric address in his book *Poetry's Touch* and makes a case for the significance of addressing a particular 'you' in a poem as opposed to first or third-person address in poetry. He argues that '[s]aying you, and the irreplaceable particularity of that addressee, can be the center of a poem's gravity.' (Waters, 2003, p. 4) This is true of Plath's letter poems, the focus on the 'you' of the poem sets it apart from the other letter poems with its direct yet anonymous address and does become the center of the 'poem's gravity'. However, the 'you' addressed in this poem is not unique to Plath's self-letter form of writing, as she uses a self-address in her journals: 'oh, <u>you</u> [*sic*] can't teach, can't do anything' (2014, p. 618; emphasis added). Particularly in 'Love Letter', this open letter style of poetry illustrates Plath's acute awareness of an audience. Waters goes on to point out the differences between letter writing and poetry, arguing that:

> the sentences I say to people, or write in a letter, contain no formal
> marker of address at all, because context has sufficed to make it clear to
> all interlocutors who is speaking to whom, in what situation. Short written
> poems, however, usually lack the cues that would play this role. (Waters, 2003, p. 5)

This distinction between letters and poetry is significant; the envelopes on letters provide a clear individual address, as do physical conversations because there are physical indicators of address in both instances. By contrast, because the 'you' of a poem lacks the context that a letter or conversation has, it immediately makes the address both universal and arbitrary. Plath's letter poems are a letter addressed, marked by the 'you' and 'love' of the poetry, but also a letter out of context, because this 'you' and 'love' is an individual unspecified, which would not be the case with a physical letter. This clever and playful use of letter writing etiquette illustrates the fluidity and often, absence of boundaries within Plath's writing – both of which make her style of letter poem unique to her. Plath's letter poems might 'lack the cues' of 'To' and 'From' but she identifies that letter poems do not need these traditional forms of address,

with 'you' and 'love' intentionally creating epistolary ambiguity which allows a plethora of poetic interpretations including the introspective self-letter.

This ambiguity is signposted throughout the poem through many juxtapositions. The title 'Love Letter' suggests a romantic poetic exchange. However, there is a contrast between this and the content of the poem, which instead details the more tumultuous, negative emotions associated with love. There is a lack of reference to colour in this poem:

> black rocks as a black rock
> In the white hiatus of winter –
> Like my neighbors, taking no pleasure
> In the million perfectly-chiselled
> Cheeks alighting each moment to melt
> My cheek of basalt. They turned to tears,
> Angels weeping over dull natures,
> But it didn't convince me. Those tears froze.
> Each dead head had a visor of ice. (Plath, 1981, p. 147)

'black rocks', 'cheek of basalt', 'visor of ice' contrast the typical bright colour associations of love and diverts attention to 'dull natures' (1981, p. 147) suggesting that the love letter is, ironically, devoid of romantic love. The environmental connotations of this poem are also difficult to ignore and portray a narrative that goes beneath the surface of this poem: z'rock', 'basalt', and 'ice' as metaphors allude to a craving of stability of Plath's behalf but illustrate that she is the only person who can grant herself stability. 'Love Letter' constructs a wider commentary on the idea of façade and suggests that romantic relationships are not always what they appear to be. Furthermore, the deliberate exclusion of all the information a letter would usually contain; a specific addressee, a clear message, a signature, serves to remind us that while epistolary in nature, 'Love Letter' is a poem above all else. However, 'Love Letter' self-consciously demonstrates an overlap between Plath's practice of letter writing and poetry by emphasising the catharsis of writing directly to an unspecified someone. This is explored in the final stanza of the poem where Plath writes:

> Tree and stone glittered, without shadows.
> My finger-length grew lucent as glass.
> I started to bud like a March twig:
> An arm and a leg, and arm, a leg.
> From stone to cloud, so I ascended. (1981, p. 147)

After the colourless imagery in the previous three stanzas, to 'bud' illustrates renewal, perhaps after a realisation, or after finishing writing this letter poem. The change in tone at the end of this poem mirrors the self-letter form because it indicates a sense of catharsis and closure within the process of writing it. Plath's colourless reflections at the start of the poem and subsequent transition into budding March twigs highlights a process of self-reflection which is innate to the confessional genre but also reinforces the positive influence of letter writing throughout her other writing projects and the benefits of having fluid boundaries within her writing.

In contrast to 'Love Letter', which opens with its colourless descriptions, 'Letter in November' evokes all of the colours of the autumn season. The title of the poem 'Letter in November' suggests she is marking a moment in time, specifically, the thoughts and feelings she has during November. This poem therefore also becomes a self-letter, because it depicts

Plath's letter poems as inherently introspective. Heather Clark speculates in *Red Comet* whether the poem is actually about Al Alvarez, a long-time friend and biographer of Plath's. Clark explains that friends of Plath's remember her as "pink and glowing" after spending time with Alvarez [Clark, 2020, p. 807]. Clark speculates that 'Something happened during this London trip which inspired Plath to write "Letter in November," a love poem for Alvarez' (2020, p. 807), which adds another dimension to the poem because it shows Plath constructing a boundary around this new relationship by not alluding to who this lover might be. However, the poem's setting alludes to Plath and Hughes' *Court Green* home in Devon which immediately situates the poem within an autobiographical context, but also within the context of a self-letter, because the poem shows Plath processing her thoughts about the life and the place she lives – a clear moment of gratitude and a reminder to herself to take in the surroundings of the home and life she dreamed of. Clark [2020, p. 807] notes in *Red Comet* that '[u]nlike most of Plath's autumn poems, "Letter in November" describes real feelings in real time, largely unobscured by symbol and myth.' Clark is keen to not detract from the importance of symbolism in this poem, but the idea that Plath describes 'real feelings in real time' illustrates how Plath blurs the boundaries between symbolic writing and metaphor, and the realities of her personal life.

The poem serves as a letter to autumn, addressing the happiness that it, and nature itself brings to Plath. The opening of the poem, 'Love, the world / Suddenly turns, turns color.' highlights a direct and light-hearted address which is also reflected in Plath's rose-tinted and colourful depiction of Autumn. [Plath, 1981, p. 253] This celebration of the autumn season celebrates the death of nature in its cycle, but the depiction of autumn's arrival by Plath also alludes to a rebirth reminiscent of spring, except that the cold autumn weather will inevitably mean that this excitement towards life will be short lived, paralleling the 'sudden' burst of colour enjoyed by Plath. The idea that everything 'suddenly' becomes colourful alludes to both the sudden arrival of autumn, but also a new sense of life Plath has with the change in season. There are frequent references to 'gold' throughout, referencing the golden colours that autumn displays and Plath's admiration for the season:

> The apples are golden,
> Imagine it –––
>
> My seventy trees
> Holding their gold-ruddy balls
> In a thick gray death-soup,
> Their million
> Gold leaves metal and breathless. [1981, p. 253]

The 'golden' apples and 'Gold leaves' sandwich the 'thick gray death-soup' weather of November, illustrating a moment of happiness in the midst of the dull British winter. Furthermore, the language used here, 'My seventy trees', mirrors the reflective model of the self-letter, identifying not only the trees as hers, but the poem too by referencing herself within it. The colourful references throughout this poem are difficult to ignore; and Plath observes the 'Pods of the laburnum at nine in the morning. / It is the Arctic, // This little black / circle' [1981, p. 253]. The enjambment throughout mirrors the flow of a traditional letter, with the stanzas flowing into one another, presenting a stream of consciousness style of poetry but also a lack of awareness of any kind of audience for this poem. This suggests that the exercise of writing 'Letter in November' was more for herself than anyone else. Plath notes the 'pods of the laburnum' early in the morning, suggesting that their bright yellow colour is the only brightness

on this November morning. However, while laburnum flowers are a bright colour fitting with Plath's descriptions of her autumn surroundings, these trees are poisonous, which once again addresses the death and decay that autumn connotes. Plath describes her natural surroundings in an unconventional way: '[t]he barbarous holly with its viridian / Scallops, pure iron' [1981, p. 253]. Here, Plath constructs a brutalised description of the holly, comparing its sharp pointed leaves to the sharpness of 'pure iron'. Plath does this while also depicting the leaves on the trees as 'Gold leaves metal and breathless', again referencing strong metal, and 'breathless' similarly alluding to death and decay [1981, p. 253]. While Plath's poetry does exhibit 'a lifelong flirtation with suicide' [Moramarco, 1982, p. 147] or perhaps more accurately, a flirtation with the notion of death, Plath plays with these notions in 'Letter in November' where the presence of death is not overwhelmingly dark, and instead gestures towards death as more natural occurrence. 'Letter in November' also shows Plath's emotional capacity to 'control and manipulate experiences […] like madness' as she explains in her interview with Orr. Because of this emotionally intelligent approach to writing poetry, 'Letter in November' sits on the boundary between traditional poetry and letter writing, with Plath revealing enough of herself to create intrigue, but not enough to give too much away.

In contrast to 'Love Letter' and 'Letter in November', 'Burning the Letters' personifies the letters rather than addressing a specific person. While in 'Love Letter' Plath addresses a 'you' and in 'Letter in November' she talks to her 'love', in 'Burning the Letters' Plath talks about the letters in the third person: 'What did they know that I didn't?' [1981, p. 204-5]. While somewhat speculative, 'Burning the Letters' seems to have parallels to the letters Plath wrote following Ted Hughes' affair in which she explains to Dr. Beuscher in a letter that she found 'sheafs of passionate love poems to this woman, this one woman to whom he has been growing more & more faithful' [Plath, 2018, p. 843]. 'Burning the Letters' and this letter written to Dr. Beuscher immediately draws a comparison between real life and poetry, showing that for Plath, the boundary between life (her internal, personal, day-to-day experiences) and writing (for work as a career) was fluid. Furthermore, Plath uses a third person address, asking the letters 'What did they know that I didn't?' going on to explain that they 'Grinned like a getaway car.' [Plath, 1981, p. 204-5]. These lines depict Plath processing the idea of Hughes' letters knowing more than she does. However, in a sudden change of tone she writes 'a dream of clear water grinned like a getaway car' suggesting that whatever information the letters contained, Plath knows that she has escaped a relationship in a 'getaway car' and is better off alone. Because 'Burning the Letters' is the most ambiguous of the three poems in terms of poetic address, this realisation mirrors the poetic model of the self-letter more so than 'Love Letter' and 'Letter in November', because Plath self-consciously inserts herself into the narrative using 'I':

> I am not subtle
> Love, love, and well, I was tired
> Of cardboard cartons the color of cement or a dog pack
> Holding in its hate / Dully, under a pack of men in red jackets,
> And the eyes and times of the postmarks. [1981, p. 204-5]

I think here, Plath knowingly illustrates the notion of the self-letter by making herself the central persona in the poem. She simultaneously addresses her 'love' but in a passive tone, suggesting that the sole purpose of this poem is to process her own emotions rather than resolve them. 'Burning the Letters' therefore presents the epistolary influence of not just letter writing as a genre, but of the self-letter, and letter correspondence in general – demonstrating its integral role in Plath's epistolary writing.

In conclusion, Hugh Haughton [2015, p. 57] observes that '[t]he inherently 'literary' nature of letters is recognised when they figure as epistolary poems.' This understanding of letter writing frames letter writing as inherently poetic, and, in reverse, poems always as a letter – whether consciously or unconsciously. To take this approach suggests that all poetry must be addressed *to* someone, which of course, isn't necessarily the case but as Plath herself explains: 'personal experience is very important, but certainly it shouldn't be a kind of shut-box and mirror looking' (Plath & Orr, 2018). This highlights the importance of personal experience, but also of taking inspiration from other things around her. Plath's letter poems are significant because they identify the blurring of boundaries between letters and poetry, two genres that are generally accepted as separate despite their natural ability to overlap when you consider the self-letter as an additional poetic model. However, Plath brings the two together, merging life with writing in a way that presents letter writing as more than its communicative form. Plath's letter poems illustrate her affinity for writing letters but also for breaking the rigid literary boundaries created between genres, which ultimately allows her writing to flourish.

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Fragile Boundaries and the Butchered Body in Janice Galloway's 'The meat'

Abstract

Janice Galloway represents women's experiences of gendered violence in her 1991 short story 'The meat', in which the body of a murdered woman appears as meat in a butcher's shop. 'Meat' is a term used to express the dehumanisation, objectification, and consumption of women and their bodies, and Galloway literalises this metaphoric treatment. This article provides a close textual analysis of Galloway's story to explore how vulnerability to butchery reveals the instability of a range of conceptual boundaries.

Carol J. Adams's concept of the 'absent referent' enables a comparison between the treatment of animals and women under patriarchy, with particular regard to domestic violence. The slippage of butchery from the commercial sphere upon animal bodies, into the domestic sphere upon the human body, demonstrates the difficulty of maintaining conceptual boundaries. Applying Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection further reveals how the polluting properties of the meat-body actively broach spatial boundaries and posits the meat-body as an ambiguous object which threatens order.

The meat-body represents the breakdown of cultural understandings of species difference and normative food categorisation. The collapse of the distinction between species witnessed in 'The meat', wherein both animals and humans may be butchered, introduces the potential for cannibalism which threatens further the distinction between Self and Other. Galloway's meat threatens a breakdown of meaning and exposes the fragility of the symbolic order, revealing boundaries of the body and culture to be unstable. This article asserts that the meat-body, as the macabre result of a violent patriarchy, exposes the dysfunction and fragility of social systems and invites the deconstruction and interrogation of the patriarchal cultural order. Adams's concept of the 'absent referent' enables a comparison between the treatment of animals and women under patriarchy, with particular regard to domestic violence. The slippage of butchery from the commercial sphere upon animal bodies into the domestic sphere upon the human body demonstrates the difficulty of maintaining conceptual boundaries. Applying Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection further reveals how the polluting properties of the meat-body actively broach spatial boundaries and posits the meat-body as an ambiguous object which threatens order.

The meat-body represents the breakdown of cultural understandings of species difference and normative food categorisation. The collapse of the distinction between species witnessed in 'The meat', wherein both animals and humans may be butchered, introduces the potential for cannibalism which threatens further the distinction between Self and Other. Galloway's meat threatens a breakdown of meaning and exposes the fragility of the symbolic order, revealing boundaries of the body and culture to be unstable. This article asserts that the meat-body, as the macabre result of violent patriarchy, exposes the dysfunction and fragility of social systems and invites the deconstruction and interrogation of the patriarchal cultural order.

Keywords: body, meat, fiction, abjection, gender

Introduction

This article is concerned with the symbolic function of meat in Janice Galloway's 'The meat', from her 1991 collection of short stories entitled *Blood*. A short text of fewer than four hundred words, 'The meat' depicts a hunk of meat hung above a butcher's counter that makes the shop's customers uncomfortable. As it begins to decompose and its stench becomes unignorable, the butcher throws the meat to stray animals in the alley to be eaten before taking a remaining scrap of hair and ribbon as a reminder to be stowed 'beneath the marital bed' (Galloway 1991, p.109). With this reference to the marital in the story's final lines, the reader realises that the meat was the body of the shopkeeper's deceased wife, murdered and displayed in her husband's shop. This article hereafter refers to the woman's exhibited remains as the 'meat-body', to emphasise its dual status as both human corpse and edible butchered carcass. This term additionally stresses the potential for any human body to become 'meat' through butchery, highlighting the conceptual closeness of these two terms.

With a wealth of symbolic connections to masculine strength, violence, and dominion over animals, meat is simultaneously a prestigious food item for Western diners and one which is strictly policed (Fiddes 1991, p.18). Considering meat as a food item, Jorge Sacido-Romero comments that of all different food types, 'meat is the one that provokes the most ambiguous reactions in humans' (Sacido-Romero 2019, p.138). Of animal origin, yet considered in de-animalised terms, connoting both power and vulnerability, and regarded as both appetising and repugnant, meat's multiplicity of meaning indicates issues with conceptual organisation and offers challenges to a range of conceptual boundaries. This article demonstrates how Galloway's 'The meat' employs these symbolic functions and this sense of ambiguity to explore and critique the violence of patriarchal control through a parallel with animal slaughter and butchery.

Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection explores the experience of horror when the distinction between Self and Other is lost; within this article, Kristeva's abject facilitates an examination of the crisis of boundaries inspired by the meat-body. Carol J. Adams's concept of the absent referent then supports an interrogation of parallels between violence against animals and violence against women, demonstrating how patriarchal violence is culturally hidden in ways that replicate practices of meat production and consumption. The continuing threat of violence represented by the meat-body is considered in terms of pollution, and this article offers an examination of how easily this threat is sublimated through the destruction of the meat-body. The article establishes that the body's treatment as meat collapses the species boundary and exposes the mechanisms of patriarchy that conceal violence against women.

Meat and the Abject

An analysis of 'The meat' utilising Julia Kristeva's interpretation of the abject begins to reveal how the horror of the text is achieved. '[T]he jettisoned object', the abject refers to that which is rejected, cast off, or discarded as waste material (Kristeva 1982, p.2). The abject causes a crisis of conceptual ordering through the loss of distinction, while to be confronted by the abject is to experience abjection, a feeling of horror at this breakdown of meaning. In Kristeva's words, 'it beseeches a discharge, a convulsion, a crying out' (1982, p.2). The meat-body's transgressive ambiguity, then, in Galloway's 'The meat' is an encounter with the horror of the abject.

For Kristeva, the corpse represents the ultimate waste product, writing that the 'corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life' (Kristeva 1982, p.4). Where the dead body exists as an extreme example of abjection, the meat-body offers the image of a corpse that has been further defiled. Physically fragmented through butchery, the meat-body exposes that the body is susceptible to the violation of dehumanising violence and presents a waste product that is unexpectedly presented as edible.

Within the butcher's shop, the dead animal bodies are not granted the status of corpses and are instead framed in terms of their edibility, and the butcher's wife is treated similarly. Her body is transformed from corpse into a fragmented edible 'carcass' by butchery and by its context within the butcher's shop [Galloway 1991, p.108]. Where the abject defies categorisation, the meat-body exists as both corpse and food, both animal and human.

The meat-body is nearly indistinguishable from other meat within the shop, raising issues with notions of human exceptionalism. The importance of meat consumption for Kristeva lies in its function as a means of separating the human from the animal in Western culture; humans in this culture do not eat kin, therefore animals are not kin. This distancing from the animal world moves humans away from so-called 'animal' actions such as murder, yet the 'abject confronts us [...] with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal' [Kristeva 1982, p.12]. When a human is capable of the 'animal' behaviour of murder, as evidenced by the meat-body, the distinction between animals and humans is eroded.

The potential edibility of the meat-body further threatens to initiate the customers in the 'animal' act of cannibalism. For Todd Chambers, cannibalism pushes deeper into Kristeva's animal territories, indicating 'that humans have become monsters or animals' as it requires considering the human body 'as simply another form of meat and, in doing so, denies humans their radical species break from animals' [2016, p.86; p.86]. The violence of Galloway's butcher challenges a range of conceptual boundaries, as Lorna Piatti-Farnell's *Consuming Gothic* notes that the slaughter of a human 'makes the differentiation between alive and dead, human and non-human, food and consumer, very difficult to discern' [2017, p.143]. Ingesting human meat would broach the boundaries of the consumer's body, wherein the 'Other' would be taken into the 'Self', complicating the distinction to the point that 'meaning collapses' [Kristeva 1982, p.2]. The meat-body is at no point consumed by humans; the line of cannibalism is never crossed. Nevertheless, when the human body is treated as an animal carcass, the threatening potential for anthropophagy disrupts conceptual boundaries of the animal and the human, and tabooed and normative foods. Russell West demonstrates that cannibalism is a practice contiguous with several key 'domains of abjection-disgust', such as food, waste products, and the human corpse; the meat-body, simultaneously representing these domains and suggesting the potential for customers to engage in cannibalism (and therefore animal behaviours), powerfully evokes the abject [West 2007, p.236]. The existence of the meat-body proposes that there is no significant difference between species, as human bodies are also vulnerable to the violence and consumption typically enacted upon animals in the production of meat.

The meat-body is consumed by 'small animals and strays' when it is discarded into the butcher's alley [Galloway 1991, p.109]. Conceptions of human dominion over animals are disrupted as animals can now consume a human body, thus challenging the idea that humans are separate and exempt from the animal world. The animals who consume the wife's body are considered of 'lowly' status, being small scavengers rather than apex predators, indicating that humans are not only part of the natural world, but that they do not occupy an unassailable position within it. Perceived hierarchies of consumption are overturned and shown to be fallible, as Galloway's meat collapses the species boundary and queries concepts of human exceptionalism. The abject is 'what disturbs identity, system, order', and the meat-body disrupts concepts of animal and human difference through the inhuman behaviour of the butcher, the presentation of the human corpse as edible, and the violation of consumption hierarchies [Kristeva 1982, p.4].

Hidden in Plain Sight

As it is specifically a woman made indistinguishable from meat, exploring gender in the text is necessary. The butcher of the story is indicated only by the pronouns 'he' and 'him', which

codes him as a man. With the butcher figured as male, those butchered are opposingly figured as female, and the gendering of these roles is exposed. Rosemary Deller asserts that 'meat' is a slippery term when connected with the body and may be used in oppositional gendered ways. Meat can function in a 'masculine' sense, as 'a metaphor for bodies that are solid, muscly and substantial', yet also as 'a metonym for bodies that have been figuratively objectified, fragmented and rendered consumable (typically viewed as a feminised position)' (2015, p.11; p.11). Galloway's meat-body fully embodies Deller's feminised meaning of meat, made edible through its physical fragmentation and objectification. Carol J. Adams similarly comments on the multiplicity of meat's gendered meanings, demonstrating that "[m]eat' becomes a term to express women's oppression, used equally by patriarchy and feminists, who say that women are 'pieces of meat'" (2010, p.59). Here, Adams asserts that 'meat' symbolically conveys both the metaphoric fragmentation and consumption of women under patriarchy, and women's experiences of being dehumanised, animalised, and objectified. 'The meat' explicitly engages with this metaphor, making literal the metaphoric treatment of women and their bodies in the hands of a patriarchal system. The butcher's wife is physically transformed into meat, representing the extremes of gendered violence.

      Sara Martín Alegre writes that 'The meat' is an 'incisive criticism of a patriarchy so dominant that we don't see women's ill-treated bodies, not even when their sad remains are fully displayed' (2009, p.462). Though the reader 'sees' the meat-body, a full understanding of its origins and a recognition of its meaning is not achieved until the closing of the story, when the body has been reduced to waste residue. Therefore, the presence of the murdered woman is invisible to the reader despite being the focus of the narrative. However, the butcher's customers may well 'see' the woman's body. Sacido-Romero adds that this indictment of patriarchal violence is all the more cutting considering the customers recognise the meat, directing attention to the fact that the hanging meat was '*familiar enough* in its way' (2019, p.137, emphasis in original). The hair and tartan ribbon of the carcass offer some indication of the meat-body's origin, and the text asserts that '[f]olk seemed embarrassed to even be caught keeking in its direction' (Galloway 1991, p.108). Customers recognise the meat's origins, and their embarrassment stems from their refusal to acknowledge their recognition of the butcher's wife and engage with the true significance of the meat-body. For Sacido-Romero, '[t]he community of unnamed/ungendered shoppers, thus, tolerate homicidal domestic violence' (2019, p.137). In Galloway's text, those who experience domestic violence are hidden in plain sight, where the unwillingness of community members to acknowledge the violence, even in fatal instances, ensures the perpetuation of these abuses.

      Adams discusses at length the connection she sees between meat and women who experience domestic violence, referencing an Amnesty International advertisement that 'protested domestic violence by showing women wrapped in cellophane and sold as meat' (2010, p.336). Images like these in the cultural imagination show a conflation of the treatment of women by domestic abusers to farmed animals by butchers, suggesting similar mechanics of oppression. Adams & Josephine Donovan demonstrate that 'the ideological justification for women's alleged inferiority has been made by appropriating them to animals' (1995, p.1). In a culture where women are animalised in this way, and animals are objectified, fragmented, and consumed as meat, distinctions in their treatment dissolve, and women too may become 'meat'. The breakdown of this boundary invites the reader to draw parallels between cultural attitudes towards women and animals and acknowledge the intersections of violence that encompass gender and species.

      Adams's concept of the absent referent helps further connect women's treatment with that of animals consumed as meat. The referent for Adams is the animal life lost in the

production of meat, which is made 'absent' by butchery that fragments and disguises the animal body to be less recognisable, and by the use of language that rebrands body parts as meat, flank, or chuck [2010, p.51]. This absence allows consumers to partake in the consumption of animal bodies without confronting the animal origins of the meat. In the butchery and presentation of the woman's body in 'The meat', the same processes are undergone to deny the origins of the meat-body; she is renamed and objectified. Despite these processes, the meat-body is still familiar to the customers and retains its hair and ribbon that mark it as something other than the butcher's usual products. That the butcher's living wife is now absent and replaced by the hanging meat, ensures customers make a connection between meat and its origins, no matter how disguised these may be. However, even when made visible, presented above the counter, her body is intentionally ignored by the public who are unwilling to interrogate their culture's role in her death and face the truth of her fate. Adams theorises that 'absent referents link violence against women and animals', citing numerous instances of violence against animals being used as a metaphor for violence against women, particularly sexual violence [2010, p.53]. The butcher's wife embodies Adams's absent referent, hidden in plain sight and wilfully ignored, allowing Galloway to call into question societal acceptance of violence against both women and animals.

Melanie Joy's concept of carnism, the dominant belief system that supports the consumption of specific animals, similarly explores how dominant ideologies are largely hidden from sight. Joy explains that '[w]hen an ideology is entrenched, it is essentially invisible' [2010, p.31]. As carnism suggests the killing and consumption of animals is naturalised and thus invisible in Western cultures, so too is the oppression of women in patriarchy. Galloway disguises this violence within the butcher's shop and uses the story's conclusion to reveal the unseen mechanisms of patriarchy that conceal the realities of violence against women.

The obfuscation of the woman's body is present even in the title of the story. Sacido-Romero suggests that Galloway's decision to name this text 'The meat', 'instead of "The carcass" or "The butcher"' stresses the abject status of meat and misleads the reader, contributing to a sense of 'surprise when the truth of a horrid parricidal act is revealed' [2019, p.138]. The choice of title emphasises the edibility of the body and conceals the humanity of the butcher's wife. As a cow is absented by being renamed 'beef', so too is the wife made absent by 'language that renames dead bodies before consumers participate in eating them' [Adams 2010, p.66].

Notions of the body as hidden within the text are further demonstrated by the lack of urgency in the scene. Despite the brevity of the piece, the meat-body has hung for nine days before the story begins. The narrative voice is a disembodied third person, and the story has no direct speech, removing any effect of mimesis in the text. No clear interiority is offered for the perspectives of the butcher or his customers, and the choices of focus suggest an emotional removal from the scene. The narrative avoids visual confrontation with the body and attention skirts around the nearby items in the store, listing items that have been purchased: 'wafers of beef, pale veal, ham from the slicer, joints, fillets, mutton chops' (Galloway 1991, p.108). This meandering approach renders the woman's body nearly invisible and mimics the diverted eyes of the shop's customers. Val Plumwood asserts that meat 'totally erases the speaking position: there is no possibility of encountering it as expressive, narrative subject' [Plumwood 1999, cited in Deller 2015, p.143]. Those who have been transformed into meat via butchery are unable to voice their own stories, and even in the realm of fiction, this voicelessness is evident. The butcher's wife is rendered incapable of contributing to the narrative, silenced both literally in death, and metaphorically by a culture that neither looks nor listens to those who experience domestic abuse. The choice of narrative voice in Galloway's 'The meat' further denies this woman's voice, echoing systemic violence that silences those who experience gendered violence.

The narrative voice suggests the location of this scene through the use of Scots vernacular. The requests for 'potted head' rather than head cheese, the 'wee minding' of the ribbon (notably, a *tartan* ribbon), and that the customers avoid 'keeking' locate this butcher's shop in Scotland [Galloway 1991, p.108; p.108; p.109]. The language provides a sense of locality and proximity for Scottish readers, suggesting domestic violence resides in the nation and its high streets. A Scots dialect indicates Scottish customers and passers-by are complicit in violence against women in their refusal to look and their refusal to question, discomforting Scottish readers and encouraging them to grapple with their own complicity in violence against women.

However, a local dialect in the narrative voice may arguably emphasise the universality of this patriarchal violence; in a 2018 interview with Jorge Sacido-Romero, Galloway suggests that her writing tackles 'the eventual absurdity of the world in general' and regards Scotland 'as being a part of the universal, like Spain or Bangladesh or Sweden are. Like everyone is' (Sacido-Romero 2018). Galloway comments: 'Out of the particular comes the universal — no?' (Sacido-Romero 2018). Instead of reinforcing a national boundary, this perspective on the particularity of Scots vernacular implies the potential for this scene to be replicated elsewhere. All figures in the story are unnamed with no descriptions of physical appearance, producing a sense of indistinctness that suggests the events of the story may occur anywhere. Employing regional vernacular may indicate that all localities with their own dialects similarly hold the potential to house such acts of violence.

Contagion and Containment

The description of the meat-body focuses on its decay; its edges have 'congested and turned brown', its 'surface has turned leathery and translucent', and the ribs have become 'sticky' [Galloway 1991, p.108; p.108; p.109]. Despite the flies and the appearance of the meat-body as it decomposes, it is the smell that begins to 'repulse' the butcher, 'clogging the air' of the shop [Galloway 1991, p.109; p.109]. Galloway's selection of the words 'congested' and 'clogging' suggest symptoms of illness, and that the meat-body threatens to cause physical sickness in those who encounter it. Meat is considered an especially polluting food item, with Adams pointing to the threat of Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, *E. coli* contamination, listeria, campylobacter, and salmonella poisoning that can be present in meat [2010, p.18]. Galloway's meat-body reflects similar anxieties around contagion and is ultimately discarded into the back close near the shop at nightfall. Vermin and stray animals consume the jettisoned remains, again contributing symbolically to ideas of disease and decay as these animals survive on waste and are associated with the spread of illness. The meat-body exemplifies a sense of pollution, as demonstrated by the sausages in its shadow remaining unpurchased until they are moved away. As customers refuse to buy the products positioned close to the body, the narrative asserts that '[s]omething about the meat was infecting' [Galloway 1991, p.108].

This smell cannot be contained within the butcher's shop, as it 'seep[s] under the door to his living room' [Galloway 1991, p.109]. The meat-body breaches the spatial boundaries of the shop, as its odour spreads throughout the building. The abject can no longer be confined within the butcher's shop and living space, and at this point, the meat-body is fully ejected from the shop. Nick Fiddes directs attention to Mary Douglas's work which asserts that 'pollution and contagion represent far more than the presence of mere toxins; they signify an ideological threat to *order*' [1991, p.187, emphasis in original]. The imprecise 'something' about the meat-body that infects suggests more than the spreading smell of a rotten food product; the violence it represents has also spread beyond the acceptable limits of the shop. A sense of movement is confirmed as the meat-body hangs 'restless, twisting on its spike' [Galloway 1991, p.108]. The meat-body's scent bleeds into domestic spaces from the workspace, reflecting how acts of butchery similarly refused

containment within the workspace; in the wife's murder, it is apparent that the violence of butchery is not confined to animal bodies within the butcher's shop. Butchery refuses to stay confined within a finite space, as the spatial boundaries of the home are crossed, collapsing notions of the workspace and the domestic space as discrete and separate. The violence 'infects' a human body within the home, illustrating the translatable and contagious potential of violence against animal bodies, as Galloway utilises cultural anxieties around meat's ability to pollute to demonstrate the spread of unimpeded violence. The very word 'butcher' has been used to describe 'abhorrent figures such as brutal murderers and torturers because of the similar violence and bloodiness that accompany the butcher's job', suggesting the ease of transference from animal body to human body [Holm 2017, p.157]. Where women are animalised, and animals are killed for consumption, the distinction between their bodies is negligible for the butcher.

This notion of violence as capable of spreading between bodies reframes customer responses to the meat-body. The customers of Galloway's short story are ungendered, as Sacido-Romero identifies, and they do not question the meat-body. However, Jeffery Sobal's work on masculinity and meat states that most often, women are relied upon for the purchase and preparation of food, including meat, suggesting that women may be the most common customers here [2005, p.144]. Their averted gazes may be out of fear regarding their own fates in a culture that devalues and dehumanises women. Being hung above the butcher's counter is not only a cruel indignity for the murdered woman; the presentation of the body offers a warning to other wives of the consequences of failing to conform and submit to the demands of patriarchy. Kristeva states that any crime is abject in its demonstration of the fragility of law, and particularly those 'immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady' transgressions [1982, p.4]. Where murderous violence is enacted within a marriage, the terms of the union are violently breached. Without consequence for the murder, the law's fallibility is seen, as it upholds and facilitates domestic violence. The murder, butchery, and hanging of one body reveals the potential for all (women's) bodies to be treated similarly, and this threat of further slippage silences other potential victims. Violence is contagious with this reading. Butchery has overstepped the boundaries of which bodies are acceptable victims and does not limit itself to one human victim, but rather threatens to spread further, refusing containment. In this interpretation, the customers' silence may be a form of self-protection, rather than the protection of a murderer. The meat-body suggests a collapse of the distinction between the self and others, where all women may suffer similar fates; this woman could be anyone.

Reinterrogating Breached Boundaries

'The meat' calls attention to power structures that have enabled the murder of the butcher's wife when she is made visible to the reader in its final lines. Galloway's text consistently challenges arbitrary norms of behaviour, even in the refusal to capitalise 'meat' in the story's title, as is customary. Conventions, such as mechanics of English writing, socially acceptable behaviour, and normative foods, are shown to be vulnerable to breaches. Galloway's short story calls for an interrogation of normalcy and draws attention to the strangeness of cultural norms; for norms that oppress, this attention may well permit them to be reassessed.

That the meat-body necessarily indicates a social breakdown and destruction of order is arguable here. While customers experience an abject confrontation with human potential for inhuman brutality, theoretically, the murder is an extension of practices already accepted and perpetuated culturally; both violence against women and meat consumption are normalised and widespread. Rather than suggesting that the meat-body represents a collapse of social order, Galloway's text proposes that the butcher's actions are simply practices of patriarchy and

carnism exaggerated to the extreme. Galloway offers the reader an image of the macabre results of a violent patriarchal social system, calling attention to the dysfunction integral to its value systems and exposing cultural reluctance to perceive or acknowledge this dysfunction. For Galloway, even when the human casualties of this system are on full display, 'dropped overhead from a claw hook, flayed and split down the spinal column', they are rendered invisible until the evidence of their existence can be hidden, consumed by strays, and stored under the bed [Galloway 1991, p.108].

That the woman's body can so easily be made to disappear, leaving only hair and ribbon to be 'salvaged and sealed' away, suggests issues with how the crisis of the meat-body is managed [Galloway 1991, p.109]. The horror of the butchered human body presented among animal meat products does not disrupt the status quo within the text. Meat is not reinterrogated by the customers, since they continue to buy meat products while simply avoiding the items in physical proximity to the threatening meat-body; Adams's absent referent is made briefly visible, then absented once more. No argument is raised against violence towards women, and the butcher seemingly evades any social consequences for his actions. Easily, Galloway's scene can return to a semblance of 'normality' with no resolution other than the destruction of the offending meat-body. The story's conclusion refuses any progress or change. When the body is destroyed, the source of abjection is nullified, and the crisis it represented is subsumed and neutralised once more. The horror of the text stems not only from the breakdown of organisation but from how effortlessly this violence is accepted.

Similarly, Kristeva comments that the reader's confrontation with the abject may not require further interrogation after the close of the text. Kristeva associates the aesthetic experience of the abject through literature with a sense of poetic catharsis, wherein the reader experiences 'an impure process that protects from the abject only by dint of being immersed in it' [Kristeva 1982, p.29]. From Kristeva's perspective, Galloway's text provides the reader with catharsis from fears of patriarchal violence, where the encounter with the abject may provide relief from anxieties of patriarchal violence, rather than encouraging engagement with the violence the text critiques.

At the close of the story, the 'minding' of the wife's ribbon is placed beneath the marital bed, suggesting that the space she once occupied in the bed is now vacant and available for a future partner. Whether these tokens are kept as a reminder of her in life or of her death is never explained. The events of 'The meat' may well be repeated in the future, beyond the scope of the story. While the conceptual boundaries of body and species may be shown to be fragile, a concerted effort is made by customers to ignore the meat and its transgressions, and the wandering narrative attention replicates the tendency towards ignorance for the reader. In these ways, Galloway's text offers a vision of how gendered violence is accepted into culture and perpetuated.

Conclusions

The wealth of cultural associations that meat holds, including gendered violence, contagion, and consumption, allows Galloway to express a multitude of ideas in a very short piece of fiction. Galloway's short story utilises the abject ambiguity of meat to expose the fragility of social order, species boundaries, and bodily boundaries.

As rotting meat infects and refuses containment, so too does the violence that created the meat. By connecting the body of a murdered woman and animals butchered for meat in one ambiguous 'carcass', Galloway demonstrates the fragility of cultural conceptions of species boundaries [Galloway 1991, p. 108]. The abject pollutes until its source may be destroyed.

In presenting the human body as inherently edible and vulnerable to consumption

by others, conceptual divisions between the human body and meat are eroded. The meat-body challenges the notion of humanity as exceptional or beyond the natural world, positioning the species as just another animal. Deller explains that when a human subject is made consumable, meat-eating is no longer a stable way to secure human domination as 'one recognises the thin, at times barely perceptible, line between human corpse and animal carcass' [2015, p.20]. The perceived hierarchy of consumption founded on ideas of human dominion is shown to be unstable, and questions of order and distinction arise.

Galloway's short story demonstrates how the mechanisms that mystify and obscure animal bodies in carnist systems are replicated in instances of domestic violence, illustrating overlapping tactics of oppression. The conceptual alignment of women with animals breaks down distinctions between them, eroding the species boundary through their shared treatment and enabling similar fragmentary and objectifying violence to be enacted upon women.

Galloway's text plays with the seen and the unseen, making visible the invisible violence against women. Through the disruption of conceptual boundaries, this text demonstrates how thoroughly naturalised misogyny and the consumption of animals have become and exposes connections between these culturally entrenched ideas.

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The eSharp editorial team recognises that the article 'Advocating Occupation: Outsourcing Zionist Propaganda in the UK' (eSharp, 25.1) has caused considerable offence, for which we would like to apologise. eSharp welcomes discussion and debate across the full range of topics, even those which are controversial. But along with such debate comes the responsibility for articles to be rigorous, well-balanced, and supported by evidence. This article does not meet those standards of scholarship. In particular, this article employs some discursive strategies, including a biased selection of sources as well as the misrepresentation of data, which promote what some would regard as an unfounded theory regarding the State of Israel and its activity in the United Kingdom.

eSharp is a student-led scholarly journal with the aim of publishing high-quality research produced by post-graduate researchers. eSharp is run entirely by postgraduate researchers from within the University of Glasgow's College of Arts, with a new editorial team being formed each year. Therefore, while we cannot speak for previous editorial boards, the eSharp team affirms that we strive for the highest standards in academic research and publishing. We would also note that, with the support of the staff at the Graduate School of the College of Arts, new checks and balances have been introduced to the eSharp editorial protocols since the publication of this article, to provide better assurance that the articles featured in future issues of eSharp are of the highest quality.

eSharp exists to provide opportunities for publication of researchers with little or no experience in academic publishing in order to educate those researchers in the publishing process as well as to refine their presentation of their work. Therefore, an additional benefit of publishing in eSharp is the pedagogical dynamic between the contributing scholars and the editorial team, by which the journal's editors can offer more gracious and constructive feedback than one might expect to receive from other academic publications. In recognition of this, the eSharp team affirms our commitment to the highest standards of academic research, the process of peer-review, and the publication of high-quality articles in our current and future publications.

The eSharp team is committed to transparently addressing the concerns raised about this article and to the integrity of the journal. There was considerable discussion among the members of the editorial team and College staff on this matter, but ultimately, with the aim of providing maximum transparency, we have decided not to remove the article from the journal, but to leave it as is with this editorial appended.

eSharp Editorial Board (2021) and the Graduate School of the College of Arts

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