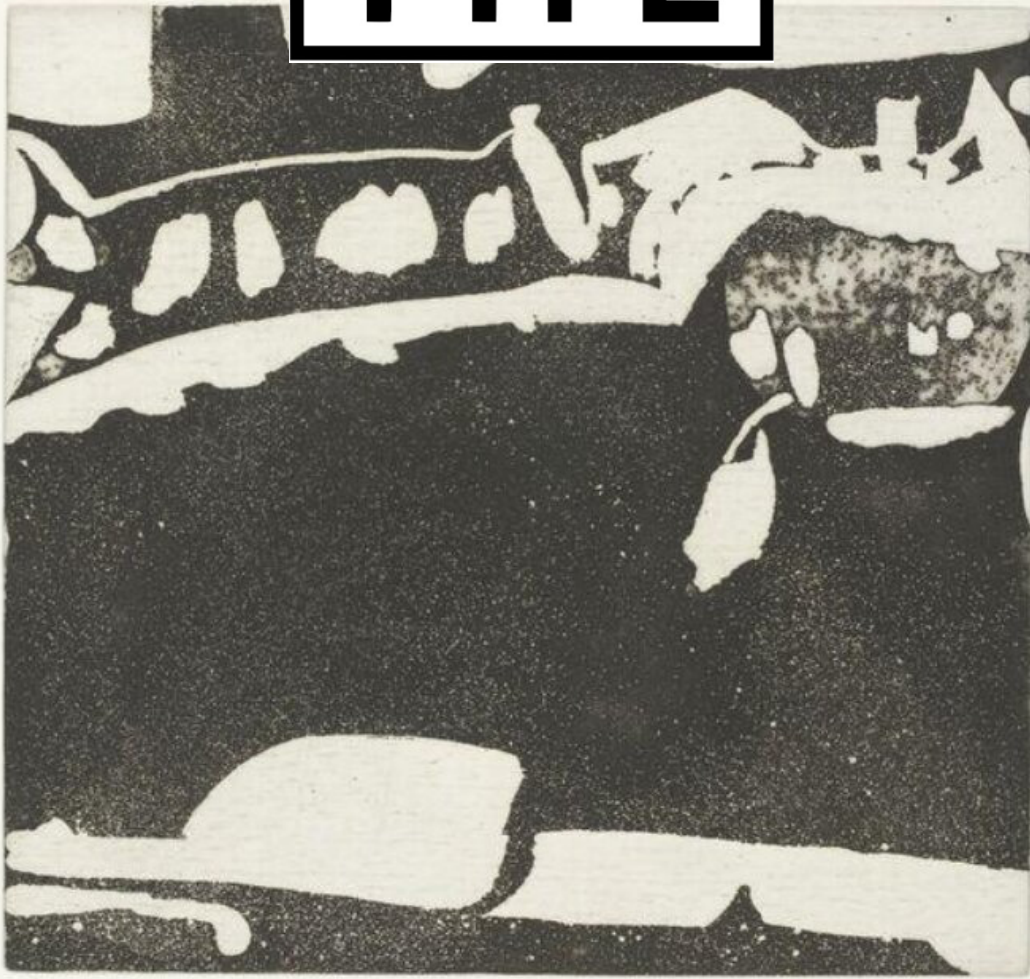


MOVE ABLE TYPE



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Busy Skyline

Stephen Cohen '71

16. PROMISE



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PROMISE

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Promise

Introduction

“That’s the point of a promise, [Cromwell] thinks. It wouldn’t have any value, if you could see what it would cost you when you made it.”

The Mirror and the Light by Hilary Mantel (2020)

A promise is an essentially human speech act—a performative utterance of intended action, which assumes or conceives an imagined, but uncertain ethical responsibility to our future selves. Self-reflexive and anchoring, it both constrains *and* creates the self to come; as an intersubjective force, it binds us to our promisee(s) *and* commits us to future obligations; it is both public *and* private in the sense that it is performed by and for us, the intended other party, and for the witnesses of the promise. It is a test of moral courage, self-constitution, and fulfilment: we cannot know what will happen in the duration of the promise to which we must commit *come what may*. The vow has temporal duration and power—it imagines, anticipates, and creates our future. It makes and breaks our worlds. This temporal force is imbedded in its etymology, borrowing partly from Anglo-Norman *promesse* and from Latin *promissum*, literally something sent forth. The prefix *pro* can also suggest delegated agency – in making a promise we speak of *and for* others. For moral philosophers, it has profound ethical significance; it underpins societal operation and relations. Self-creating and -fulfilling, it creates and organises epistemic parameters that are not yet determined at its inception. Its impact on the parties to the promise has ontological force; it brings them into being in their altered, created, and reordered world. Potentially excessive or self-limiting, the promise can impact, and yet be rendered inoperable or constraining, drawing other subjects into its passionate force.

Promises abound in fiction, creating, and determining intersubjective relations; their inherent narrative dynamic impels the plot over time. When is a promise performed? When can we evaluate and judge it? Is that beyond, literally, the book’s recognition? This uncertain yet sustained trajectory of a promise, and its ethical, moral, and, overwhelmingly, social implications are vital components of writers’ imaginative exploration of subjects negotiating their worlds. Fiction makes its own promise to us as readers to allow us imaginative and sensory simulation to experience and judge our social and material existence. Promises and their evocation in literature are socially and culturally contingent. There is a double promise here of the promissory act itself *and* its textual representation as an important component of literature. Reading about the enactment of promises through the human and ethical drama of their working out is both a thrilling spectator sport and, we hope, a paradigm of this dynamic intersubjective human connector. By reading about the trajectory of a promise, we learn by example the complications and dangers of the verbal act and its consequences. Far from being shunned, bonds between humans are a vital vector of our human condition and, perhaps, give us joy, hope and comprehension even in their tragic and costly versions. The contributions to this edition examine many different examples of promises and emphasise the essentially human power of the speech act and its adherence.

Bret van den Brink argues that promises are ontological commitments to the settled templatary states of virginity and marriage in Sir Philip Sidney’s *Arcadia* (1593); *falling* in love is an intermediate, unstable, labyrinthine passage – a secular trajectory that mirrors that of scriptural

paradise, fall, and redemption. His ideas enforce the primacy of promise as a vital aspect of being in the world, of self-regard, and its construction. The process of falling in love is a disordered and, potentially, disastrous movement between the promise of achieved virtuous states. Virginity, in this construction, is as much a metaphysical and spiritual reality as physical. As a gift from God, it cannot be attained by an effort of will. *Arcadia's* Philoclea cannot make this vow, as she has neither the agency nor the grace. Falling in love forces her precipitously to unmake and remake her vow with the peril that this offers to self-knowledge and construction – ‘a more quick opening of her mind than she minded’. Philoclea’s initial promise was epistemically contingent – she could not know that she would fall in love. She does not break her vow but rather remakes it, ‘governing her passion with reason’; marriage holds the promise of unity with another person and crucially of generation of self and child. Promises in this schema of literary romance, based on Renaissance Neoplatonist philosophy and Protestant theology, are reflexive and rooted in the World– they represent a ‘fall into mortality’ whilst instigating a commitment to a better self-knowledge, and a virtuous life.

Turning to literary representation, Sohini Raychaudhuri reveals the double promise of scary stories for child readers in the collection of Alvin Schwartz – master folklorist and storyteller. Banned and controversial for their alleged terrifying content, these stories are drawn from universal collections, scattered and strengthened by oral retelling, and are revitalised by Schwartz and his illustrator, Stephen Gammell. For Chaudhuri, the fulfilled moral promises of revenge and restitution offer an exemplary and, in the end, comforting trajectory for children. The art of storytelling, especially the *jump* is exciting—it models for children and their parents a communicative model of being in the world and our making of contracts in order to live fairly together.

Luke Basil Louis Ow Zhi Heng considers the ideal of peaceful cooperative living promised by the social contract implicit in the strong governance proposed in Hobbes’ *Leviathan* (1651). Ow suggests that this promise is inherently unstable, and its potential vicious failure was illustrated half a century earlier by Shakespeare in his play *Titus Andronicus* (1594). For Hobbes, the promise of his utopian community denies the human impulse to construct fragmented alliances and conflict; in return for subjects’ collective restraint of their egotistic impulses, the sovereign has a reciprocal obligation to act on behalf of the well-being of his subjects. This mirrors the bond between God and his subjects we have explored in Old English poetry. Ow puts Machiavelli in dialogue with Shakespeare in his *Discourse on Livy* (1531), in which the earlier writer urges vigilance to guard against the false promises of a self-proclaimed benevolent and cooperative governance. Titus begins the play as a loyal and valiant subject who is betrayed by his ruler. The reciprocity of a pledge to loyal subservience envisaged by Hobbes—that the state has a corresponding obligation to its subject—is overridden by human pride and greed. Ow argues that it is the particular pursuit of glory that corrodes the mutual and protective bonds of the state and its subjects. A commonwealth has bounds—implicit promissory obligations which, if relied upon rigidly and without consideration, are undermined and overthrown by self-seeking, which Machiavelli asserts as intrinsic to human nature. To this human flaw, Shakespeare gives a bloody unravelling of severed ties. Titus fulfils his side of the bargain to an almost unconscionable degree, sacrificing sons and daughter to the sovereign, and his own flesh to protect the state and his fellow citizens. In Hobbes’ purview, the soldier outshines his master to build and protect the commonwealth. This implicit bargain is not kept. As Machiavelli predicts, the emperor is fearful of his reliance on, and potential eclipse by this service, regarding Titus as a rival for his authority. Hobbes understands the dangers of a ruler’s vainglory—that it can become an insatiable hunger upsetting any rational transactional behaviour and negating reciprocal obligations, even those that promise a stable and prosperous commonwealth. For Ow,

this dynamic could be seen as a map for Titus' demise. Saturninus breaks his covenant to his people, and to Titus, recklessly without thought for security and well-being that Hobbes sees as his duty and responsibility. Without a clear understanding and enactment of these reciprocal obligations, society degenerates into factional chaos and violence. Machiavelli predicts that binding laws and customs will fray as good intentions fade to weak and wicked ones. Political systems need to recognise collective will and understanding to regulate the balance of reciprocal obligations that underpin a healthy society. Promises and rules are only as strong as the protagonists, and their faith in societal beliefs which enact them. If, as Hobbes predicts, men are governed largely by appetite, or by cunning according to Machiavelli, a strong enlightened ruler is needed to direct their obligations to society. Saturninus is an absurdist negative model, unable to fulfil any sustainable bargain of civil interpersonal behaviour. He fails to deliver the promise of the commonwealth and Machiavelli warns of the danger of such a breakdown.

Both Alexander Williams and Kennedy Marie Crowder examine the promise of cultural resistance and expression for African Americans. For these critics, America has failed in its promise to provide life—no ontological acknowledgement or acceptance has existed in American society despite the explicit post-emancipation promise. Crowder examines the historic failure of undertaking in its literary expression of disappointment, pragmatism, and subversion. Williams notes that Fanon's 'existential deviation' not only adumbrates twentieth-century white hegemonic exclusion but is made more complex in the current era. For both writers, unresolved hauntology and 'middle-passage epistemology' operates as a wake, unsettling and unbalancing the possibility of a reckoning and recognition of Black lives. This schema operates, perhaps, as a broken or unfulfilled promise – slavery and its aftermath are profoundly antithetical to the undertakings of the America constitution, and of the later enshrining of human rights.

Kennedy Marie Crowder argues that the concept of linear time functions as a false and even disingenuous promise to reckon with the aftermath of slavery, and indeed permanently delays laying to rest slavery's ghost. Through reading three contemporary American texts through the comforting Western linearly progressive, yet restrictive and regressive, lens of 'middle passage epistemology', she offers an alternative more complex, compelling, and accurate version of the lived realities of slavery's legacy, and false promises of uncompromised life and freedom. A western teleological version of history overwrites the reality of recurring violence, and restriction; it eliminates the memory of cultural heritage and struggle, as well as the need for a promise of recognition and restitution in order to *live*. The urge to 'move on' paradoxically validates the concept of progressive linear time without paying attention to the need to stop, acknowledge, and make amends.

For Williams, rap as a cultural expression of Christina Sharpe's 'wake work'—work that bears witness to the cumulative trauma that results from the experience of new world blackness—promises ontological resistance and the opportunity of reparative solutions to the psychopathy of the Black man's existential deviation. Childish Gambino, as the avatar of twentieth-century African American experience and embodied being, operates to ventriloquise the ghosts and animate the Black man's lived experience. The rapper draws on African oral traditions to give animated meaning to Sharpe and McKittrick's evocation of ontological fracture, violence, and the resultant haunting. Williams believes that the rap artist extends and makes specific these abuses. Speech and syntax appropriated, yet altered, from the coloniser's hegemonic constitutive language of civilisation is made transcendent, a narrative of anti-black singularity, and resistance. It fulfils Fanon's purposing of language as a vital ontological vector. Gambino as an economic object confronts the colonial ledgers of the black archive, promising a renewal and repossession. Williams's close reading shows that through lyric repossession, retelling, and cathartic alleviation, rap promises hope for linguistic redemption; ghostly knowledge is passed through

the generations and articulated through rap and storytelling—the expression of an inverted reworking of dark promise.

Bruce Xiao discusses the early literary evocation of promise in his reading of Old English hagiographic poetry. Using linguistic analysis, he shows the complex and performative qualities of promise, and the operation of self-promise—that the adherence to a promise, especially to God, is an act of self-fulfilment and development. Promise in this analysis is a visible demonstration of personal commitment, and spiritual exemplar to others. It operates as its own reward to self. As a performance of saintly intercession, it is an act of sacrifice to believers *and* a gift to self. He considers that promise is central to the spiritual legitimacy of religious communities. The pledge made to God is reciprocal, connecting heaven and earth. Furthermore, the distinct literary qualities of these poems offer a secondary promise to readers and listeners, one of the satisfying communicative and constitutive conceptual action of pledges, as well as their aesthetic fulfilment. In his reading, Xiao puts the imagined religious community of God and his followers in dialogue with the qualitative performance and growth of self through faithfulness and steadfastness. The sustained undertaking of promise is a vital expression and construction of religious faith and community. Promise can be read through this conviction of covenant. For Xiao, the foundational covenant in Christian soteriology is re-presented in a vernacular promise that underpins subsequent interpretations of the reciprocal gesture. He argues that epistemic intellectual growth—figurative seeing—is crucial in the development of a pledge to and covenant with God. Words themselves and their delivery become vital to the performance, comprehension, and consequence of the promise; the speech-act is inherent. There is, nonetheless, an expectation of physical suffering, to test faith in God's reciprocal commitment. The saint must demonstrate his temporal extended fidelity in both words and deed.

Nabanita Chakraborty argues for an understanding of the contingent socially-situated nature of a promise in her analysis of Elizabeth I's rhetorically conditional vow to her subjects to marry. Once again, the perilous exchange of virginity for marriage and its generative promise is under consideration. Chakraborty examines the performative promissory act, noting the obligations of the audience to believe the promisor to effectuate the contract and yet, in this case, to understand the concept of *kairos* – the propitious moment for action without which the promise cannot be fulfilled. Through a careful reading of Elizabeth's speech with consideration of speech act theory and rhetorical precepts, Chakraborty demonstrates the queen's proficiency in promissory construction by putting the onus of trust on her subjects, yet protecting her political position with conditional pragmatism. This reading complicates feminist readings by showing the queen as a skilled and wary political operator. Whilst Philoclea is able to fulfil the conditions to move from one promised state to another, with grace, Elizabeth's rhetorical strategy keeps her subjects literally in suspense.

A wide range of creative writing submissions explore the sensory promise of life, reciprocal obligation, and the redemptive power of promise to undo harms. Lydia Pearson's poem 'An Unspoken Promise' pledges words in a temporal suspension to make good the harms of living. She offers a commonality of word and comprehension, a weaving together to be stronger in the world through shared voice and utterance. Misha McDaniel's deliciously sensory story 'this is what august tastes like' reminds us of our temporal obligation to being in the world with a warning to honour our mutual commitments to each other and to the natural world. In her translation of Savita Pathak's 'No One is Voiceless', Sonakshi Srivastava evokes the childish present and ever-possible future, holding out hope and promise to the weary. The child's overbrimming zest for life, animating all he glimpses, underscores this fragile promise. Fiona O'Malley captures the personal trust inherent in promise; a commitment to the sea is life enhancing and fulfilling, but ultimately a pledging of one's safety. The ocean may be

treacherous, but entrusting your being and fate to larger forces may in the end be a human compassionate gift. Nicholas Samaras in his poem ‘The Promise’ manifests the sadness of promises that elude us—we can only promise ourselves but have not the power or vision of determining our end—all our promises are a contingent leap of faith.

The book reviews in this edition engage with ideas of the self-reflexive power of promise to create and bind, sometimes in destructive ways. Freddy Conway-Shaw shows us how, for Stuart Burrows in *Henry James and the Promise of Fiction*, the promise is a governing trope in Henry James’s fiction. Burrows structures his argument with a rigorous theoretical grounding to show the weight of a Jamesian promise, world-making and -breaking, with its existential impact across the author’s fiction. These promises are self-reflexive acts—strengthening and constituting being. Intriguingly, Conway-Shaw further emphasises that textual production, as much by the protagonists as by the author, imbues fiction itself as a promissory act. In her review of Victoria MacKenzie’s fictional account of Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich, *For thy Great Pain Have Mercy on My Little Pain*, Sarah Wallace contrasts the protagonists’ devotional promise to God in all its life-renouncing and -embracing qualities. She mourns Kempe’s narrow if spirited refusal of the world and feminine promise, celebrating Julian’s doubled devotions, and wishing that MacKenzie’s poetics could animate the joy and suffering of this spiritual anchoress more deeply. Catherine Marcotte notices the double nature of promises—those we make to each other *and* the ones we make to ourselves—in her review of *Milk Fed* by Melissa Broder. The entangled narrative of religion and myth, with female conventions around thinness and queer attraction allow for a complication of human and narrative promise. She shows how our commitment to ways of being in the world are conflicted by the ideological stories we are fed. This novel about eating and taking care of our bodies shows the bad and then better ways to understand the restrictions and liberations of epistemic beliefs in order to fulfil the double nature of personal promise. Kushali Mahajan makes visible the implied promise to care and protect in return for patriarchal domination – a domestic version of Luke Louis Ow’s political theory. Her review of the forthcoming publication of the translation of Andrea Bajani’s autofiction *The Anniversary* details the pain and rupture of broken commitments.

* * * *

This issue of *Moveable Type* is a satisfying outcome to the pledge we make to our contributors to bring their voices and ideas together, creating an issue that exceeds its constituent parts. I am grateful for their faith in us and for the quality of their writing. The team at *Moveable Type* has worked generously together – my thanks for support from Olivia Ho as reviews editor, and to Ilona Mannan as creative editor. Emma Cavell and Daniel Evans brought their skilled editorial advice on Old English. Eric Langley advised incisively on Shakespeare, and has generously fulfilled his promise as faculty advisor. Anthony Ossa-Richardson has brought his editorial wisdom, warm encouragement, and expertly fixed wayward matters of format and typography. Excellent peer review and editorial support was given by Jennifer Kenyon, Naomi Reiter, Catherine McNaughton. Zoe Guttenplan transformed the quality of the journal’s appearance with her invaluable advice and knowledge. I am grateful to you all.

Sarah Chambré
Editor in Chief

ARTICLES

Philoclea's Vows: Falling in Love, Protestant Neoplatonism, and the Structure of Romance in Sidney's 1593 *Arcadia*

BRET VAN DEN BRINK

Romance as a literary mode is deeply involved with ideas of chastity, virginity, falling in love, and marriage, and Sir Philip Sidney's 1593 *Arcadia* is no exception. Since Sidney's romance was written in a period when, as a consequence of the Reformation, ideas of virginity, chastity, and marriage, and the vows people made concerning them, underwent major changes, and since the *Arcadia* was a vital influence on many subsequent early modern texts, from Shakespeare to Milton and beyond, Sidney's treatment of these topics is of great interest. Historically informed by Protestant and Christian Platonist texts and otherwise methodologically indebted to Northrop Frye's conceptualization of romance, this article considers (paying special attention to the character of Philoclea) how the plot of Sidney's work is organized by the trope of falling in love, and the relationship of this trope to the Christian narrative of Fall and Redemption.

Keywords: Marriage, Virginity, Chastity, Elizabethan Literature

Early in Sir Philip Sidney's Elizabethan prose romance, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (1593), the heroine Philoclea vows to live a virginal life. Soon thereafter, she falls in love with Pyrocles, and she realizes that she cannot uphold her vow. Instead, she and Pyrocles exchange a promise of marriage, which is fulfilled by the end of the romance. This article examines Philoclea's apparently conflicting vows of virginity and of marriage, along with the very idea of *falling* in love, in light of Northrop Frye's structuralist vision of romance as well as the Christian Neoplatonism of Sidney's early modern contemporaries. Its examination concludes that in Sidney's romantic and Christian Neoplatonic vision, the act of falling in love is a loss of the metaphysical unity of the self, and this loss of self-unity can only be amended through marriage. Hence, Philoclea's false vow of virginity (which, as we shall see, Martin Luther would say she was under no obligation to uphold) is redeemed by her true vow of marriage and the marriage itself. There are deeper obligations at play than she initially assumes. Thus, in the course of the romance, Philoclea passes from chastity in one mode to chastity in another. The structuralist portion of the argument finds its starting place in Harold Bloom's comments on the trope of 'falling in love' in *Take Arms Against a Sea of Troubles*:

The paragon of erotic justice, Rosalind in *As You Like It*, charmingly says to Celia, 'From henceforth I will, coz, and devise sports. Let me see—what think you of falling in love?' (Act 1 Scene 2). I recall an exchange between John

[Hollander] and me in which I wondered aloud at the trope of ‘falling,’ and he replied: ‘Harold, it could hardly be *rising* in love.’¹

Elsewhere in that work, Bloom comments on love using the archetypal categories of ‘temple’ and ‘labyrinth’ as Angus Fletcher devised them (under Frye’s influence) in *The Prophetic Moment*:² ‘If achieved love is templar, then the perplexing road to get there will be labyrinthine, and pragmatically most of our erotic relationships will take place on the threshold between assurance and perplexity.’³ In the context of this study, one must add to Bloom that the virginity that precedes falling in love is itself templar, and that the templar state of ‘achieved love,’ in early modern England, would be a contented marriage.

This journey from one temple to another through an intervening labyrinth relates closely to Frye’s structuralist model of romance as a pre-generic literary mode (or, rather, ‘*mythos*’).⁴ As Emily Griffith Jones explains, ‘Frye’s structuralist model’ envisions romance as ‘a secular quest that echoes the scriptural narrative of fall and redemption—and that tends to be creatively fixated not just on the redemption but also on the fallenness, loss, and longing’.⁵ In Sidneian romance (and very often in early modern romance more generally), the correlates for paradise, fall, and redemption are virginity, falling in love, and marriage.⁶ Virginity and marriage are ideally both forms of self-unity: the first is a unity of the self and the second is the unity of oneself with another. Thomas P. Roche Jr. states the matter well in *The Kindly Flame*: ‘To surrender one’s self to love is either to lose one’s integrity or to transmute it into a higher unity.’⁷ Both states of unity (virginity and marriage) are analogous to the unity of the Godhead, yet virginity was traditionally the more privileged of the two in Christianity before the Reformation, as well as in Neoplatonism. Before we deepen this discussion of chastity and virginity in the early modern romance, it will be worthwhile to underscore a comment that Frye makes in *The Secular Scripture*: ‘What is symbolized as a virgin is actually a human conviction, however expressed, that there is something at the core of one’s infinitely fragile being which is not only immortal, but has discovered the secret of invulnerability that eludes the tragic hero.’⁸ Virginity, in this context, is not primarily a physical but a metaphysical reality. While it is inextricably linked with one’s corporeality, with the flesh being a kind of medium through which one experiences the world, virginity as an essential quality is nonetheless very much distinct from the exterior world. It is a vital aspect of the incorporeal integrity of one’s being. For Frye, ‘the objective correlate for

¹ Harold Bloom, *Take Arms Against a Sea of Troubles: The Power of the Reader’s Mind Over a Universe of Death* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), p. 438.

² Angus Fletcher, *The Prophetic Moment: An Essay on Spenser* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971). For Fletcher, the temple is an archetype for what is sacred and ordered (pp. 14-23) and the labyrinth is the archetype of what is profane and chaotic (pp. 24-34).

³ Bloom, *Take Arms Against a Sea of Troubles*, p. 491.

⁴ Northrop Frye, ‘The *Mythos* of Summer: Romance’, in *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), pp. 186-206.

⁵ Emily Griffiths Jones, *Right Romance: Heroic Subjectivity and Elect Community in Seventeenth-Century England* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019), p. 5.

⁶ One might point to *The Faerie Queene*’s Belphoebe or the Lady of Milton’s *Comus* as heroines whose virginities are tried but not lost, and who are portrayed, in some ways, as paradisaic; similarly, *The Faerie Queene*’s Britomart is a figure whose chastity must be perfected through marriage after falling in love. One might compare this suggestion with Frye’s discussion of the ‘Heroes and Heroines of Romance’ in *The Secular Scripture*, pp. 65-93.

⁷ Thomas P. Roche, Jr., *The Kindly Flame: A Study of the Third and Fourth Books of Spenser’s Faerie Queene* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 55.

⁸ Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study in the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 86.

this kind of integrity' is 'the diamond set in a black horn' worn by Sidney's Pamela, which bears the motto, 'yet still myself'.⁹

In the Christian Neoplatonism of the Renaissance, virginity was not simply a matter of whether or not one has had sex. Rather, it was more exacting and enigmatic, requiring one to be virginal in both body and in mind. This exacting status was envisioned as something divine. Marsilio Ficino writes in his *Platonic Theology*, 'The seventh and most outstanding of all the soul's alienations is that which results from the chastity of a mind devoted to God, as Orpheus teaches Musaeus in the hymn to all the gods.'¹⁰ Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa considers the matter similarly in his *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*.¹¹ Of course, Renaissance authors drew from earlier sources. Methodius of Olympus, for example, notes in his *Banquet of the Ten Virgins*, a work modelled on Plato's *Symposium*, that *parthenia* (virginity) is just one letter away from *partheia* (nearness to God). Ambrose affirms that 'he who has preserved his chastity is an angel'. In *The Confessions of the Flesh*, Michel Foucault comments thus on this passage:

And it is not just in a metaphorical sense, or to designate a certain attitude of the soul, that the angelic nature of virginity is invoked. It is substantial. It passes through matter. It operates throughout the world and transfigures things. Here on earth it is not simply waiting for the other world: it really carries the latter into effect¹²

It is clear, then, that virginity is the state of life that most overcomes one's attachment to the flesh and draws one into the life of the spirit. Human beings, as compounds of flesh and spirit, may live like beasts, or like angels, and the virginal life is the life that actualizes one's angelic potential. Nonetheless, reformers often harboured skepticism concerning virginity in its form of vowed abstention. In a sense, these theologians thought virginity was against nature, but in another sense, they thought of it as surpassing nature. As such, they contended that it was chiefly a gift from God rather than an exercise of the will; and because of its unearned nature, one was not in a position to determine how long it would last. Hence, one could not make a vow to be a virgin because one lacked the agency to make this choice. In a wedding sermon on 4 August 1545, Luther made this point with great vehemence: '[I]t is worth nothing that you swore your vow or oath to remain chaste when you do not have the power to keep it. If you have sworn this, you have sworn it to the devil and are not obliged to keep it, for it is opposed to God.'¹³ Roche cites John Jewel, the Bishop of Salisbury, who makes a similar point in a milder register: '[C]hastity is no ill thing: it is the special gift of God. But an unclean and a filthy life under the colour of a "vow," or the name of "chastity," is a wicked thing before God . . . Though chastity be a singular gift of God, yet is it not good for him, that hath not the gift of chastity.'¹⁴

In Philoclea, Sidney presents a character who vows herself to a virginal existence but wavers because her vow is not supported by the necessary grace. In fact, the heroine makes and revokes

⁹ Ibid., 86.

¹⁰ Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, trans. by Michael J. B. Allen, 6 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001-6), IV, p. 167.

¹¹ Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, 'Of Abstinence, Fasting, Chastity, Solitude, Tranquility, and Ascension of Mind', in *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, trans. by Eric Purdue, 3 vols. (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2021), III, pp. 698-703.

¹² Michel Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh: Volume 4 of The History of Sexuality*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 2020), pp. 129, 147.

¹³ Martin Luther, *Luther on Women: A Sourcebook*, ed. and trans. by Susan C. Karant-Nunn and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 99.

¹⁴ Roche, *The Kindly Flame*, p. 115.

her vow in the same chapter.¹⁵ Here, a few days before the arrival of Pyrocles, she invokes this sentiment in verse: 'You living powres enclosed in stately shrine / Of growing trees', and vows, 'My virgin life no spotted thought shall staine' (172). Sue P. Starke associates the *topos* of the *hortus conclusus* with 'the pure and isolated self';¹⁶ here the enclosure of trees in which the divinities presiding over virginity abide is connected with the *hortus conclusus* of the virgin whom they protect. She inscribes her verse on 'a goodly white marble stone', the pureness of which she takes to represent her 'purest minde' and the hardness of which she takes to represent the constancy of her 'tempred hart' (172). In her poem's third stanza, Philoclea utters an apostrophe to chastity which would suit with equal justice those literary paragons of early modern chastity, Spenser's Belphoebe and Milton's Lady:

O Chastitie, the chiefe of heavenly lightes,
Which makst us most immortal shape to weare,
Holde thou my hart, establish thou my sprights;
To onely thee my constant course I beare.
Till spotlesse soule unto thy bosome flye,
Such life to leade, such death I vow to dye. (172)

Here Chastity is equated with Diana, the virgin goddess of the moon, and the angelic life of chastity is portrayed as leading to the soul's superlunary flight. This process is very close to the deification the virgin undergoes in Milton's *Comus* (according to the Elder Brother):

[O]ft convers with heav'nly habitants
Begin to cast a beam on th' outward shape,
The unpolluted temple of the mind,
And turns it by degrees to the souls essence,
Till all be made immortal.¹⁷

In Milton's work, the person-turned-daemon may follow the Attendant Spirit '[t]o the corners of the Moon'.¹⁸ In her apostrophe, Philoclea commits herself to the supernatural vocation of the virgin life and is (seemingly) fully cognisant of its merits and austerity.

Philoclea, however, cannot follow the path of virginity. Although she 'did not dissemble' when she wrote her verse, she has 'chaunged since' (173). Philoclea's change accords with the view of reformers such as Luther who, as noted above, advised against vows of chastity as being against (or, rather, as surpassing) human nature. Starke's evocative comment that Philoclea's change 'involves a fall out of eternity and into time, like a fall out of Eden into mortality' touches at something essential for the work.¹⁹ Nonetheless, for Sidney, and for his *Arcadia* (the pagan world of which is tinged by his theology), such a fall lies in the shadowy past of prehistory, and it is presumed that all persons must endure the postlapsarian world's trial by existence. The angelic life of virginity is a flight from this fallen world, which is why Foucault, in explicating Ambrose's view, contrasts 'virgins who, because of their chastity, pass from the world to heaven',

¹⁵ Philip Sidney, *The Prose Works of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. by Albert Feuillerat, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), I, bk. 2. Ch. 4. All quotations are from this edition and are cited in text in parentheses.

¹⁶ Sue P. Starke, *The Heroines of English Pastoral Romance* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007), p. 32.

¹⁷ John Milton, *Complete Shorter Poems: With Original Spelling and Punctuation*, ed. Stella P. Revard (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), ll. 459-63.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, l. 1017.

¹⁹ Starke, *The Heroines of English Pastoral Romance*, p. 61.

with ‘the fallen angels who, because of their “intemperance”, have fallen into the world’.²⁰ Given Sidney’s generally Protestant audience, Philoclea’s mistake was less in breaking the vow than in making it at all.

The life of perpetual virginity, if it is to have any spiritual value, must be exacting in both mind and body. As Foucault writes in a discussion of Basil of Ancyra, ‘What soul could be called a virgin if it kept the one that it loves in an embrace “with the incorporeal hands of thought”?’.²¹ Having fallen in love with Pyrocles, the virginity of Philoclea’s mind is spoiled. She says as much herself: ‘[T]he purenes of my virgin-minde be stained’ (260). Were she to attempt to live by the vow that she inscribed in marble, she would but ‘labour to lay marble coulours over [her] ruinous thoughts’ (260). Rather than becoming a whitened sepulchre, she pursues the virtuous road open to her—married chastity. She might be guilty of ‘a more quick opening of her minde, then she minded to have done’ (261); however, the viciousness of such an opening is venial at most, and it still allows for what Roche calls marriage’s ‘higher unity’.²² It, in short, sends her into the labyrinth between temple and temple.

Both the fall into love and the possibility of attaining a higher, templar unity through love are enabled by love’s unitive nature. Early in the romance, Sidney emphasizes this aspect through a discourse between Musidorus and Pyrocles. While the latter is already smitten with Philoclea and disguised as a woman, the former has yet to fall in love with Pamela. As such, Musidorus’s eulogy of love’s unitive power is degraded by a misogynistic view of woman:

[T]rue love hath that excellent nature in it, that it doth transform the very essence of the lover into the thing loved, uniting, and as it were incorporating it with a secret & inward working. And herein do these kindes of love imitate the excellent; for as the love of heaven makes one heavenly, the love of vertue, vertuous; so doth the love of the world make one become worldly, and this effeminate love of a woman, doth so womanish a man, that (if he yeeld to it) it will not onely make him an Amazon; but a launder, a distaff-spinner; or what so ever other vile occupation their idle hands ca[n] imagin, & their weake hands performe. (78)

One might detect in this passage the touching Aristotelian notion that friends become second selves for one another, as well as the harmful Aristotelian misogyny that men and women cannot be friends, because friendship necessitates equality between the friends, and men are intrinsically superior to women.²³ Freud called ‘being in love’ an ‘over-estimation’ of ‘the object’;²⁴ some of Sidney’s contemporaries, such as Giordano Bruno, might have agreed with him. In *On the Heroic Frenzies* [1585], a work dedicated to (and arguing against) Sidney, Bruno writes, ‘I could scarcely regard [a woman] as worthy, without blushing, of loving physically, even at the momentary height of her beauty and her capacity to beget children according to God and nature.’²⁵ As someone in love, Pyrocles cannot abide by this view, being unable to see his beloved

²⁰ Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh*, p. 147.

²¹ Ibid., p. 163.

²² Roche, *The Kindly Flame*, p. 55.

²³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2019), Book 8, pp. 141-162.

²⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1949), p. 73. See also Harold Bloom, *Ruin the Sacred Truths: Poetry and Belief from the Bible to the Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 108.

²⁵ Giordano Bruno, *On the Heroical Frenzies*, trans. by Ingrid D. Rowland (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023), p. 11.

as anything other than lovable, and he explicitly links his love for Philoclea with his love for God. Even Musidorus, upon falling in love with Pamela, recants his former position, saying, '[B]y love we are made, and to love we are made' (113). In this view, the love that makes us is immediately the love of our parents, but ultimately the love of God, and we are made to love not only so that we might love one another and to create offspring, but also to love God and to create others who will likewise love him. Such love is further given an epistemological value, for to love something is to know it in a similar manner as to how God knows it, for God's knowledge is his love, or, as Nicholas of Cusa writes, 'Your seeing, Lord, is your loving.'²⁶ If one overcomes the blindness of infatuation, the person in love is in the best position to know the value of love and the value of their beloved. As Spenser writes, 'Such ones ill iudge of loue, that cannot loue, / Ne in their frozen hearts feele kindly flame.'²⁷

Love is nonetheless perilous in the *Arcadia*. Falling in love is to risk the integrity of one's selfhood, opening it in all its vulnerability to another self. Due to 'Cupides deepe incision,' the person in love lives 'in self Division' (50). Losing their intrinsic self-unity, characters in love become other than themselves until they attain the new unity of marriage. (Some characters, it must be said, are more extremely divided in themselves than others, as Pyrocles and Musidorus may be said to fall into greater degrees of self-division than Philoclea or Pamela). This inward transformation of love's self-division is portrayed outwardly in the two princes: Pyrocles becomes Zelmane the Amazon, and Musidorus becomes the shepherd Dorus. Thus, Pyrocles sings that he is 'Transformd in shew, but more transformd in minde', and that he is 'False in [his] selfe' (76). Likewise, Musidorus sings, 'Come shepherds weedes, become your masters minde: / Yeld outward shew, what inward chance he tryes' (113). The princes are fortunate to be so changed merely in mind and dress—another character finds his flesh mutilated. The nadir of *Arcadia's* unchastity is the serial lover, Pamphilus, who is only constant in his inconstancy, being reported as saying, 'I (whom you call inconstant) am ever constant; to Beautie, in others; and Delight in my self' (268). His ex-lover Dido considers him 'so naturally inconstant' as to 'marvell [that] his soule findes not some way to kill his bodie, whereto it had beene so long united' (267). His punishment is to be bound at the bottom of a tree and pricked by the (vaguely phallic) bodkins of nine gentlewoman whom he had seduced (264). While Pamphilus's name suggests that he is loved by all, his sin is that he loves all, in a merely carnal sense of love.

The opposite of Pamphilus's infatuations is a committed love, which seeks true union with the other. Such commitment is seen, to give but one pair, in the characters of Philoclea and Pyrocles. When they first embrace, '[I]t seemed their soules desired to meete, and their harts to kisse, as their mouthes did: which faine Pyrocles would have sealed with the chiefe armes of his desire, but Philoclea commaunded the contrary; and yet they passed the promise of mariage' (46). The desire of souls to meet and hearts to kiss as mouths do is reminiscent of a passage from Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things*. The passage is thus rendered in Dryden's early modern translation:

They gripe, they squeeze, their humid tongues they dart,
As each would force their way to t' other's heart—
In vain; they only cruise about the coast,
For bodies cannot pierce, nor be in bodies lost²⁸

²⁶ Nicholas of Cusa, *Selected Writings*, trans. by H. Lawrence Bond (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1997), p. 239.

²⁷ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. by A.C. Hamilton, et al. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), bk. 4, proem, ll. 10-11.

²⁸ John Dryden, 'Lucretius: Concerning the Nature of Love (from Book IV)', in *The Poems of John Dryden*, ed. by Paul Hammond, et al., 5 vols. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), II, p. 332-344, ll. 75-78. While the exact of image of

William Butler Yeats famously commented on this passage, 'The tragedy of sexual intercourse is the perpetual virginity of the soul.'²⁹ The Lucretian echo hints that Pyrocles' desire to join his heart with Philoclea's through sexual intercourse would be 'in vain', two bodies cannot wholly mix with one another, yet Philoclea offers a solution beyond Lucretius: Christian marriage. To this end, Philoclea declines Pyrocles' offer of sex, and instead the two become engaged to one another, promising to marry. Their eventual marriage will achieve their kiss of hearts, bringing their souls into their higher unity.

This fuller union is delayed until the end of Sidney's romance, where they, along with Musidorus and Pamela, finally wed. In the final sentence of the *Arcadia* it is revealed that Pyrocles and Philoclea have a son named Pyrophilus, and that Musidorus and Pamela have a daughter named Melidora (207). The final wonder presented by Sidney's *Arcadia*, the fruit of the 'coupled joys' freed from Cupid's 'emboyson'd darte', is generation, the bearing of new life (64). The higher unity achieved in marriage is figured forth in the names of the children, which each contain half the names of their parents. Were Sidney's romance to unfurl in a Christian setting rather than in *Arcadia*, the heroic offspring would undoubtedly be raised in the ways of God, with the hope that they might increase the number of saints, as Luther extolls in *The Estate of Marriage*,³⁰ and as Spenser aspires towards in the 'Epithalamion'.³¹ As it is, they will be raised in the ways of heroic virtue.

The erotic journey from virginity, through love's fall, into marriage, takes a circular form, resembling both the Christian schema of Fall and Redemption, as well as the Neoplatonic cycle of *exitus* and *reditus*, procession and return.³² Philoclea's vow of virginity was in vain, because it offered something that was not in her power to give. She could not know whether or not she would fall in love, and, shortly thereafter, she did. She passed through a stage of inward disorder, losing her identity with herself, but, in comparison with others (including her love, Pyrocles), she proceeds through this stage with virtue and grace, governing her passion by her reason. She engages herself to Pyrocles, and she is faithful to her promise unto the close of the romance, whereupon the two characters marry one another, to their mutual delight. In this narrative, Sidney weaves together the concerns both of his literary mode of romance, as well as his Renaissance Platonist philosophy and his Protestant theology. Sidney's context is not our context, and not all aspects of his thought will be amiable to his twenty-first century reader, yet he touches on something resonant about the nature of falling in love and the promises we make concerning love. In considering Sidney's *Arcadia*, one may better understand Hollander's rejoinder to Bloom with which we began: 'Harold, it could hardly be *rising* in love.'³³ Yet, as we have seen, after love falls, it may also rise.

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hearts failing to kiss may not be in the original Latin text, the crucial idea is the failure of souls to achieve union with one another due to the limitations of embodiment.

²⁹ Harold Bloom, *Yeats* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 486.

³⁰ Luther, *Luther on Women*, p. 108.

³¹ Edmund Spenser, *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. by William A. Oram, et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 660-679, l. 423.

³² Cf. M. H. Abrams, 'The Great Circle: Pagan and Christian Neoplatonism', in *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), pp. 146-154.

³³ Bloom, *Take Arms Against a Sea of Troubles*, p. 438.

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‘Come on. Come on. Move on.’:
Linear Time as False Promise in African American Literature

KENNEDY MARIE CROWDER

This paper argues that linear progress narratives of human history, influenced by a Newtonian idea of absolute spacetime, fail to accommodate the ongoing racial traumas experienced by African Americans. Informed by Michelle Wright’s *Physics of Blackness*, as well as broader theories from hauntology and Afropessimism, I perform a spatio-temporal analysis of three texts by African American writers: *Citizen* by Claudia Rankine, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* by Saidiya Hartman, and *Kindred* by Octavia Butler. These readings show how writing that foregrounds slavery’s afterlives reveals the ways in which linear time functions as a false promise specifically designed to permanently delay a true reckoning with slavery’s ghost in contemporary society.

Keywords: *Kindred*, Saidiya Hartman, hauntology, spacetime

In *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019), a blend of archive writing and fictional prose, Saidiya Hartman narrates scenes of quotidian Black life for African American women living in Harlem and Philadelphia at the beginning of the twentieth century. Wayward and waywardness, according to Hartman, ‘is the untiring practice of trying to live when you were never meant to survive’. For a population of newly freed African Americans, waywardness comes to describe an ‘experiment’, an entirely new mode of being in space and time that comes in the wake of emancipation and mass migration.¹ This cultural historian seeks to capture through her method of close narration the promise that lured Black people up north and the ways in which life in the city fell short of that pledge:

Most days, the assault of the city eclipses its promise: when the water in the building has stopped running, when even in her best dress she cannot help but wonder if she smells like the toilet or if it is obvious that her bloomers are tattered, when she is so hungry that the aroma of bean soup wafting from the settlement kitchen makes her mouth water, she takes to the streets, as if in search of the real city and not this poor imitation. [...] Each new deprivation raises doubts about when freedom is going to come, if the question pounding inside her head—*Can I live?*—is one to which she could ever give a certain answer, or only repeat in anticipation of something better than this, bear the pain of it and the hope of it, the beauty and the promise.²

Despite the Emancipation Proclamation officially outlawing slavery in the United States in 1865, the consequences of enslavement did not end. A series of social and legal restrictions on how Black people were allowed to move through space and engage with other people replicated the

¹ Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*, Adobe Digital Editions (Serpent’s Tail, 2019) p. 228.

² Hartman, p. 18.

organizing logics of the plantation. Jim Crow was alive and well, codified into law by the Supreme Court May 18, 1896 decision *Plessy v. Ferguson* which legalized ‘separate but equal’ segregation of the races.³ There is a commonly held belief that the North was and is less racist against Black people than the South. Black people made up the majority of victims in the gory spectacle of lynching in the South;⁴ the notorious cruelty on southern plantations during slavery cast a long shadow; and the chain gang prison profit system disproportionately affected Black people.⁵ This belief is undermined, however, by the fact that at the beginning of the twentieth century, northern states enforced separate schools, hotels, restaurants, and other public spaces for Black and white people.⁶ And what is more, none of the justices from northern states dissented from *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

Hartman’s book thus shows that though African Americans had temporally and spatially moved past the plantation, somehow the ‘promise’ of the city—which in turn represents a greater promise of a free future for Black people with equal rights and autonomy—remains undelivered. This means that for African Americans any idea that time will heal all wounds falls woefully short. This paper argues that linear progress narratives of human history, influenced by a Newtonian idea of absolute spacetime, fail to accommodate the ongoing racial traumas experienced by African Americans. By looking at literary creations by African American writers that foreground slavery’s afterlives, we can come to understand that time itself functions merely as a pacifying false promise specifically designed to delay permanently a true reckoning with slavery’s ghost in contemporary society. This reading joins together concepts from hauntology, physics of blackness, and Afropessimism, to create a multi-framework approach to demonstrate the value of considering the impact of time and space on the Black subject.

Absolute time and space are concepts from Newton’s ‘General Scholium’, an essay included in the *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (commonly known as *Principia*) (1687). The concepts are summarized by philosopher Robert Rynasiewicz as follows:

- Time: Absolute, true, and mathematical time, from its own nature, passes equably without relation to anything external, and thus without reference to any change or way of measuring of time (e.g., the hour, day, month, or year).
- Space: Absolute, true, and mathematical space remains similar and immovable without relation to anything external. [...] Relative spaces are measures of absolute space defined

³ Jim Crow Laws, named after a minstrel show character, were a number of state and local laws enforcing racial segregation. Justice Henry Brown of Michigan delivered the following majority opinion: ‘We consider the underlying fallacy of the plaintiff’s argument to consist in the assumption that the enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority. If this be so, it is not by reason of anything found in the act, but solely because the colored race chooses to put that construction upon it [...] The argument also assumes that social prejudice may be overcome by legislation, and that equal rights cannot be secured except by an enforced commingling of the two races [...] If the civil and political rights of both races be equal, one cannot be inferior to the other civilly or politically. If one race be inferior to the other socially, the Constitution of the United States cannot put them upon the same plane.’ (*Plessy v. Ferguson*)

⁴ ‘History of Lynching in America’, *NAACP*, <https://naacp.org/find-resources/history-explained/history-lynching-america>.

⁵ Georgia profit prisons made an astonishing \$354,853.55 in 1907 thanks to their unpaid prisoners (i.e., enslaved people): ‘Of 1,011 boys and girls under sixteen, arrested in 1905, 819 were black, but of those given the advantage of the probation system, 50 were white and only 7 colored. In other words, out of 819 arrests of Negro children only 7 enjoyed the benefit of the probation system.’ (Ray Stannard Baker, *Following the Color Line: American Negro Citizenship in the Progressive Era* (New York Doubleday Page & Company, 1908), pp. 50-51).

⁶ Baker, pp. 117-129.

with reference to some system of bodies or another, and thus a relative space may, and likely will, be in motion.⁷

Essentially, Newton posits that time and space are both universal or fundamental absolute truths that persist irrespective of relative time, or of how a person or other object may experience time. In this formulation, time is always moving linearly forward and similarly pushes forward absolute space—creating linear spacetime.⁸ To explain my concept of absolute time in this essay, I turn to Michelle Wright’s aptly named study, *Physics of Blackness: Beyond Middle Passage Epistemologies* (2015). She argues that absolute time and absolute space influence how Black Studies and, more broadly, the entirety of ‘Western imagination’ perceives all knowledge as linearly progressive.⁹ What Wright terms ‘Middle Passage Epistemology’ is a narrative which charts the origin of Black history from its forced dislocation from Africa through the ‘Door of No Return’, which then proceeds through the scattering of Black people across the Atlantic, and finally arrives at the development of Black music, art, literature, cultural traditions, academic achievements, and political victories following abolition and post-reconstruction.¹⁰

Wright locates the problem with such a narrative in how Enlightenment era philosophers applied the idea of time and space moving uniformly to their conceptualization of human history, using a linear progressive narrative to assess the development of other civilizations. This is a kind of *narrative* absolute spacetime, distinguished from the mathematical/physical spacetime that Newton and his contemporaries applied in classical science, by the importance of imagination, myths, legends, stories and historicity on shaping the conception of linearity.¹¹ Narrative absolute spacetime uses language and imagination to create a violent force out of time that dehistoricizes and regresses Black life. For example, Hegel’s *The Philosophy of History* (1956) names Africa—yes, the entire continent of Africa—as ‘Unhistorical [...] only as on the threshold of the World’s History.’¹² Temporally, Africa and its people are positioned as outside the progress of human history, and thus a perversion of absolute time. Furthermore, the continent is outside absolute space—which is framed within human history as the world itself—because of its failure to progress linearly as these philosophers perceive Europe to have done. European geography is positioned through narrative absolute spacetime as fundamentally different to Africa in terms of development. Hegel continues, ‘[Africans] exist in a land of childhood [...] and wrapped in the dark mantle of night.’¹³ His term, ‘Childhood’, implies an early stage of life, so that although African culture and Africa’s people have existed for thousands of years, they are reduced to infants in the western imaginary. Furthermore, his metaphorical image, ‘the dark mantle of night’, expresses the phenomenological signifiers of blackness as being associated with spatiotemporal immaturity. In trying to create a narrative of Black linear

⁷ Robert Rynasiewicz, ‘Newton’s Views on Space, Time, and Motion’, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2022 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2022), p. 2.

⁸ Michelle Wright, *Physics of Blackness: Beyond Middle Passage Epistemology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), p. 40.

⁹ Wright, pp. 39-40.

¹⁰ Wright, p. 43.

¹¹ I am explicitly referencing ‘The Fact of Blackness’ in Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, (New York: Grove Press, 2008), in which he understands the white gaze as a mode of formulating the Black subject in contrast to whiteness, such that, upon encountering the white gaze for the first time, the Black Man feels himself unmade then remade within the white imaginary and that imaginary projected across his skin: ‘I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors [...] I was battered down by toms-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: “Sho’ good eatin’” (p. 112).

¹² G.W.F Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York, NY: Cosimo Classics, 2007), p. 99.

¹³ Hegel, pp. 174-175.

progress, Middle Passage Epistemology replicates the spatiotemporal logics that justify the creation of race, and, consequently, Black enslavement and dehumanization. In doing so, I argue, it unconsciously validates the originating narratives of dehistoricized and spatially marginalized blackness. This is especially unhelpful for Black women because of the dominance of heterosexual masculinity as the drivers of human progress within Western narratives. Mapping narrative absolute spacetime onto the Black experience through Middle Passage Epistemology ‘implicitly forecloses anything but a male source of agency, further suggesting that even for Black women and queers, narratives by and about Black men and modernity are the most universal.’¹⁴ This paradigm replicates the gender disenfranchisement of narrative absolute spacetime, such that Black women—doubly marginalized through race *and* gender—are relegated to the fringes of an already fringed history.

At the heart of *Middle Passage Epistemologies* is a desire to reach some point in time where Black people are perceived as equally human to their white counterparts, that at some point we as a society will ‘get over’ slavery.¹⁵ The problem with such thinking is not its yearning for Black liberation from dehumanization, but rather how framing time this way unconsciously replicates and validates Hegel’s narrative absolute spacetime. This desire to move on is explored in Claudia Rankine’s book-length poem *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014). Rankine uses a series of vignettes, artworks, and essays to show connections between the racist abuse hurled at tennis champion Serena Williams, the always growing list of Black men murdered by police, and the racist comments, jokes and passing interactions Rankine herself has fallen victim to. This final category is what she calls ‘invisible racism’—commonly called a microaggression—for its insidiousness and difficulty to pin down. Consumed by paranoia (‘She said what? What did he just do? Did she really just say that? He said what? What did she do? Did I hear what I think I heard?’) and slashed repeatedly by invisible violence, the Black body is for Rankine rendered uninhabitable: ‘Where is the safest place when that place / must be someplace other than in the body? [...] The worst injury is feeling you don’t belong so much / to you.’¹⁶ Rankine fundamentally overturns how contemporary American society has attempted to move on from its violently racist, anti-Black origins through disavowal in the form of colour-blindness. The idea that talking about race opens a wound and thus makes race relations worse rather than better is voiced repeatedly in the text: ‘Feel good. Feel better. Move forward. Let it go. Come on. Come on. Come on’ and ‘This is how you are a citizen. Come on. Let it go. Move on.’¹⁷ Textually juxtaposing these pleas to *move on* with a myriad of stories of anti-Black violence undermines the validity of letting go as a viable method of moving on. Furthermore, ‘This is how you are a citizen’ brings clarity to the text’s subtitle *An American Lyric*—woven deeply into the fabric of American identity is anti-blackness and, therefore, to become an American citizen one must first learn to safe-guard against the persistence of anti-Black violence. For Rankine, this is outright

¹⁴ Wright, pp. 60.

¹⁵ I use ‘get over’ in reference to Calvin Warren’s ‘Black Time: Slavery, Metaphysics, and the Logic of Wellness’: ‘[T]he desire of the exhausted to enter a temporality beyond slavery—to inhabit the present—has structured our discourse about slavery. The phrase “getting over” is yet another index of this intensifying exhaustion—one that figuratively subordinates the Subject of the slave past, holding out the dubious promise that if we can somehow get over this incorrigible subject, the conceptual-historical surplus, then we might achieve something like wellness, success, possessive individualism, power, agency, and so on.’ (see: Calvin Warren ‘3. Black Time: Slavery Metaphysics, and the Logic of Wellness’, in *The Psychic Hold of Slavery: Legacies of Expressive American Culture*, ed. by Soyica Diggs Colbert, Robert J. Patterson and Aida Levy-Hussen (Ithaca, NY: Rutgers University Press, 2016), pp. 55-68.

¹⁶ Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014), pp. 63, 139-46.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 66, 151.

destruction of the Black body but also creates silence and stagnation, the kind of violence that kills quietly and repeatedly, forever.

From an Afropessimist perspective, this ongoing violence can be understood as an organizing social principle, a necessary constant to preserve social hierarchy. Frank B. Wilderson III explains that ‘to be Human, one has simply not to be Black [...] There is a structural (which is to say, necessary) antagonism between Blacks and Humans; and this antagonism hinges on violence.’ Blackness, he continues, ‘makes the Human conceptually coherent’ because the ontological position of Human is assured of all its ‘positive attributes’ simply by remembering which ontological position contains none of them.¹⁸ Returning to *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, Hartman shows how white people living in northern cities at the beginning of the twentieth century are assured of their humanness through the criminalization of Black autonomy. On the plantation, masters were legally allowed to dictate all their enslaved workers’ movements: when to get up in the morning, when and how long to rest, when and how long to work, if they could travel, who could get married, which plantation to send their kids off to. To continue the Human/Slave antagonism after the Emancipation Proclamation and Reconstruction, there had to be new ways implemented to continue legally policing Black movement. In the first section of *Wayward Lives*, Hartman writes ‘A whole world is jammed into one short block crowded with black folks shut out from almost every opportunity the city affords, but *still intoxicated with freedom*. The air is alive with the possibilities of assembling, gathering, congregating.’¹⁹ Her use of words ‘congregating’, ‘lingering’, and ‘gathering’ are charged in their evocation of Black assembly, an action which was criminalized through Black Codes following the end of reconstruction. Additionally, vagrancy laws made it illegal for Black people to be unemployed, ‘wandering or strolling about in idleness’;²⁰ the laws further banned ‘unlawfully assembling themselves [negroes and mullatoes] together.’²¹ The prospect of Black people not working and grouping up with each other frightened and disturbed white northern city folks. Hartman writes:

If only they could be prevented from flocking to the city, ‘if the metropolis could vomit them back down south, the whole matter would adjust.’ Better for them and for us, the restrictions of the south, than a ‘seeming liberty which blossoms noxiously into license.’ Better the fields and the shotgun houses and the dusty towns and the interminable cycle of credit and debt, better this than black anarchy.²²

This passage, when read through an Afropessimist perspective, clarifies how Black autonomous movement disturbed America’s racialized social order because it signalled the possibility of Black humanness. Therefore, for narrative absolute spacetime to continue progressing for white Americans, African Americans must inhabit a kind of time loop where the possibility of achieving humanness is always just barely out of reach. Without the cyclical nature of Black dehumanization, narrative absolute spacetime would collapse.

¹⁸ Frank B. Wilderson III, ‘Afropessimism and the Ruse of Analogy: Violence, Freedom Struggles, and the Death of Black Desire’, in *Antiblackness*, ed. by Moon-Kie Jung and João H. Costa Vargas (New York: Duke University Press, 2021), pp. 37–59, (p. 40).

¹⁹ Hartman, p. 13.

²⁰ Joe M. Richardson, ‘Florida Black Codes’, *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, 47.4 (1965), 365–379, (pp. 371–372).

²¹ Gary Stewart, ‘Black Codes and Broken Windows: The Legacy of Racial Hegemony in Anti-Gang Civil Injunctions’, *The Yale Law Journal*, 107.7 (May 1998), pp. 2249–2279, (p. 2261).

²² Hartman, p. 17.

Time functions as a false promise precisely to ensure that there is no substantive critique waged against the persistence of anti-Black social ordering. Instead, as Rankine, Wright, and Hartman all identify, the Black subject is encouraged to *move on*, do better, learn from our history but rest easy in the promise of the city. Time will surely fix it; just wait, we are told. We are inhibited from moving forward, and from legitimately achieving the promised colour-blind society, or free city by disavowing what lingers in our haunted geography. My use of ‘haunted’ is informed by the discipline of hauntology, and specifically by Avery Gordon’s theorizing in *Ghostly Matters* (1997). Horror stories describe the ghost as an undead person that haunts the realm of the living for some unfinished business—revenge, grief, even love. Gordon employs the language of haunting and ghosts to describe how repressed histories of social violence and death committed in the past and disavowed in the present remain as a ‘seething presence’.²³ She writes:

Haunting [...] is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely [...] those singular and yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over-and-done-with comes alive [...] it alters the experience of being in time.²⁴

When applied to the lived experiences of Black people, I understand hauntology as a form of what Christina Sharpe terms living in the ‘wake’ of the ‘as yet unresolved unfolding’ of slavery.²⁵ Hauntology as a lens of inquiry affirms that past traumas and silenced histories have ‘affective, historical, and mnemonic structures’ that then shape our social geography.²⁶

Octavia E. Butler’s 1979 historical fantasy novel *Kindred* perhaps most obviously deconstructs the boundaries between past and present when the novel’s main protagonist Dana, an African American woman living in 1976 California, mysteriously travels back in time to a pre-Civil War plantation in Maryland.²⁷ Though Butler never reveals—and is entirely uninterested in—*how* Dana travels back in time, Dana comes to believe that she is called back to the plantation whenever her ancestor, white slave-owner-to-be Rufus, needs her help. Scholars have noted how 1960s Black radical politics influenced Butler’s literary practice. Both Megan Behren and Gerry Canavan make specific reference to her interview with Charles H. Rowell, in which Butler explains how an encounter with a student in the Black Power Movement went on to inform the philosophy that underscores much of her writing.^{28 29} Butler recounts:

I heard some remarks from a young man who was the same age I was but who had apparently never made the connection with what his parents did to keep

²³ Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 8, p. xvi.

²⁴ Ibid, p. xvi.

²⁵ Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (London and Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 13.

²⁶ Gordon, p. 18.

²⁷ Readers often refer to *Kindred* as a science fiction novel, but I defer here to Butler’s own identification with fantasy as stated in an interview with Randall Kenan delivered in 1991: ‘*Kindred* is fantasy. I mean literally, it is fantasy. There is no science in *Kindred*[...] Not even the time travel. I don’t use a time machine or anything like that. Time travel is just a device for getting the character back to confront where she came from.’ Kenan, pp. 495-496.

²⁸ Megan Behrent, ‘The Personal is Historical: Slavery, Black Power, and Resistance in Octavia Butler’s *KINDRED*’, *College Literature*, 46.4 (Oct. 1995), pp. 795-828.

²⁹ Gerry Canavan, ‘Chapter 3 To Keep Thee in All Thy Ways (1976-1981)’ in *Octavia E. Butler* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2016), pp. 55-65.

him alive. He was still blaming them for their humility and their acceptance of disgusting behavior on the part of employers and other people. He said, "I'd like to kill all these old people who have been holding us back for so long. But I can't because I'd have to start with my own parents." [...] That was actually the germ of the idea for *Kindred* (1979). I've carried that comment with me for thirty years. He felt so strongly ashamed of what the older generation had to do, without really putting it into the context of being necessary for not only their lives but his as well.³⁰

This incident instills in Butler an investment in and appreciation for those ancestors who devoted themselves to survival. As Canavan notes, where Butler originally was 'embarrassed' and 'ashamed' of her mother's demeaning service jobs, she grows to understand them as heroic sacrifices, made to secure her survival: 'survival is not necessarily the same thing as defeating your enemy, or even fighting back or standing up for yourself, but simply means that you (and, crucially, your children) have continued into the future.'³¹ I agree with Butler's assessment that this young man fails to understand the difficulty his parents faced in trying to nurture a life for their Black family during Jim Crow segregation. At the same time, I can empathize with his painfully obvious yearning to *move on*. What he resents in his parents is the imagined life for Black people that could have been possible if they had resisted sooner, if his ancestors had burned the plantation down, and if *their* ancestors had jumped into the ocean rather than submitting to the belly of the slave ship. The what-ifs and what-could-have-beens that haunt him and his contemporaries almost drive him to madness: 'I'd like to kill all these old people', he says.

Dana too brings with her into the past a kind of reflexive disdain for some of the enslaved people she encounters on the Maryland plantation. This is seen in her initial assessment of the enslaved woman Sarah,

...the kind of woman who might have been called 'mammy' in some other household. She was the kind of woman who would be held in contempt during the militant nineteen-sixties. The house-nigger, the handkerchief head, the female Uncle Tom [...] I looked down on her myself for a while. Moral superiority. Here was someone less courageous than I was. *That comforted me somehow*.³² (emphasis added)

This is at the heart of *Kindred's* politics, the disavowed but terrifying truth haunting 1960s Black radicalism: how courageous would we, as contemporary freed Black people, be if we had to live through the horrors of slavery? How much better would we fare? And has time really progressed us that far from our enslaved ancestors? Dana arrives with contempt and hubris, assured that her twentieth-century knowledge and position in the present as a free woman would prevent her from slipping into the dreaded subjugated position of a Black enslaved woman. Once she and her white husband Kevin have spent enough time in the past, however, she realizes resistance is not as easy as she once believed: 'Time passed. Kevin and I became more a part of the household, familiar, accepted, accepting. That disturbed me too when I thought about it. How easily we seemed to acclimatize.'³³ She is never able to escape, never able to liberate

³⁰ Charles H. Rowell and Octavia E. Butler, 'An Interview With Octavia E. Butler', *Callaloo*, 20.1 (Winter, 1997), pp. 47-66 (p. 51).

³¹ Canavan, pp. 53-54.

³² Octavia E. Butler, *Kindred* (Boston: Beacon Press Books, 2003), p. 145.

³³ *Kindred*, p. 97.

in a militant nineteen-sixties fashion the other enslaved workers on the plantation, and is in fact complicit in her ancestor Alice's rape by Rufus in order to ensure the survival of her family tree. Behrent highlights how we as contemporary readers must consider the implications of Dana's decision to help Rufus subdue Alice. Specifically, what it might mean that Dana believes the future of her family tree hinges on Alice's acute suffering. She writes:

An unpublished draft presents an alternate version of *Kindred* set in the Patternist universe, in which Dana and Kevin rescue a young Alice and bring her back to their present to raise as their own child [...] Dana's decision to keep Rufus alive and accept the sexual enslavement of Alice is not the only option—but a choice with repercussions Butler encourages us to consider and question.³⁴

I am in no way trying to argue that Alice's rape is Dana's 'fault'; Butler makes clear that the villain of this story is slavery, represented in the moral decay of Rufus himself, who begins the story as a child with a kind of respect for Dana. As the years pass, however, this youthful kindness and kinship slowly deteriorates as he grows more acclimated to his social position as a white man and an enslaver. The same is true for his relationship with Alice: "When we were little, we were friends," he said softly. "We grew up. She got so she'd rather have a buck nigger than me!"³⁵ He sells her husband to Mississippi when they attempt to run away together and forces Alice into sexual slavery, repeatedly raping and beating her. Then, when Alice commits suicide, he turns his attention to Dana, attempting to rape her to replace the mistress he's lost.

Nevertheless, Dana's complicity reveals something about the contemporary American social landscape that should be self-evident but is instead an uncomfortable, disavowed and silent history: just as the progressive history of America is dependent on the dehumanization of its Black population, African American culture is contingent on the suffering of our ancestors. Just like Alice, Sarah and the other enslaved men and women Dana encounters on the Maryland plantation, she cooperates with Rufus to secure her family's future. Dana, like Sarah, is simply trying to survive. She has a clear advantage over her ancestors in that she lives in that future and never has to question whether freedom is on the horizon. Dana becomes aware of this advantage in a telling exchange with Sarah:

"I'd rather see the others."

"What others?"

"The ones who make it. The ones living in freedom now."

"If any do."

"They do."

"Some say they do. It's like dying, though, and going to heaven. Nobody ever comes back to tell you about it."³⁶

What irony! Here is Dana, somebody who has come back from 'heaven', who could tell Sarah, Alice, and everyone else about the ones living in freedom, but she cannot. For risk of losing that future for herself, she cannot tell them. Here, *Kindred* slips into a ghost story, with Dana

³⁴ Behrent, p. 810. 'The Patternist universe' refers to the Patternmaster series, the first book of which is Butler's debut novel. Butler was only publishing Patternist novels until 1987, making it unsurprising that the original intention was to include *Kindred* in the series.

³⁵ *Kindred*, p. 123.

³⁶ *Kindred*, p. 145.

haunting the past as much as the past haunts her. The so-called progressiveness of time and the idea of a free future corrodes in these character interactions, not only because Dana slips so easily into what should be a wholly unnatural dehumanized existence for a twentieth-century woman who has married across the colour-line, but also because she understands that the privileges she *does* have in that century hinge on historic sexual and racial violence.

What unifies Hartman, Butler, and Rankine's writing is their narrative illustrations of the failure of time's promise to Black people, and how whiteness benefits from perpetuating that promise. For Hartman's archival figures of the twentieth century, the future was in Harlem and Philadelphia at the beginning of the twentieth century. To perform experiments in Black humanity, its inhabitants had to work against legal and social restrictions to their autonomy, which replicated social structures that were supposed to have been in the spatiotemporal 'past'. Butler's fantasy writing literalized the presence of the ghost of enslaved ancestors by forcing a contemporary woman to live on her ancestor's plantation. Her familial history and indeed Black culture broadly, is haunted by enslavement, once again inhibiting an easy linear progress away from the 'past'. Finally, Rankine's account of microaggressions and the ensuing paranoia caused by experiencing quotidian racial violence that can be so easily denied, psychically inhibits a comfortable inhabiting of the promised future of a colour-blind society. Such writing shows us that linear time is not an immutable reality but a violent social function that feeds on disavowal, silence, and grief.

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‘[D]o me right’: The Promise of Protection and State Action in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*

LUKE BASIL LOUIS OW ZHI HENG

This paper deploys close reading to interpret William Shakespeare’s early tragedy *Titus Andronicus* as articulating that belief in the state as a consistent, regulatory institution – as exemplified by Thomas Hobbes’ proposals in *Leviathan* – is a flawed one due to its misalignment with a core component of the human psyche which stymies attempts at fostering uniformity among individuals; the tendency for humans is to be swayed by emotional changes. In *Titus Andronicus*, the broken promise of the state is crystallised by a fixation on glory which distracts characters from protecting each other’s interests. This paper then proceeds to read *Titus Andronicus* alongside Niccolò Machiavelli’s *Discourses on Livy* to uncover vigilance as the key for survival no matter the political conditions in which individuals may find themselves.

Keywords: *Titus Andronicus*, Hobbes, Machiavelli, promise

In William Shakespeare’s tragedy *Titus Andronicus* (1594), after being celebrated for his awe-inspiring military actions, the titular character suffers overwhelming losses at the hands of the Roman state which he had served. The state turns on him and his household on the whims of its sovereign–Saturninus–after the general had devoted years of service to safeguarding the collective security of his fellow subjects. This account of a corrupted political environment calls into question ideas on duty and the state, ideas which later informed Thomas Hobbes in his writing of the treatise *Leviathan* (1651). In it, Hobbes establishes his commonwealth—an omnipotent force multiplier designed to guarantee safety to all of its members. From Hobbes’ perspective, the commonwealth ameliorates conflicts by introducing stability into the interactions amongst its members. With every member of the group now viewed as a potential ally sheltering together under a sturdy protective umbrella, clear behavioural obligations are established for the commonwealth’s members to carry out as an attempt to engender trust among them, fostering a sense of common purpose in the population. In the worldview of *Leviathan*, since the state is ostensibly able to discipline and harness the passions of its members, this form of governance is framed as the solution to interpersonal strife.

However, the civil conflict in *Titus Andronicus* demonstrates that strong institutions in themselves—like the state—are unable to fulfil the promise laid out in *Leviathan* that a strong state will exorcise conflict from the human condition. The play’s action reveals an element in the human psyche which stymies attempts at nurturing cohesion among members in a commonwealth: their individual tendency is to be swayed by emotional changes. Hobbes is aware of this condition and expresses his opposition towards intangible elements like feelings interfering with the life of the commonwealth due to their unpredictable effect upon human behaviour. However, apart from repeated emphases on obedience to preserve a commonwealth, and warnings that any failures to do so would cause a group to revert to ceaseless conflict, *Leviathan* provides no further insights regarding how else subjects can defend themselves from or, at least, negotiate the emergence of any sudden attacks. To address this gap in Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, this essay proffers that Shakespeare’s play is in dialogue with Niccolò Machiavelli’s ideas of vigilance—which the Florentine details in his *Discourses on Livy* (1531). In the

Discourses, Machiavelli warns his readers of the varieties of human behaviour and advises them to alter their modes of response according to the situation at hand. Machiavelli's perspective serves as a useful frame of reference to characterise Titus' evolution from a glory-minded monarch's obedient minister to a shrewd operator prioritising his family's interests. Thus, *Titus Andronicus* anticipates *Leviathan* in contending that the pursuit of the intangible quality of glory pulls the sovereign and their subjects away from their respective obligations to each other. The play demonstrates that individuals who fixate on glory corrode a commonwealth's ability to keep its promise of protecting its members. Ultimately, the play's depictions of bloodshed within the bounds of the commonwealth expose the limitations of political actions which are founded upon rigid ideas, hinting that vigilance should be cultivated in individuals to better safeguard their interests in a corrupt environment.

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes concerns himself with the creation of an institution that can insulate humans from the effects of conflict. He theorises that, amongst humans, 'the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others, that are in the same danger with himselfe'.¹ The philosopher argues that physical prowess alone cannot guarantee a person's survival. According to him, even the most imposing individuals can be felled by covert operations, or partnerships between persons who feel threatened by the influence of such aggrandised individuals. Under these conditions, any person is susceptible to being attacked and dispossessed of anything according to the whims of another '[and this initial aggressor] again is in the like danger of another' (87). Hobbes' understanding of ungoverned human interactions is one of unpredictable, unceasing conflict. The sheer variety of situations under which one can be injured or killed makes it impossible for an individual to be protected on their own. It is in response to this concept of human relations that Hobbes proposes his commonwealth.

To neutralise the endless fighting described here in *Leviathan*, Hobbes envisions the commonwealth as an institution which fosters safety for a group of people:

as if every man should say to every man, *I Authorise and give up my Right of Governing my selfe, to this Man, or to this Assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy Right to him, and Authorise all his Actions in like manner.* This done, the Multitude so united in one Person, is called a COMMON-WEALTH... that great LEVIATHAN, or rather (to speake more reverently) of that *Mortall God*, to which wee

This dictum establishes the commonwealth as an institution which is generated when many persons converge and invest their collective trust in one entity, the sovereign, who is given sole command over their state. As subjects, they have empowered the sovereign to act on the behalf of the well-being of every single member of the community. Instead of having to struggle against multiple threats to their survival, each individual can now shelter under the collective security of the state, trusting that their sovereign would muster the combined strength of their fellow subjects for their defence should an external party threaten any of them. Hobbes' characterisation of the state as a controlled, force multiplier able to act in excess of any individual's capabilities is what leads him to christen his thesis after the biblical beast and liken it to a divinity. These comparisons imply that *Leviathan* posits that subjects should yield to their

¹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. by Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.87. All quotations are from this edition and are cited in text in parentheses.

far-more-powerful sovereign for the promise of their own safety in a hostile world, just as mortal creatures are meant to defer to omnipotent deities for the maintenance of their well-being.

Prefiguring Hobbes' recommendation of subjects obeying their sovereigns, *Titus Andronicus* explores this relationship that a subject has with their sovereign through the construction of its protagonist as a dutiful subject. When the newly-nominated emperor Saturninus declares his intention to marry Titus' daughter at the start of the play, Titus acts according to the emperor's wishes (I.1.243–253).² His loyalty to his sovereign is such that he disregards existing cultural customs regarding property rights, even killing his own son without hesitation to execute Saturninus' will (I.1.281–301). By acting in complete deference to his sovereign's choices, Titus is fulfilling his conception of the role of a subject under the governance of another entity. Titus' understanding of his place in the commonwealth to which he belongs is revealed when he is questioned regarding his killing of his own son on Saturninus' account, retorting: 'My sons would never so dishonor me./Traitor, restore [my daughter] to the emperor' (I.1.298–299). Titus asserts that his identity is founded upon his service to his sovereign. He believes too that his offspring function as extensions of his own worldview, pushing him to aggregate their own relationship with the emperor together with their filial duties to him as their father. By disowning his sons for their lack of fealty to the emperor, Titus exhibits that his is tied to state directives, demonstrating a glimpse of Hobbes' conception of an omnipotent sovereignty – that the sovereign's dictates should constitute the consciences in each one of their subjects (223). In short, Titus expresses his rigid faith in Saturninus' government, trusting that the emperor's decisions would be beneficial to his well-being.

The depth of Titus' service to his sovereign and the state is emphasised as a glorious trait. To calm the intercommunal tensions stirred up by the contest for the vacant throne at the very beginning of the play (I.1.1–19), Titus is heralded by his brother, Marcus Andronicus, as the epitome of duty – '[Titus] hath returned/Bleeding to Rome, bearing his valiant sons/In coffins from the field' (I.1.33–35). Marcus reminds everyone that Titus has been away from the metropole, placing his own life and those of his male offspring at risk for the safety of the community. By gaining wounds and losing the lives of his children, Titus' service has literally cost him his flesh and blood, in contrast to the self-interested behaviour of the claimants for the imperium who merely dress their respective bids for their personal aggrandisement in the attire of service (I.1.5–7; 16–17). According to Marcus, Titus has persisted in military service in spite of these personal losses, enabling Rome to overcome the Gothic threats against it (I.1.27–35). Through his campaigns having assured the safety of everyone in Rome, Titus has already performed the role of protector, explaining the people's enthusiasm in trusting him with sovereignty over them (I.1.20–26). This general's commitment in performing his obligations to the Roman community is framed as a trait deserving of respect, pointing to a connection between the performance of awe-inspiring actions and the making of a political community.

Titus' losses in the service of Rome garner him respect, a testament to the importance of sacrifice to the sustenance of a political community. In the aftermath of his elevation to the throne, Saturninus hails Titus as 'noble Titus, father of my life' (I.1.256). The newly-elected sovereign marks Titus out as a subject worthy of high praise, upon whom his own existence depends. The general's military role in the commonwealth anticipates Hobbes' description of public ministers in *Leviathan* as servants acting in the person of their sovereign (167). To Hobbes, these public ministers are 'parts Organicall' (166). This description denotes their

² William Shakespeare. 'Titus Andronicus', in *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*, ed. by Russ McDonald (New York: Penguin, 2002), pp.1219–1250. All quotations are from this edition and are cited in text in parentheses.

invaluable status in performing tasks which enable the body of the state to function. In drawing attention to Titus' exalted status as Rome's martial protector, Shakespeare's play presents a sovereign relying upon a subject to outdo himself in feats of public service in order to ensure the general safety of every other member of the commonwealth. Significantly, since his fellow Romans owe their well-being to his military campaigns, Titus' assumption of the duty of protecting his fellow Romans from harm calls into question the sovereignty of Saturninus. The emperor realises the jeopardy in which his authority lies relative to Titus' position in the community and, consequently, refuses to honour any promises made to the soldier, triggering the eventual unfolding of their relationship. Saturninus insists that Titus has 'mock[ed him]', branding Titus and his offspring as '[c]onfederates all thus to dishonor [him]' for allegedly boasting that he had 'begged the empire at [their] hands' (I.1.304, 306, 310). Saturninus interprets Titus' martial exertions as an insult to his status as sovereign and thinks of Titus and his children as having conspired behind his back to make him look weak. Saturninus' focus on his status illustrates the fragility of the bonds amongst the components of a state.

In having its emperor concerned that he owes his authority to one of his subjects, Shakespeare's play echoes the writings of Machiavelli. In his *Discourses on Livy*, the thinker writes of rulers being ungrateful to those who have led armies for them, 'for the captain who has virtuously acquired an empire for his lord... of necessity acquires such reputation with his soldiers, with enemies, and with the subjects belonging to that prince that the victory cannot taste good to the lord who has sent him'.³ Machiavelli explains that sovereigns are likely to be embittered by the successes of their subjects who perform magnificent deeds which strengthen the state in the sovereign's name. Like Shakespeare's Titus, such subjects have garnered loyalty from the soldiers they have led in the field, confidence from their fellow subjects, and intimidation from any beaten enemies. However, these feelings of respect are directed towards the subject who has led the military campaign, not the sovereign. In a state where the monarch should act as the sole locus of authority, such a military leader has inadvertently become an alternative source of protection for the monarch's subjects. With Machiavelli's perspective in view, it is unsurprising that Saturninus is reacting out of envy towards Titus, a leader who has proven himself in battle. Therefore, Shakespeare's play makes us aware that the performance of awe-inspiring deeds can trigger tensions between components of the commonwealth.

With Saturninus' reverence for Titus turning quickly into loathing, *Titus Andronicus* depicts the fickle nature of human sentiment. This insight on human nature is expounded upon by Hobbes in *Leviathan*. In his discussion on the passions in Chapter 6, Hobbes explains that, in the absence of an authority over them, 'whatsoever is the object of any mans Appetite or Desire; that is it, which he for his part calleth *Good*.' Hobbes challenges a key conceptual binary – that between good and evil – reducing a moral judgement to an unfixed varying entity, its verdict dependent upon a person's cravings in any given moment. Hobbes clarifies the unpredictability of this condition, stating that, 'it is impossible that all the same things should alwayes cause in him the same Appetites' (39). For this philosopher, a human being cannot be depended upon to respond to any given stimulus in the same way in every moment of life. Recalling his conception of the state as an institution which functions as a shield for its members at all times, a shifting entity like sentiment seems unfit for the purpose of nurturing a collective which is supposed to guarantee security.

³ Niccolò Machiavelli. *Discourses on Livy*, trans. by Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.65. All quotations are from this edition and are cited in text in parentheses.

Hobbes traces the emotional journey taken by a person who is consumed by the pursuit of glory. Hobbes describes how ‘great *vaine-Glory*; which is commonly called *Pride*, and *selfe-conceipt*... subjecteth a man to Anger, the excesse whereof, is the Madnesse called RAGE, and FURY... That excessive love, with jealousie, becomes also Rage’(54). Hobbes specifies that the thirst for recognition – if severed from an honest evaluation of one’s own abilities – wraps a person in a cloak of self-deception. When the person encounters an external reality which does not align with their elevated view of themselves, they lash out. Determined to protect and actualise their self-perception, the vainglorious person operates amongst others in a hostile manner, wary of potential enemies which ostensibly lie in wait to attack and humiliate them. This development is logical since ‘[u]nlike a material good (e.g. the quantity of food or drink necessary to satisfy hunger and thirst), the immaterial good of honour... depends on the attitude and behaviour of other people’.⁴ In contrast to tangible items like food and drink, the intangible feeling of being well-reputed rests upon the belief systems held by other people. Other people need to be convinced of the value of one’s actions first before expressing this recognition through concrete gestures like praise or the awarding of a medal. Often, these gestures can be insincere if the giver determines that performing them to flatter a specific person might advance their own temporary interests. With the determination of whether one has attained glory being dependent upon so many variables beyond an individual’s control, the trait’s utility in building the promise of security for a multitude is doubtful.

These meditations on the risks inherent in the pursuit of glory read as a prompt book for Saturninus’ behaviour in *Titus Andronicus*. With Titus popular amongst the Romans, Saturninus perceives any move by him as a threat to his influence:

TITUS:	Patience, Prince Saturninus.
SATURNINUS:	Romans, do me right. Patricians, draw your swords, and sheathe them not Till Saturninus be Rome’s emperor. Andronicus, would thou were shipped to hell Rather than rob me of the people’s hearts! (I.1.206–210)

Unable to restrain himself from acting on his desire to become emperor, Saturninus lashes out at the war hero. The play’s verse structure shows Saturninus cutting Titus’ line, pointing to his deep suspicion of the general’s intentions. In the ruler’s mind, the Roman populace resembles a mine of personal bodyguards to be exploited in his squabble against anyone who would block his way to the throne. The well-being of these Romans does not factor into Saturninus’ calculations as someone aspiring to lead them; he seems unperturbed or unaware that he is hazarding some of their lives for his prospective advancement. In addition, Saturninus intends to vanquish and purge the man whom the play presents as the chief architect of a Roman victory against a foreign danger. If Titus were to be removed from public life as per Saturninus’ whims, it is unclear that anyone else remains who could defend Rome from external threats. Saturninus’ pursuit of glory pushes him to behave recklessly with the security of the people over whom he is aspiring to be sovereign, a sign that the focus on glory undermines the promises of security which people seek from political collectives.

⁴ Barbara Carnevali. ‘Triumphs of the Mind. Hobbes and the Ambivalences of Glory’, in *Studies in the History of Philosophy of Mind 25: The Dark Side: Philosophical Reflections on the “Negative Emotions”*, eds Paola Giacomoni, Nicollò Valentini, and Sara Dellantonio (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2021), pp. 119–38, (pp.128–129).

The chase for individual glory is unveiled to be a compulsion, driven by unceasing competition. With contestants possessing no fixed intrinsic measure of success, their views of victory or defeat are pegged to 'the waves of other people's feelings and behaviour'. Being pushed to value themselves and each other according to an ever-shifting and idiosyncratic series of norms, '[r]estlessness and instability' are generated. As surpassing a rival today does not guarantee remaining supreme tomorrow, it is possible to be surpassed in the future by a different competitor, or by the vanquished party. In an arena where every competitor holds the mindset of constantly seeking to either ascend to or remain on top, there can be no resolution to the struggle and 'stable hierarchies [become] impossible. In the war of all against all, there will always be someone able to overcome our ephemeral victories'.⁵ Left to develop, the pursuit of glory is little different from Hobbes' state of nature (87). In an environment where everyone is fighting against each other, there is a high risk of being vanquished or killed at any moment. Mistrust becomes endemic and ordering systems fail to take root. This description of the consequences of individuals embarking on the pursuit of glory runs counter to the purposes of the commonwealth as defined in *Leviathan* Chapter 17—that of a shelter for individuals seeking respite from violence. Far from promoting the promise of security, attempting to mould a political community around the pursuit of glory only engenders fragmentation and constant strife.

Titus Andronicus elucidates the effects of the competition for glory being a pursuit fraught with instability. Saturninus does not settle into his role as head of state. As sovereign, he continues to be disturbed, railing, 'Was ever seen/An emperor in Rome thus overborne,/ Troubled, confronted thus' (IV.4.1–3). Distracted from tending to the welfare of his subjects, Saturninus fixates on threats to his power. His outrage suggests that, to him, emperors should be free to exercise their sway over their subjects and face no opposition from them. At the same time, Saturninus' outburst reflects the reality that instability is associated with the pursuit of glory; he frets that he could be ousted from power and someone else could become emperor in his stead. Saturninus continues, '[w]hat's this but libeling against the Senate/And blazoning our injustice everywhere... he and his shall know that justice lives/In Saturninus' health' (IV.4.17–18, 23–24). Much like his earlier speech from Act 1, Saturninus attempts to pull other parts of the Roman state onto his side. He inflates his perceived personal affront, accrediting this local insult as a slight to the Senate too, and reconceptualising personal slander to be an act of injustice inflicted upon the whole population. Saturninus' desire to enact vengeance upon his opponent is expressed as a performance of righteous fury against a criminal, bringing the state to the brink of war to avenge a personal injury. By pursuing the advancement of his personal reputation at any cost, Saturninus disregards any promises of acting in the interests of his subjects, perpetuating the ceaseless interpersonal conflict which Hobbes posits in *Leviathan* to be the antithesis to the very notion of a state.

Saturninus' desire to turn the state into a personal vehicle for avenging himself against perceived slights to his reputation reflects Machiavelli's observations on attempts to keep societal corruption in check. In his *Discourses on Livy*, he notes:

...as good customs have need of laws to maintain themselves, so laws have need of good customs so as to be observed. Besides this, orders and laws made

⁵ Carnevali, p. 130.

in a republic at its birth, when men were good, are no longer to the purpose later, when they have become wicked... (49)

Machiavelli is conscious that rules and regulations can only manage the members of a collective if these precepts are anchored in the existing culture of the members who constitute said society. Strong rules and regulations last only when they are nourished by supportive conditions amongst a people. Also, Machiavelli points out that the rules which were fashioned by a state to govern itself in its infancy – when its members possessed a different temperament – no longer serve a state after its members have undergone years of change. This implies that the Florentine is convinced of the importance of having laws which can evolve along with the people that they are designed to help govern. In the context of the abuses in *Titus Andronicus*, no regulation can serve to check Saturninus' actions if the attitudes of the majority of the people around him are more aligned with his fixation on personal status than in recognition of Titus' faith in duty. This failure of rigidity in political life gestures towards the necessity for inventing new tools to safeguard the well-being of a commonwealth's members. Therefore, when read together, Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy* and Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* question the efficacy of being fixed in one's political disposition.

Titus Andronicus documents the consequences of being slow to adapt to changing societal circumstances. Observing Saturninus' outbursts upon being challenged for the Imperium, Titus responds 'Content thee, prince, I will restore to thee... The people's hearts, and wean them from themselves' (I.1.206–10, 213–214). In contrast to Saturninus' self-interest, Titus gives up any bid for power when he realises that opposing Saturninus would only plunge the Romans into war amongst themselves. Instead of pursuing his own advancement, Titus chooses to serve the Roman state by unifying its people under Saturninus' banner. Through this act, Titus demonstrates his commitment to the security of all Romans by attempting to teach those watching him – one of whom is Saturninus – to orientate their politics towards the common good. However, in his blind acquiescence to Saturninus, Titus inadvertently turns himself and his family members into prey (III.1.1–24). He is unable to turn the tides of the society to which he has returned, causing him to be swept up in wave after wave of losses.

The worldview of *Titus Andronicus* anticipates that of *Leviathan* in acknowledging that promises and rules in themselves are impotent moulders of human behaviour. Hobbes assesses that most humans are caught up in the 'pursuit of "Wealth, Command, or sensuall Pleasure" [which] has dulled most men's capacity for generosity'.⁶ According to Hobbes' theory of ungoverned interpersonal relations, the pursuit of control to facilitate one's personal access to resources and delights makes most less likely to look out for the interests of their fellow men; indeed, in this zero-sum game, the gains of others are seen as threats to one's well-being (70, 87). In response to humanity's dulled capacity for generosity, Hobbes' 'appeal to authority does not reflect the ontological status of the law, but the need to impress its necessity on the malicious man or woman who cannot be depended upon to think like a philosopher'.⁷ *Leviathan* asserts that any political community can only be given life if it has a sole source of overbearing power at its head to compel all of its parts to obey its directives. According to Hobbes, a law functions as an aspirational standard to which the sovereign is supposed to direct their subjects. To ensure the safety of everyone under the aegis of the commonwealth, individuals who would typically be at each other's throats have to be instructed by the sovereign on how to live at peace with each

⁶ Julie E. Cooper. 'Vainglory, Modesty, and Political Agency in the Political Theory of Thomas Hobbes', *The Review of Politics*, 72 (2010), pp. 241–269, (pp. 246–7).

⁷ Catherine Wilson. 'Political Philosophy in a Lucretian Mode', in *Lucretius and the Early Modern*, eds. David Norbrook, Stephen Harrison and Philip Hardie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 259–282, (p. 281).

other. It is up to the sovereign to decide how best to impress the necessity of civil interpersonal behaviour on the malicious under their authority. From this perspective, *Leviathan* hints that sovereigns have the flexibility to tinker with devising laws, as long as their choices succeed in coercing their subjects into living peaceably alongside each other.

Titus Andronicus has often been interpreted as a meditation on the boundless depths of human cruelty. Far from guaranteeing anybody's safety, Saturninus' rule is one where subjects are harmed on a whim and those who are untouched live in fear of being next.⁸ The play documents the rapacious lawlessness of a sovereign failing to keep the promise of the commonwealth. In his *Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli describes how a subject can respond to living under a regime of such predations:

...if a man is greatly offended either by the public or by a private person and is not avenged according to his satisfaction, ...if he lives under a prince and has any generosity in himself he is never quiet until he avenges himself against him, even if he sees evil for himself in that (196)

Warning his readers that aggrieved individuals are a risk to the state to which they belong, Machiavelli is convinced that those who have been injured either by other individuals or by the community at large must receive redress from the state for their wounds. Failure for the state to respond to this acute need from any of its subjects reinforces to the aggrieved individuals that they were left unprotected by an institution which was supposed to preserve their well-being. Consequently, they would have no motivation to preserve this institution which did not safeguard their interests. Depending on the depth of the injury, the aggrieved individual might strike back against those whom they regard to be responsible for their woe. Therefore, Machiavelli explains that individuals, when pushed into a corner, have the capacity to destabilise the entire edifice of state.

In demonstrating that individuals are not helpless in the absence of proper sovereignty, *Titus Andronicus* is aligned with Machiavelli's observations. After fruitlessly offering up one of his hands for the lives of his sons (III.1.150–161, 233–238), 'Titus [begins to see] his suffering as to some extent educative, correcting false perceptions of the society he lives in'.⁹ After mourning his losses, Titus becomes aware that his past inaction in the face of predation had contributed to the ensuing pain endured by himself and his family members. Knowing that any notion of Roman-ness founded upon mutual service has been swept away, Titus chooses to act against those who have harmed the well-being of himself and his household (III.1.284–287). Titus repurposes the mantle of a general, albeit for a different cause—that of his household's interests. He alters his course, adapting to his present circumstances by turning his back on the state which had long turned its back on his well-being and that of his household.

The play presents Titus adapting adroitly to the norms of the Rome under Saturninus. Studying Titus' behaviour in the latter half of the play, Aaron—an associate of Saturninus—comments to himself, 'Now what a thing it is to be an ass!/Here's no sound jest! The old man hath found their guilt./And sends them weapons wrapped about with lines/That wound, beyond their feeling, to the quick' (IV.2.25–28). Aaron notes the benefits of playing the fool. He realises that Titus has ostensibly humbled himself before the brothers who raped his daughter, feigning service and naïve goodwill to lure them into a false sense of security (II.4.1–2). Instead of openly

⁸ Foakes, R. A, 'Shakespeare and the display of violence', in *Shakespeare and Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 36–60, (p. 55).

⁹ Warren Chernaik, 'Self-inflicted wounds', in *The Myth of Rome in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 56–78, (p. 73).

attacking them and giving them an opportunity to crush his project of vengeance, Titus acts subtly; by concealing his intentions, Titus increases his odds for success. In controlling his anger in front of his daughter's assailants, he speaks to the human spirit possessing the skills 'to act as autonomous agents'.¹⁰ Concentrating on attaining his final goal, Titus is able to operate in spite of his emotions, allowing him to assert his interests. Instead of a space which enacts concord, politics has evolved into a ceaseless competition between groups suspicious of each other.¹¹ As Titus learns from his mistakes and jettisons his fixed disposition of state service for a vigilance to these new norms, he becomes an effective advocate for his household against threats to its interests.

Hence, while Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* anticipates Hobbes' *Leviathan* in questioning whether human persons without coercion can be trusted to act in each other's interests, it critiques the notion that rigid obedience to particular precepts can reliably safeguard the interests and well-being of those who need to be safe from predations. The titular character's arc serves as a warning for individuals to be vigilant of the political conditions in which they find themselves. The cruelties inflicted upon Titus and his household are initially exacerbated due to his blind acquiescence to Saturninus; the general begins the play believing that Saturninus would repay his services to the state in kind. While Titus eventually adapts to the norms of Rome under Saturninus, it comes too late to save many members of his household. Therefore, part of the play's tragedy lies in the unanswered question of whether Titus and his household could have better protected themselves if the general had asserted his household's interests against the whims of Saturninus from the beginning of the play. The gesturing in *Titus Andronicus* towards the flexible decision-making discussed by Machiavelli in his *Discourses on Livy* lends nuance to the characterisation of Shakespeare's political vision as a conservative cry for a fading worldview. Instead, Shakespeare's writings serve as forum for various ideological positions to interact with each other, forging well-rounded and considered discourses which have continued to inspire and provoke generations of readers to scrutinise the varieties of political action which affect their lives.

¹⁰ Alison Brown. 'Lucretian Naturalism and the Evolution of Machiavelli's Ethics', in *Lucretius and the Early Modern*, pp. 69–89, (p. 70)

¹¹ Moore, Andrew. 'Introduction', *Shakespeare between Machiavelli and Hobbes: Dead Body Politics* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016), pp. 1–31, (p. 25).

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Luke Basil Louis Ow Zhi Heng is a final-year English MA student at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. Having first encountered a Shakespeare text in full during his first semester as an undergraduate, Luke is intrigued by the sincere and profound sociopolitical commentary which abounds in Shakespeare's writings. For his BA dissertation, Luke submitted a paper which reframes violence in *Henry VI, Part Two* and *Henry V* as a political presence which monarchs must negotiate as though their own lives were in danger for the defence of those under their charge. Ultimately, the paper presents the meeting of violence with force as a key characteristic of kingship in Shakespearean drama. Currently, Luke is attempting to place *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar* in conversation with theoretical frameworks from Kristeva, Hobbes and Machiavelli to demonstrate that, in Shakespeare's plays, violence is a symptom of interpersonal mistrust which destroys any shared bonds between members of a community. To unwind, Luke can be found appreciating jazz, trying to win at chess or taking long walks with podcasts.

The Soundtrack to Revolution: Examining Rap as a Resistance Against the Black Man's
'Existential Deviation' in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*

ALEXANDER WILLIAMS

'To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively
conscious is to be in a state of rage almost all of the time'.

- James Baldwin ¹

When we discuss the Black man as a psychological subject, we must keep in the forefront of our discussion the fact that 'alongside phylogeny and ontogeny, there is also sociogeny'; these branches of biological and social systematics lend themselves, as Frantz Fanon argues, to a psychological exploration of the 'existential deviation [...] white civilization and European culture have imposed' on the Black man. In this paper, I will argue that not only are wake work and rap forms of ontological resistance against the American hegemony and its systems of oppression, but also reparative solutions to the psychopathology of the Black man's existential deviation. This paper will explore how Childish Gambino's existential deviation during his childhood and adolescence is rooted in his inability to be accepted by both his white and Black contemporaries, forcing him to occupy the fringe between the racial communities of Stone Mountain, his childhood home.

Keywords: wake work, hip-hop, Childish Gambino, Frantz Fanon

The Black man's alienation has never been an *individual* question, nor shall it ever become one. When we discuss the Black man as a psychological subject, we must keep in the forefront of our discussion the fact that 'alongside phylogeny and ontogeny, there is also sociogeny'; these branches of biological and social systematics lend themselves, as Frantz Fanon argues, to a psychological exploration of the 'existential deviation [...] white civilization and European culture have imposed' on the Black man.² In my reading of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) I interpret his conceptualization of the Black man's 'existential deviation' to encompass the psychological disalienation the Black man develops in relation to his self, his body, and his ability to exercise agency within the socio-political systematics the white hegemony has designed to assail him (6). Fanon's text acutely describes the psychopathology of a Black man in the twentieth century, elaborating similar ontological concerns to those advanced by Christina Sharpe, Katherine McKittrick, and W.E. B. Du Bois, but the Black man's psycho-existential complex from Fanon's temporal moment has only grown in complexity and malice during the twenty-first century.³ 'Ontology,' as it is discussed in this paper, will be defined as the lived experience of being, reality, and mode and how these existential mediums coalesce within an individual's body and positionalities. Fanon claims 'the black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the

¹ James Baldwin, 'To Be In A Rage, Almost All The Time', *NPR*, 1 June 2020

² Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated from the French by Richard Philcox, (New York: Grove Press, 1967). p. xv. All further references are taken from this edition and cited parenthetically in text.

³ Christina Sharpe's text *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Katherine McKittrick's article 'Mathematical Black Life', and W.E.B. Du Bois' text *The Souls of Black Folk* all speak to shards of this psycho-existential complex.

white man' (69). Against this universalizing abdication, I would argue rap and Sharpe's conceptualization of wake work, specifically how rap fulfils wake work's hauntological demands, are, in fact, potent forms of ontological resistance against the American hegemony and its wider power asymmetries in the socioracial order. In fulfilling wake work's hauntological demands, rap offers the promise and hope of the integration, acceptance, and acknowledgement of Black subjectivity amidst the daunting presence of ghosts and the abusive systems of power responsible for their creation.

In her book *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016), Christina Sharpe traverses between visual, literary, and theoretical archives to portray the contemporary Black existence defined by the wake of slavery, and the violence consistently accomplished by an antiblack singularity. This wake, which Sharpe describes as 'the track left on the water's surface by a ship; the disturbance caused by a body swimming or moved in water; it is the air currents behind a body in flight; a region of disturbed flow' leaves behind Black death and the 'hard emotional, physical, and intellectual work that demands vigilant attendance to the needs of the dying'.⁴ This 'wake work' describes how the modern Black body must bear McKittrick's 'new world blackness': a blackness originating and emerging in violence, death, and the cumulative trauma produced by the antiblack singularity.⁵ In this paper, I will argue that not only are wake work and rap forms of ontological resistance against the American hegemony and its systems of oppression, but also reparative solutions to the psychopathology of the Black man's existential deviation. We can observe both Fanon's existential deviation and the weaponization of rap as a means of ontological resistance within Childish Gambino's construction and discography, and from these observations, demonstrate the promise rap brings as an ontological emancipator. In creating Childish Gambino as outcast incarnate, the character is Donald Glover's vessel to store and express the valences, prospects, forces, and opportunities he experiences traversing through racially and economically antagonistic spaces. I explore how Gambino's existential deviation during his childhood and adolescence is rooted in his inability to be accepted by both his white and Black contemporaries, forcing him to occupy the fringe between the racial communities of Stone Mountain, his childhood home. Fanon's explications on the Black man's existential deviation reflect many innate components of the Black man's ontogeny but do not explicitly consider the ghosts embedded within new world blackness, which I will argue, must be at the forefront of these inquiries. Fanon admits 'the black Americans are living a different drama' than a Black man of his temporal and spatial position; nevertheless it is possible to expand upon his conclusions and supplement them with a twenty-first-century encounter of the Fanonian 'black problem' using Childish Gambino, a Black man in America, as our main subject of study (3).

In the mixtape *Royalty's* 'We Ain't Them' (2012), Gambino details how his great grandfather achieved the highest level of freedom a Black body can obtain within the economic constraints of slavery: 'My great granddad bought his own freedom/ Walk barefoot to Virginia to start his own peanut farm', reflecting the antiblack violence present in Sharpe and McKittrick's work.⁶ American slavery forced Black bodies to undergo a self-generative and intertwined process in incorporating slavery's drive toward death and trauma: an initial ontological fracture, such as being sold or whipped, producing a psychological fissure and a process of fragmentation following the break this fracture creates. In its fractured and fragmented state, the enslaved Black body is vulnerable to haunting as it is psychologically constrained under malicious systems of exploitation. In her book *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (2008),

⁴ Christina E. Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), pp. 3,10.

⁵ Katherine McKittrick, 'Mathematics Black Life', *The Black Scholar*, 44.2 (2014), pp. 16–28, p. 16.

⁶ Childish Gambino, 'We Ain't Them', from *Royalty* (Glassnote Records, 2012).

Avery Gordon defines haunting as the ‘language and the experiential modality by which abusive systems of power make themselves [and] the incontrovertible facticity of racial capitalism’ known.⁷ Abusive and racialized systems of power like slavery, Jim Crow, and its aftermath, mar the Black body, leaving scars and echoes of haunting’s spectral language in their wake. These scars, like Fanon’s existential deviation, are remnants of abusive systems of power, exerting their will on the Black body, bringing chaos into its language via a repetitive compulsion of haunting. The network of psychological neuroses embedded within slavery, and its continuation in socioracial systems of exploitation designed to objectify Black bodies, form the ‘social and economic realities’ Fanon argues must be recognized when discussing the ‘true disalienation of the black man’ (4). Early in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon asserts that we attach a ‘fundamental importance to the phenomenon of language’ because to ‘speak’ means ‘being able to use a certain syntax and possessing the morphology of such [language]’ (8). Synthesizing Gordon and Fanon’s framing of language as a vector of ontology shows the Black body’s language is haunted by abusive systems of power, forcing the syntax of the colonizer onto its morphology and its ability to ‘speak’. This syntax not only determines the words uttered by the Black body but also the language they emit as a sociopolitical structure trying to define its existential deviation. As a Black man in America, Gambino recounts such familial histories to prove that he, using the English language and thus, in a Fanonian context, assuming a culture to support the weight of Western civilization, can disrupt the colonization of his own psychopathology and transcend the modes of life, affect, and community dictated by his colonizers.

To complicate my discussion of Fanon’s existential deviation, I would like to merge its spectral characteristics with that of McKittrick’s ‘new world blackness’, and its relationship with what Christina Sharpe identifies as the ‘antiblack singularity’.⁸ New world blackness acts upon a Black man in the twenty-first century, personified as Childish Gambino, through his historic designation as an economic object via the ‘proved and certified archives of ledgers, accounts, price tags, and descriptors of economic worth and financial probability’.⁹ To invoke Sharpe, the rituals and acts of antiblackness accompanying slavery and these economic documents created such a violent environment the institution morphed into an all-encompassing climate. Sharpe describes a ‘singularity’ as a ‘weather event or phenomenon likely to occur around a particular time, or date, or set of circumstances’, meaning the antiblack singularity is a phenomenon occurring around the set of political, economic, and racial circumstances that dehumanized and violated African peoples.¹⁰ Enslaved African bodies were recorded in state-sponsored documents like ledgers and logs as *property* and, by dying as such, were left in the American archive as economic *objects*, but producing a *human* ghost. Gordon posits the ghost as a manifestation of modern forms of dispossession, exploitation, repression, and their concrete impacts on the people most affected by them, and on their shared conditions of living. To probe into a Black man’s historic designation as an economic object necessitates a collision with the language of the economic archive, the colonizer’s language, that has erased the humanity of his ancestors and left in its stead the need for Sharpe’s wake work: the haunting labor a living Black body undertakes to humanize Black ghosts from an American economy of skin pushing for Black death. I believe this complicated network of ontological and psychic positionalities encompasses a Black man in America’s existential deviation, and while the depth of this network remains horribly daunting

⁷ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Chicago: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. xvi.

⁸ McKittrick, p. 16.

⁹ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁰ Sharpe, p. 3.

to overcome, rap can, at least, present the opportunity to use the language of the colonizer as a means of achieving sociopolitical and economic mobility. Bound by the historic designation of nonperson, Childish Gambino equips the African oral tradition embedded within hip-hop to combat American necropolitics and the antiblack singularity in which Black life is rent and torn.

In *Camp*'s 'That Power' (2011), Childish Gambino provides a concrete profiling of his existential deviation within the geographical context of the American South, a region known for its extreme racial divide and violence. In the song's first verse, Gambino raps:

Lovin' white dudes who call me white and then try to hate
When I wasn't white enough to use your pool when I was eight
Stone Mountain, you raised me well
I'm stared at by Confederates, but hard as hell.¹¹

In this verse, we can observe Gambino's disalienation as a negotiation between how a Black body is racialized, and the subjectivity that is granted as an exterior effect instead of being an interior effect with an outward orientation. The 'white dudes' Gambino refers to are malicious representations of the American hegemony willing and able to weaponize a Black body's blackness against itself. Calling Gambino 'white' because of his personal demonstration of blackness while simultaneously discriminating against him because of this same blackness reflects Gambino's disalienation: the attack uses the designation of white to subvert Gambino's identity as a Black man while also reinforcing that Black is subhuman and worthy of violation. Gambino rapping he is being 'stared at by Confederates' alludes to the historical geopolitics of Stone Mountain, it is the site of the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan. Many of the white people he encountered growing up are, in essence, political actors seeking to reinforce a Confederate agenda. These violent and discriminatory actions are not isolated incidents unique to Gambino but, instead, are social manifestations of the antiblack singularity that has survived slavery, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow. Gambino's experience with Stone Mountain's racial communities is an expression of his existential deviation and subsequent double consciousness in America, 'a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world'. As an outcast, Gambino was always looking at himself through the eyes of others, and for Du Bois, measured his soul both by the blackness he knew to be, and the whiteness forced upon him: therein his psyche was a distinct 'two-ness...two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder'.¹² Gambino's fragmented bodily schema reveals his embodiment of division: to Fanon, the *self* is a dialectic composition of a 'body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world', but disrupting this process of composition, as abusive systems of power do, divides the Black body from itself and prevents the formation of a complete bodily schema.¹³ In this division, the Black man becomes a conjunction of social, phenomenological, and psychological disruptions, behaving as an animated vessel containing internally opposing forces, also known as the 'two-ness' Du Bois attributes to the American Negro's consciousness.¹⁴ Despite the repeated attacks on his racial identity and social agency, Gambino is thankful for the heuristic lessons he gleaned from these experiences and their ability to expose the stark reality for Black individuals in Stone Mountain as he alludes to with the line 'Stone Mountain, you raised

¹¹ Childish Gambino, 'That Power', from *Camp* (Glassnote Records, 2011).

¹² W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 8.

¹³ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 70

¹⁴ Du Bois, p. 44.

me well' because he can use rap as a form of revenge against his haters and the Confederate legacy ingrained within the South.¹⁵

In my reading, one of Childish Gambino's most important heuristic purposes is to demonstrate how rap, as a form of Fanon's 'collective catharsis', alleviates the melancholia that accompanies new world blackness (96). These critical considerations are at the forefront of wake workers like Gambino who converge Fanon's attempt to explain 'psychopathologically and philosophically the *being* of the black man' with the spectrality embedded within the Black body (6). In *Because the Internet's* 'II. Earth: The Oldest Computer (The Last Night)' (2013), Gambino negotiates these phenomenological tensions with the ontological implications of twenty-first century technology:

Yeah, break free from all of the insides
The godless denied us
But we don't give a damn bout the next day
We were never here, never know if the world change
Common sense, the consequences
Retweet the truth, then regret the mentions
We are the wireless survivors of things gone
Slaves to the unnamed never live long
Live and die by the line 'Never know fear'
Even I won't survive, is it unfair?
Is it unfair? Cause I don't care
When I step on that ant on the grass
Progress only thing that'll last (*last, last*)
3005, the year that we fear only God will survive
To be alone is alive.¹⁶

The first couplet of Gambino's verse 'Yeah, break free from all of the insides/ The godless denied us' is a veiled allusion to the psychopathology of a Black man in Gambino's specific temporal moment. Gambino first orients his listener to the psychic landscape of blackness as a means of preparing them to understand how those afflicted by new world blackness, 'the wireless survivors of things gone', live as necropolitical manifestations of economic violence. The 'things' Gambino alludes to are the Black bodies designated by the American hegemony as economic objects and the 'wireless survivors' the descendants of enslaved African people who must conduct wake work to humanize Black ghosts, the 'things', from the economic archive. As a victim of the antiblack singularity's repetition compulsion, Gambino weaponizes his colonizer's language to activate Black ghosts from the economic archive and produce their personhood from an 'afterlife of property'.¹⁷ Conducting the haunting labor of humanizing Black ghosts requires an intimate relationship with the spectral world, so it is no coincidence the word 'slaves' follows the lines 'We were never here, never know if the world change' and 'Retweet the truth, then regret the mentions', because the concealment of Black subjectivity that pervaded Fanon's temporal moment continues to persist into Gambino's. Wake work re-temporalizes the laborer and their experience of a Black past, present, and future where haunting is the language of

¹⁵ Childish Gambino, 'That Power', from *Camp* (Glassnote Records, 2011).

¹⁶ Childish Gambino feat. Azealia Banks, 'II. Earth: The Oldest Computer (The Last Night)', from *Because the Internet* (Glassnote Records, 2013).

¹⁷ McKittrick, p. 18.

‘working against meaning, working for meaning, [and] working in and out of meaning’.¹⁸ In the case of Childish Gambino, we can observe his experience with an altered Black chronology through his lines ‘Progress only thing that’ll last (*last, last*) 3005, the year that we fear only God will survive’. The ‘we’ being used in this couplet reflects the collective register of the Fanonian black problem’, so when Gambino describes the ruin that will precede the year 3005 he is operating from a similar critical framework as my own, one that argues ruin pervades the collective Black destiny.¹⁹ In the twenty-first century, the social and economic reality of a Black man in America is one of extreme haunting, but, the prevalence of rap as an art form gives the contemporary Black man an opportunity to channel in resistance or intentionally their haunting reality into a practice of concerted awareness and transformation.

To Du Bois, inside the American Negro are ‘two warring ideals’ and ‘two unreconciled strivings’ that drive them to discover the meaning of Black identity.²⁰ This quest of discovery, as it did for Childish Gambino, can often give way to a need for revenge, which then in turn becomes a palpable neurosis within their existential deviation. In *Culdesac*’s ‘Fuck it All’, Gambino explicitly recounts his need for revenge and the psychological damage this need, coupled with his existential deviation, caused:

Cause I used to be poor, I used to be unconfident
I used to hate these haters, now it’s just the opposite
Not only have I changed, I’m becoming something better
And revenge is for the weak, so I have settled my vendettas
With all of the kids who made my early life a living hell
And I hope you’re doing well and feeling better ‘bout yourself
Don’t know if you can tell, but change is usually for the better
I used to like these bitches but couldn’t afford to get ‘em
But now I’ll take your girl, yeah player pay homage
That’s why I fuck these bad mamas, Kate Gosselin
I’m trying to tell the world I’m nothing to be trifled with
Donald Glover staying hotter than some rifle spit
They only wanna fuck with you after you made your way
But when you started out you couldn’t pay ‘em to stay
But now I got ‘em lined up in the lobby door
It makes me wonder what this rapping shit’s a hobby for
Oh that’s right, because I’m gifted in another field, and another field, and another field
They say my public persona don’t have enough appeal
I take a lesson from Kanye and give ‘em something real
I’m getting all this attention I wanna do it right
That’s why I’m performing for you like every single night
To all my fans who’s saying Donald Glover about to blow
Just give me six months so you can say I told you so.²¹

¹⁸ M. NourbeSe Philip and Setaey Adamu Boateng, *Zong!* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), p. 204.

¹⁹ Fanon, p. 70.

²⁰ Du Bois, p. 4.

²¹ Childish Gambino, ‘Fuck it All’, from *Culdesac* (Glassnote Records, 2010).

Like Lord Byron, Gambino blurs the line between human and literary construct: he is one rapper whose 'hero was his poetry, or whose poetry existed for his hero'.²² As we can observe in the above lines, Gambino details the psychological healing he had to create for himself in order to move past the disalienation and 'living hell' forced onto him by his peers. Gambino's mentions of his marginalized economic status: 'I used to be poor', 'I used to like these bitches but couldn't afford to get 'em', and 'But when you started out you couldn't pay 'em to stay' reflect the economic nature of his disalienation and the continued economic marginalization Black bodies must navigate in America. However, the fact that this verse is written in the past tense, particularly with lines that point to a passing of time 'Cause I used to be poor, I used to be unconfident/ I used to hate these haters, now it's just the opposite', 'I used to like these bitches but couldn't afford to get 'em/ But now I'll take your girl, yeah player pay homage', and 'But when you started out you couldn't pay 'em to stay/ But now I got 'em lined up in the lobby door' means Gambino has already progressed past the need for revenge and that he has used his gifts in 'another field, and another field, and another field' to achieve socioeconomic mobility. This passage of time demonstrates there was a past Gambino, who was ill-equipped to combat the visceral consequences of his existential deviation, and a present Gambino who has changed and is on his way to 'becoming something better'. The present Gambino recognizes the responsibility of his recently-attained cultural position because of his 'gifts'— 'I'm getting all this attention I wanna do it right'—and now seeks to combat disalienation in the collective register. Gambino notes his existential deviation could have led to violence or some other antagonistic chain of events, but he believed acting upon this violence would reflect a weakness he already reconciled within his psyche. In an American socioracial order that often demonizes the Black man into a violent thug and criminal, Gambino believed committing these acts of violence or revenge would prove the white hegemony and his 'haters' right: that given the opportunity or choice, Gambino would choose violence and prove that he *is* dangerous. Instead, Gambino psychologically navigated through the violence inflicted upon him to become 'something better' and used his confidence to transcend the brutalities and trauma in his existential deviation. If we are to move toward a Fanonian revolution, we need to not only recognize how abusive systems of power like colonization and slavery restrict the Black body and its language, but also how the Black body can weaponize the language of the colonizer to achieve sociopolitical and economic mobility. Furthermore, we need to recognize how rap, as the descendant of the African oral tradition, is a dynamic, revolutionary artform entrenched in Black possibility, or rather a reparative futurity entrenched within the lessons of the past and the reality of the present.

The African oral tradition embedded within hip-hop, in its function as a weaponization of language, exposes the intergenerational racial and economic violence responsible for the Black man in America's psychopathology, revealing that what has 'been concealed is very much alive and present, interfering precisely with those always incomplete forms of containment and repression ceaselessly directed toward us'.²³ Such 'incomplete forms of containment' are economic in nature for the Black body as the Black ghost reminds us the 'slave is possession, proved to be property', so it would follow that Black freedom is 'embedded within an economy of race and violence', with this economy of violence being housed within the economic archive.²⁴ Rap, in its function as a 'channel, an outlet whereby the energy accumulated in the form of aggressiveness can be released', is a performative collective catharsis designed to humanize the Black ghosts locked within this economy of race and violence (112). Bound by the historic designation of

²² Peter L. Thorslev Jr., *Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes* (Chicago: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), p. 4.

²³ Gordon, p. xvi

²⁴ McKittrick, p. 17

nonperson, rappers repurpose the African oral tradition and the language of their colonizers to combat the American hegemony and the antiblack singularity in which Black life is rent and torn. For Fanon, revolution is a permanent state of struggle. Rappers exemplify this by embodying archives of Black resistance, in which knowledge is passed down through generations via the coding and weaponization of language. Throughout this paper we have explored Fanon's concept of existential deviation and its relationship to Sharpe's antiblack singularity and McKittrick's new world blackness and even observed how Childish Gambino has weaponized rap to combat his own existential deviation, but the question remains: where do we go from here? Synthesizing Fanon's existential deviation with the Black body in America should illustrate the potency of the Fanonian 'black problem' in the twenty-first century, but what does it actually *mean*?²⁵ What does rap's reparative functionality concretely accomplish in our day-to-day lives? For many, like me, it gives Black people hope and strength to carry on despite overwhelming knowledge we could be the next Elijah McClain, Sandra Bland, or Willie McCoy. After all, the murders of Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Breonna Taylor, and countless unnamed others forgotten in history are still ever-present necropolitical and racist acts of violence designed to keep the Black body in bondage. Fanon is quick to point out the 'true disalienation of the black man implies a brutal awareness of the social and economic realities', an awareness that has become increasingly visible thanks to rap's widespread appeal.²⁶ Rappers like Childish Gambino use the oral tradition to paint acutely the plight of the Black man in a white world, but the economic opportunities rap affords Black men give them a chance to create revolution, the kind of hopeful reimagining Fanon did not live to see.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

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Discography

- Childish Gambino, 'Fuck it All', from *Culdesac* (Glassnote Records, 2010)
- 'That Power', from *Camp* (Glassnote Records, 2011)
- Childish Gambino feat. Azealia Banks, 'II. Earth: The Oldest Computer (The Last Night)', from *Because the Internet* (Glassnote Records, 2013)

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The Promissory Obligations of Ghosts in *Scary Stories*

SOHINI RAYCHAUDHURI

Alvin Schwartz's *Scary Stories* trilogy (1981–1991) revitalises traditional folklore for children aged eight to twelve. Diverging from idyllic fairy tales, Schwartz presents a macabre universe populated by spectres, skeletons, and punitive revenants, thereby allowing young readers to confront fear while internalising social and ethical norms. His stories, drawn from archival folk narratives and urban legends, exemplify the “Man from the Gallows” tale type, demonstrating formulaic conflict-resolution sequences in which transgressions are rectified by supernatural justice. In the stories of my selection, twofold misdeeds of human characters, stealing body parts and eating them summon ghosts, much as the Ouija board compelled them to breach the boundaries of common households that relatable characters in familiar neighbourhoods inhabited, thereby upholding the promise - the evil must perish. The books concluded with an exhaustive list of these sources which revealed the author's assiduous intent to acknowledge the orally transmitted roots of these old tales, urban legends, scary stories in the distant and obscure past of human existence.

Keywords: Alvin Schartz, *Scary Stories*, Stephen Gammell, ‘Man from the Gallows’ family tale type 366.

In the 1987 interview with *Language Arts* magazine, the respected American folklorist, Alvin Schwartz shared:

Everything I write is read aloud three or four times in the bathroom because the acoustics are so good. I'm listening to the way the sounds link up and work together, so I will lock myself in the bathroom and read the book aloud and put big red circles around those things that are not working in terms of sounds. Since a lot of this material is going to be told, the sounds are important. But, what I'm also after here when I'm dealing with tales, are stripped down tales - right down to the essentials, because traditionally, storytellers will take such a tale and embellish it themselves. I want them to be able to do this¹

Schwartz's retelling of folklore, traditional stories, and urban legends achieves its intended effects meticulously in his three-book *Scary Stories* series (1981-1991).² With their crisp vernacular, simplicity, coherent and linear progression devoid of parenthetical preaching, florid description, or hyperbolic details, the short tales were appropriate for storytelling and oral transmission. He upends the tradition of commonly read children's fairy tales and

¹· Sylvia M. Vardell, “Profile: Alvin Schwartz.” *Language Arts*, vol. 64, no. 4, 1987. pp. 426–32.

²· Alvin Schwartz, *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark*. (New York, Harper Collins, 1981), *More Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1984), *Scary Stories 3: More Tales to Chill Your Bones*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1991). All further quotations will be from these editions and will be cited as *Scary Stories* in text in parentheses by volume and page number.

folktales with their idyllic plot, wish fulfilling narrative, talking animals and virtuous heroes, which universally wrought an unsaid covenant with parents by keeping in abeyance their shared anxiety of overexposing children's tender minds to anything age inappropriate. The world of these stories was formulaic and held a doorway to a realm where children could be left alone without parental supervision - at the end the universal virtues were always rewarded and evil punished. Unlike the rose-tinted fairylands and enchanted forests, what *Scary Stories* conjured was a world dominated by ghouls, skulls, skeletons, and spectres. But the question was why; a question that served as a fulcrum with the rage of parents wanting to sanitise these scary tales on one hand, and on the other, Schwartz underlining the necessity to allow young children to explore their fears and understand moral injunctions through folktales as well as the art and conventions of storytelling. In his *Prefaces*, Schwartz stressed the *fun* of telling and retelling scary stories that are transmitted orally through the ages to uphold the admonition that *justice will be served to those who violated the laws*. He stated in the *Preface* to the first book, *Strange and Scary Things*, 'Telling scary stories is something people have done for thousands of years, for most of us *like* being scared in that way. Since there isn't any danger, we think it is fun' (2). He remakes the promise to one made directly with children: that he will show them the joys and skills of storytelling, being safely scared whilst embedding guiding moral truths and a code of restorative justice.

Schwartz's note of assurance, however, failed to convince the parents of the target readers - children aged between eight and twelve years - and they continued to feel affronted to find in these narratives elements too nightmarish for tender minds. Furthermore, following the publication of the third and the final book in the series, *The Seattle Times* published an article in 1991, 'Hair-Raising Stories For Kids Also Raise Parents' Hackles on the pressing demand to ban the volume of *Scary Stories*'. 'Several parents here say the "Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark" trilogy is too gruesome for young children.'³ Earning the title the 'hobgoblin of school libraries' from the contemporary newspapers for creating foreboding narratives, portraying frighteningly familiar neighbourhoods, characters and settings, Schwartz's stories remain at the centre of contentious dialogues that rage between parents, school authorities, and publisher. While the publisher HarperCollins firmly stood their ground refusing censorship, Schwartz never ceased to win spontaneous adulation from his target readers and favourable critics. Katelyn Nelson wrote in her essay, 'On Literary Censorship: Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark':

The Scary Stories books are some of the most banned and challenged I've ever come across. They were the #1 banned book series of the '90s, and in the top 10 banned books of the 2000s... As Disney takes traditional fairy tales and sugarcoats them for the masses, Schwartz talks to children about folklore and life and death as if they are just subjects that need to be addressed. Instead of happy endings, he seems to say, here there be monsters. Here is the world and all of its dark corners. But it's okay! To be afraid is natural. Death is natural. And you don't have to be alone in facing it.⁴

Unfortunately, *Scary Stories* remain relegated as trivial frightful tales for children. Later in this article I discuss how the trilogy, as a synthetic revival of old and obscure tales, besides rendering a bite of scary delight, harked back to the generic promissory obligation of folklore in oral

³ Mary Elizabeth Cronin, *Raising Stories For Kids Also Raise Parents' Hackles*, Dec 6, 1991.

<https://archive.seattletimes.com/archive/?date=19911206&slug=1321458>

⁴ Katelyn Nelson, *On Literary Censorship: Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark*, Jun 13, 2019.

<https://katelynwrites.medium.com/on-literary-censorship-scary-stories-to-tell-in-the-dark-e03eff82bec7>

tradition, such as, ‘maintaining conformity to the accepted patterns of behaviour’.⁵ Schwartz recreated the typological function of ghosts as the corrective agents of misdeeds and restoration of social order and justice. On the one hand, they drew attention to rectitude and aphorisms like ‘justice is served’ and on the other, provided guidelines for acceptable ‘behaviour...either through emulation or avoidance’.⁶ The world of formulaic folktales was governed by the thumb rule; the worthy succeeded and the unworthy failed. The idea of worthiness was nonetheless deeply rooted in the sense of universal compassion and justice as opposed to incidental morality. Before revisiting my selection of Schwartz’s retelling of ancient cannibalistic stories, I would briefly like to discuss the standard index system or the international catalogue of folktale tale-types, the Aarne - Thompson - Uther Index (ATU Index); a system of classification that the folklorists commonly used to identify the underlying building blocks of tales and cross-reference them with the tales collected from around the world. Schwartz comments that in his folklore research ‘patterns emerge...and typify the genre’.⁷ This system highlights the persistence of themes and tropes across cultures, suggesting the importance of these tales to moral coding. The variants underscore the flexibility of the tales to particular circumstances. Folklorists widely use the catalogue to identify and classify tale-types into seven broad categories. Among these, my subject of interest and one of the most familiar conflict - resolution formulaic ghost story tale-type was the *return from the dead* to complete an unfinished task or retrieve what was rightfully his, such as a body part, golden limb or piece of jewellery. The ATU index identifies this tale-type as index number 366 – ‘The Man from the Gallows’, cross-referenced with folklorist Stith Thompson’s *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, a compilation of motifs present in European and Eastern folktales between 1932 and 1958.⁸ The latter assigns to this motif an identification alphabet and numbers:

E200—E299: *Malevolent return from the dead*.

Based on the various purposes of “the malevolent return from the dead” there are variants:

E230: *Return from the dead to inflict punishment*;

E235.4.1: *Return from the dead to punish theft of golden arm from grave*; and

E235.4.4: *Return from the dead to punish theft of liver from man on gallows*.

Folklorists also identify the traditional tale of grave robbing and punishment as Aarne/Thompson Tale Type 366, *The Man from the Gallows*. In the medieval period, leaving corpses to rot on gallows and gibbets in clear sight of the town as a demonstration of the rule of justice was a common practice in different parts of Europe. In the fourteenth century, famine afflicted pre-plague Europe and soon people were in the grips of terrible food shortages. In the words of Ben Johnson: ‘Everyone was affected, from nobles to peasants. Things got so bad in the winter of 1315/1316 that the peasants ate the seed grain they had stored for planting in the spring. By 1316 there were even rumours of cannibalism. In their misery and starvation, many people begged, stole, and murdered for what little food they could find. Even law-abiding

⁵ William R. Bascom, ‘Four Functions of Folklore’, *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 67, No. 266, Oct. - Dec. 1954, pp.333-49.

⁶ Roger D. Abrahams, ‘Personal power and social restraint in the definition of folklore.’ *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 84, no. 331, Jan. 1971, p.16.

⁷ Vardell op. cit. p.427.

⁸ Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends*. Revised edition, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960. pp.865 884.

people resorted to criminality in order to feed themselves.’ Parents who could no longer feed their families abandoned their children to fend for themselves. Indeed, the fairytale of *Hansel and Gretel* may have originated at this time. In the story, the siblings are abandoned in the woods by their parents during a time of famine. They are taken in by an old woman living in a cottage. She starts to heat the oven, and the children realise she is planning to roast and eat them. Gretel manages to trick the old woman into opening the oven, and then pushes her in⁹

Such flagrant violation of humanity gave birth to the revenant tales to intimidate the culprits. Promulgation of moral injunction through generations by orally transmitting narratives which assigned vengeful ghosts, replacing princes in shining armour on horseback or fairy godmothers bestowed with magical power, the responsibility to punish unacceptable behaviour. This gave currency to *what* should be emulated and *what* avoided. In his three-book series, Schwartz retells several old and obscure stories from this repertoire. He reanimates ghosts in their traditional role of corrective agents to sustain the generic trajectory of folklore towards the attainment of moral code, punishment of evil, and restoration of order: ‘The Big Toe’, ‘Cemetery Soup’, and ‘Just Delicious’, appear in each of the three anthologies of *Scary Stories* series consecutively. The first volume of *Scary Stories* opened with ‘The Big Toe’, one of the most infamous of all the stories considered too ghastly for young readers. Schwartz extracted it from ‘The Golden Arm’, a widespread traditional story, and in the notes provided at the end of the book, he adds the episode of Mark Twain sharing valuable advice ‘on delivering the jump lines’:

You must wail [‘Who’s got my golden arm?’] very plaintively and accusingly; then you [pause, and you] stare steadily and impressively into the face of ... a girl ... jump suddenly at that girl and yell, ‘*You’ve got it!*’ (*Scary Stories* 1, p.91n)

His illustrative episode is exemplary of Schwartz’s stripped-down tales that storytellers like Twain would take and embellish themselves. The importance of delivering jump scare in oral storytelling not only encompasses a major performatory aspect, woven into the fabric of orality, but also simulates the retributive experience of violating moral codes. The carefully wrought fright of the listeners foregrounded a glimpse of the promissory obligation of ghost stories, when *justice is served*. What makes these scary tales that are directed to punish the culprits who destroyed moral codes distinct from a legal injunction is their theatrical performances. Schwartz’s version of the story ‘The Big Toe’ began:

A boy was digging at the edge of the garden when he saw a big toe. He tried to pick it up, but it was stuck to something. So he gave it a good hard jerk, and it came off in his hand. Then he heard something groan and scamper away. The boy took the toe into the kitchen and showed it to his mother. “It looks nice and plump,” she said. “I’ll put it in the soup, and we’ll have it for supper”. (*Scary Stories* 1, pp.7-9)

The boy, the garden, the kitchen, and the mother could be any place or person. They were not characters endowed with supernatural powers, residing in some mystical fortress atop a secret mountain bewitched by an incantation. They were relatable. The story ended with the ‘voice’ of the ghost seeking its toe back. I read it as a reverse mirror image of the story ‘Cemetery Soup’ in

⁹ Ben Johnson. “The Great Flood and Great Famine of 1314.” Historic UK. 2014. .

which a woman replaced the young boy and a big bone replaced the big toe. The author classified both 'The Big Toe' and 'Cemetery Soup' as old 'jump stories', the latter dating back to 1925 (*Scary Stories 2*, p.93).

On her way home from the market, the woman took a shortcut through the cemetery. There, sticking up out of the ground, she saw a big bone. She picked it up and looked it over carefully.
"This will make a very good soup bone," she said. "I think I'll take it home. It's perfect weather for hot soup" (71-3).

What followed was a detailed recipe of the soup with all its ingredients! Just like the previous one, 'The Big Toe', in this tale the woman heard the voice of the ghost: "Please give me back my bone" (73). Unlike the ghost in 'The Big Toe', here the ghost sounded meek and polite. Soon after making a few requests, it lost its patience and spoke in a voice 'so loud that the whole house shook. "I WANT MY BONE BACK!" The woman reached into the pot, grabbed the bone, and threw it out the window. In a voice just as loud, she shouted, "TAKE IT!" As soon as the ghost got back the bone for which it appeared, footsteps could be heard "scurrying away from the house down the road toward the cemetery"' (73). In my opinion, the exact same formulaic narrative progression primarily concerned these two scary stories. The woman who made the ghost "scurry[ing] away from the house" figures as the alter ego of the child "Shaking with fear ... as the footsteps moved through the dark toward his bed." (*Scary Stories 1*, pp.7-9)

In his third version, Schwartz reworks the idea again with the appetising title 'Just Delicious', acknowledging its roots:

This is one of hundreds of stories that make up what folklorists call the "Man from the Gallows" family, or tale type 366. They are found in America, Great Britain, Western Europe, and parts of Africa and Asia... Such stories have their roots in the ancient tale of the man with no work whose family was starving. Searching for food, he comes to a gallows where a criminal has just been hanged. He cuts out the dead man's heart (or some other part of his body) and takes it home (*Scary Stories 3*, pp. 95-6).

Mutilating the dead, cooking a severed body part, enjoying the delicious meal, and the dead returning as the avenger were the common motifs this story shared with the other two. But here the stock conflict - resolution plot makes a slight departure with the character of Mina who was a victim of domestic violence. Martin makes this plain:

George was a bully, and Mina was a timid woman who did everything he asked because she was afraid of him.
On his way home for lunch one day, George stopped at the butcher shop and bought a pound of liver. He loved liver. He would have Mina cook it for dinner that night. Despite all his complaints about her, she was a very good cook.
When Mina cooked it, she tasted it and could not stop and ate all of it. Then she started panicking. 'What would he do when he found that she had eaten all of the liver? Some men would laugh - but not George. He would be angry and mean, and she did not want to face that again. But where could she get another piece of liver that late in the day?'

Then she remembered the old woman lying in the church next door waiting to be buried... (12-14)

Fearing the temper of her husband, Mina did what we and the reader/listener could easily presume after discussing the other two tales on mutilation of corpses. At the end, after feeding the cooked liver stolen from the dead body to her husband, when the ghost came to retrieve it, asking, "Who has my liver?" Mina pointed at her husband who had no clue what transpired while he was away. The tale ended with George Flint screaming under the punitive measures of the ghost and Mina. The typical folkloric narrative movement revolved around the journey, encumbered by trials and tribulations of the virtuous hero, from slaying dragons to fighting spells of dark magic, in order to rescue the damsel in distress whom I saw as Mina's alter ego. Contrarily, *Scary Stories* focused on the ends and not the means of flouting codes with a sense of urgency. In this story, Mina alone procured the liver from 'the old woman lying in the church next door waiting to be buried' without anyone finding out. Schwartz left it to the readers and their fertile imagination, primed by the codes of previous stories.

In the previous narratives, the non-corporeality of ghosts manifested in the *voices* of justice, serving as the fulcrum between the two antithetical axes of popular culture: one dominated by the bedsheet ghost of elementary school Halloween parties, and the other by the hyperbolic supernatural of the big-budget Hollywood movies. The excerpt from Schwartz's interview discussing his obsession with sounds with which I opened my essay would be an appropriate endnote to this. The writers and scholars of literature almost always relegated ghosts to the margins in children's literature, as the unwanted guest or the strange other, hideous and wicked; their sudden visitation disrupted the ostensible harmony of human residence. In 'Just Delicious', for instance, the self-sacrificing angel in the house, Mina turned into a Deviant Femme in order to punish her intimidating husband with the help of the ghost of another woman. Schwartz thus breathes fresh air by reversing the axis and bringing ghosts to the centre as the supreme voice of justice to establish social order. In fact, etymologically, the words "guest" and "host" share the same root, originating in the Latin word "hostis", meaning "stranger" or "enemy". Moreover, the spatial movement of these voices across two different realms, the living and the dead, was significantly not restrictive in opposition to the commonplace haunted house tale types, in which ghosts frequented only the coordinates of a given house. Generally, as the living crossed a door the narratives transported them to the other world as Sylvia Ann Grider explores in her essay, 'Haunted Houses':

Ghosts and their haunted domains are inseparable in ghost stories because the presence of the ghost is what changes an otherwise mundane place into a portal through which the living encounter the realm of the supernatural... Children explore the limits of reality through imaginative play in various kinds of metahouses - dollhouses, playhouses, tree houses, carnival fun houses, etc. - and haunted houses function much the same way for them.¹⁰

In the stories of my selection, twofold misdeeds of human characters, stealing body parts and eating them summon ghosts, much as the Ouija board compelled them to breach the boundaries of common households that relatable characters in familiar neighbourhoods inhabited, thereby upholding the promise - the evil must perish. Schwartz did not write these stories to scare little children, rather he collected them from a wide range of sources as extant texts of oral literature

¹⁰ Diane E. Goldstein, et al. *Haunting Experiences: Ghosts in Contemporary Folklore*. University Press of Colorado, 2007, p. 143.

and retold them in his own way for this age group. The books concluded with an exhaustive list of these sources which revealed the author's assiduous intent to acknowledge the orally transmitted roots of these old tales, urban legends, scary stories in the distant and obscure past of human existence. His wide range of work on folklore earned him veneration from children's literature scholars whom parental cavil could not dissuade. Professor Sylvia M. Vardell championed his oeuvre: "Who has done for children in the United States what the Grimm brothers did in Germany...? Alvin Schwartz, that's who!"¹¹

Scary Stories turned, with a stroke of mastery, the orally transmitted traditional tales and their supernatural elements into vehicles for enculturation of young readers, providing entertainment, demonstrating the art of storytelling, and furthering cognitive development. Mitigating the concerns of the parents, Schwartz repeatedly proclaimed the edifying functions of his *Scary Stories* in the *Prefaces*. In the *Preface* to the second book he wrote,

We still tell stories about creatures we fear, but not all of them are about bogeymen and demons. Quite a few are about living people. You'll meet some of them...who, at best, are not to be trusted. Scary stories of this kind often have a serious purpose. They may warn young people of dangers that await them when they set out in the world of their own (xii).

As a folklorist, Schwartz also stressed the performance aspects of storytelling:

Many years ago a young prince became famous for a scary story he started to tell, but did not finish. His name was Mamillius, and he probably was nine or ten years old. William Shakespeare told us about him in *The Winter's Tale*... Most scary stories are, of course, meant to be told. They are more scary that way. But how you tell them is important. As Mamillius knew, the best way is to speak softly, so that your voice sounds scary (2).

What followed was a short excerpt and a direct address to his readers, "If you started as he did, what would you tell?" (2). Throughout the three-book series Schwartz probed valuable instructions on the art of storytelling and performance techniques, as one of the most significant aspects of folktales, with a heuristic note. Stimulating narrative competencies in young readers, Schwartz did not fill in their imaginative spaces with "Once upon a time in a far far away land..." and "they lived happily ever after" creating dreamlike fantasy realms. The seven-line story which Schwartz wrote for the *Preface* to *Scary Stories 3*, a year before he passed away in 1992, was exemplary of his simple narrative style offering scope to the narrator to adorn it with verbal tapestry, especially epithets and proper nouns:

The girl was late getting home for supper. So she took a shortcut through the cemetery. But, oh, it made her nervous. When she saw another girl ahead of her, she hurried to catch up. "Do you mind if I walk with you?" she asked. "Walking through the cemetery at night scares me." "I know what you mean," the other girl said. "I used to feel that way myself when I was alive" (3).

In place of Shakespeare, in the second volume of *Scary Stories* Schwartz referred to T.S. Eliot

¹¹. Vardell, p. 426.

and his poem “Fragment of an Agon”:

Some people call those shivery, shaky, screamy feelings the “heebee jeebies” or the “screaming meemies.” The poet T. S. Eliot called them the “hoo-ha’s” (xii).

Schwartz dedicated the entire preface of his third and final volume of *Scary Stories*, named ‘*Boo Men*’ to write a closing statement of substantiation for his readers, validating his role as a folklorist collecting tales, legends, poems etc. from different sources,

This is the third book of such stories I have collected. I learned some of them from people I met. I found others: tales that had been written down or in folklore archives and in libraries. As we always do with tales we learn, I have told them in my own way. (3)

The books contained several such formulaic cautionary tales revolving around the rightful vengeance of ghosts returning to avenge grave digging, mutilating corpses and cannibalism, humans transforming into animals, dark magic, witches and fortune tellers. Stories like ‘The White Wolf’, ‘The Dead Man’s Hand’, and ‘Just Delicious’ shared a common theme: justice will be served. *Scary Stories* thus unlocked an eerie smell that wafted out through the American libraries of elementary and middle schools, disseminating socially acceptable behaviours, shared values, and approved practices, thereby filling the air with a fear of the unknown dangers lurking in the depths of darkness. He also delved deeper into more profound discussions of what scared us. But in place of Freudian analysis, he explained in much simpler words, ‘The dark scares us, for we don’t know what is waiting in the dark.’ (*Scary Stories* 3, p.3)

A crucial element of scary stories perpetuating the sense of horror was its environment. In these stories darkness prevailed as a major character, inseparable from the appearance of ghosts and fearmongering on which the horror genre thrived. In *Scary Stories*, the depths of the night shielded ghosts and otherworldly creatures and often appeared as the negative mirror image of the faraway kingdom, magical realms or enchanted forest of folktales. Writers of horror fiction used darkness, as the portent of all that was threatening and horrific, in a formulaic pattern. Stephen Gammell’s black and white charcoal and tenebrous strokes which contributed to the supernatural, horrific nature of the texts, brilliantly captured the timelessness of Schwartz’s narratives. The artist’s illustrations aggravated the brewing resentment among guardians giving them more reasons not to consider *Scary Stories*, beyond the familiar purview of children’s story books, suitable for kids or sing-song parentese. His illustrations conjured up the macabre world of ghouls, skulls, skeletons and spectres staring directly at us from the pages of the books, transcending the constraints of time and space in tandem, in sharp contrast to the vivid drawings of children’s fantasy books supplementing the winsome enigma of their enchanted world with which parents of that decade were familiar. These monochromatic sketches, blurred silhouettes, crevices and holes, complementing the element of textual vagueness, unfolded a feeling of uneasiness and creeping sense of dread. They also seemed to overturn authoritarian third-party interventions by directly bringing the young readers to the centre of the narratives, offering them the image of an empty chair on the opening title page of the first book in the series.

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Saintly Promises: The Spiritual Bond Between God and Saints in the Old English *Andreas* and *Guthlac A*

BRUCE N. XIAO

This article examines the significance of promise in two Old English poems, *Andreas* and *Guthlac A*. At once spiritual and moral, promise connects God with His pious followers on earth. Beginning with linguistic analysis that interprets saintly promise through the lens of biblical covenant, this article proceeds to show both the external and internal features of promise as presented in those two poems. It argues that the poetic portrayal of promise underscores verbal performance and heightened inner qualities, both of which are crucial in showing saints' commitment to, and fulfilment of their promises. In the *Andreas*, particularly, we also see that Andreas's transformation from a flawed to a flawless apostle suggests that saintly promise to God is also a form of self-promise which enhances Christian virtue.

Keywords: promise, Old English poems, *Andreas*, Biblical covenant, saints

Saints in Anglo-Saxon England 'were distinguished – if at all – by the glory of their martyrdoms (a visible token of their acceptance to God) and by their efficacy in dealing with various human suffering'.¹ Acting as soldiers of Christ (*Cristes cempa* in Old English), saints are often presented as intermediary agents between the spiritual and earthly spheres. This belief in saintly intercession was crucial in both the medieval Church and the literary imagination of the period.² A large corpus of prose and verse hagiographical narratives composed in Latin and Old English had an essential role in maintaining and reinforcing the spiritual and territorial legitimacy of religious communities. Saints' lives 'could be read out on the appropriate feast day, either in refectory while the monks or clerics dined in silence, or else during the Night Office on the vigil of the saint's day [...]'.³ Crucial to these narratives are their emphatic concerns about promise. As this article seeks to demonstrate through a close-reading of two Old English verse hagiographies, *Andreas* (c. 850–950) and *Guthlac A* (c. 720–50), pledge underpins the shape of the poems. Saints and apostles make solemn promises to the everlasting Lord, whilst God swears divine pledges to his followers. This reciprocal bond, profoundly spiritual and cooperative, is a connecting force between heaven and earth. Recent criticism has acknowledged the aesthetic qualities of Old English verse saint's lives, and this article reads promise in the *Andreas* and *Guthlac A* as a spiritual, linguistic, and literary exercise.⁴

¹¹ Michael Lapidge, 'The Saintly Life in Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, eds. by M. Godden and M. Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 251–72 (p. 269).

² Saints' ability to cure diseases, for example, was institutionalised by medieval church to promulgate a religious understanding of disability. Crucial to these ends would be the circulation of hagiographical literature. This is what Edward Wheatley calls the religious model of disability. For a further discussion, see Edward Wheatley, 'Monsters, Saints, and Sinners: Disability in Medieval Literature', in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Disability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 17–31 (p. 22).

³ Lapidge, p. 261.

⁴ Robert Bjork, for instance, argues for the unique individuality of Old English verse saints' lives. As he points out, 'the tendency of the Old English lives [...] has traditionally caused them to be viewed as individual, autonomous works of art, differing as much among themselves as from their continental progenitors'. See Robert Bjork, *Old*

The *Andreas* offers useful insights into the linguistic construction of ‘promise’. This long poem, preserved in a manuscript known as the *Vercelli Book* (Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare MS CXVII, s.x²), is intimately linked with the Greek apocryphal *Acts of Andrew and Matthias* (*Praxeis*), probably written around the fifth century.⁵ It tells of Andrew’s heroic adventure into the exotic land of Mermedonians to fulfil his apostolic mission. At the beginning of the poem, God sends Andreas to save Matthew who has been tortured by the cannibalistic Mermedonians. Intimidated by the dangers of the sea and foreign inhabitants, he is reluctant to accept the mission and questions the logic of this divine plan, as one of God’s angels could effortlessly reach the exotic land (‘ðæt mæg engel þin eað geferan/halig of heofenum’ (194–95a)).⁶ To this, God replies:

Ne meaht ðu þæs siðfætes sǣne weorðan,
ne on gewitte to wac, gif ðu wel þencest
wið þinne waldend wære gehealdan,
treowe tacen (211–14a).⁷

[You cannot be reluctant about this journey, nor weak in mind, if you well
intend to hold the pledge of true faith with your Ruler]

God warns Andreas that his reluctance might potentially undermine the *treowe tacen*. The noun *tacen*, normally glossed as a token, denotes a pledge here, while the adjective *treowe* means true or loyal. Accordingly, the phrase can be translated into ‘pledge of true (faith)’.⁸ It is widely accepted that the sense of being true implied in *treowe* is only slightly associated with objective description or gnomic wisdom;⁹ instead, it implies putting faith on someone, because *treowe* is derived from the Proto-Germanic *trewwaz ‘reliable’.¹⁰ Therefore, this phrase, I would suggest, establishes a basic lexical framework within which to understand saintly promise: it articulates the *raison d’être* of the promise (God and the entire Christian discourse) and the innerly refined qualities crucial for the fulfillment of promise (faithfulness and steadfastness). The phrase *treowe tacen* also suggests a mutually mandatory bond between God and his follower(s) that a failure in fulfilling its moral obligations amounts to a denial of divine will. Furthermore, I argue that

English Verse Saints Lives: A Study in Direct Discourse and the Iconography of Style (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), p. 1.

⁵ Yet, it seems implausible to regard the poem as a direct descendant from the Greek text. The scholarly consensus is that the *Andreas* refers to a Latin translation of *Praxeis*, though it remains indecisive which Latin version is the exact direct source; a number of the poem’s details suggest familiarity with the 12th century *Codex Casanatensis* (C-text), but the late date appears contradictory with the poem’s relatively early composition. For a detailed discussion of textual transmission, see Kenneth Brooks ed., *Andreas and The Fates of the Apostles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), xv–xviii. Moreover, dating the *Andreas* is notoriously difficult. Brooks uses Cynewulfian poems and *Beowulf* as reference and reaches a conclusion of the middle of the ninth century, whereas Samuel Cardwell argues for a later composition in the late tenth century. See Brooks, xxi and xxii; Samuel Cardwell, ‘Go now: Mission and Commission in the Old English *Andreas*’, *Parergon*, 39 (2022), 1–25 (p. 3).

⁶ ‘Your angel can achieve that without difficulty, high from heaven’.

⁷ Mary Clayton ed. and trans., *Old English Poems of Christ and His Saints* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013). Unless otherwise stated, all subsequent references to the *Andreas* are to this edition. All translations of Old English throughout the article are the author’s, who accepts full responsibility for any errors. Emphasis mine.

⁸ In Brooks’ edition of the poem, the glossary reads ‘an earnest of good faith’ (p. 167).

⁹ For example, it is true that winter is cold.

¹⁰ See Don Ringe, *The Development of Old English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 239. The phonological development of OE *treowe* is illustrated as: PGm. *trewwaz ‘reliable’ (Goth *triggws*, ON *tryggr*) > PWGm. *triuwī > *gǣ-trīowī > WS. *gætrīewī.

treowe tacen contains echoes of covenant in Christian soteriology such that promise in vernacular hagiography can be interpreted in the light of it.

In biblical theology, a covenant is the sacramental promise between God and humanity. For God, his covenantal word ‘reveals and interprets his own redemptive acts that develop across time, from creation to new creation, and his covenants with his chosen people provide the structure and unfold his eternal plan of salvation centered in Christ’.¹¹ For humanity, they promise obedience, submission, and cooperation following the divine word. This principle of reciprocity is illustrated by the so-called Abraham digression in the Old English poetic reworking of the Old Testament *Exodus* (c. 950–90):

Wære hie þær fundon, wuldor gesawon,
halige heahtreowe, swa hæleð gefrunon.

[...]

He þæt gecyðde, þa he þone cniht genam
fæste mid folmum, folccuð geteag
ealde lafe, (ecg grymetode),
þæt he him lifdagas leofran ne wisse
þonne he hyrde heofoncynige.

[...]

Soð is gecyðed,
nu þin cunnode Cyning alwihta,
þæt þu wið Waldend wære heolde,
fæste **treowe** (387–88; 406–10; 420–23a).¹²

[They were found there, beheld the glory, the holy pledge, as the warrior told;
he revealed that, when he took the boy fast in hands, drew the famous, ancient
sword, the roared blade, he did not value his life days more beloved than his
obeying the heavenly king; it is made known true that, now the King of all
creatures made trial of it, that you held fast the promise with the Lord]

Abraham’s offering of Isaac as a sacrifice might seem striking, but for Abraham, maintaining the promise of his *halige heahtreow* (‘holy pledge/faith’) remains the priority. His ritualised act thus marks the fulfilment of his obligation, whereas timely divine intervention and assurance of unfailing protection are God’s fulfilment of His obligation. Such a relationship reflects the broader thematic pattern of the entire poem. As Peter Lucas points out, ‘this arrangement, the provision of salvation in return for faith and obedience is the result of a mutual agreement, the abiding *haligu heahtreow*, between God and the Israelites’.¹³ Linguistically, if the *Exodus*-poet deploys ‘treow’ to translate the biblical concept of covenantal promise, that the *Andreas*-poet also uses ‘treow’ to imply the bond between God and Andreas is suggestive. This demonstrates that it is entirely appropriate to interpret hagiographical promise through the lens of biblical theology.

Now that we have examined the Christian covenantal framework that underpins these poems, we can turn to the other aspects of promise in Old English hagiography. Earlier in the *Andreas* a conversation between Matthew and God is particularly interesting for a further

¹¹ Paul Kim, ‘Covenants and The Eschatological Kingdom of God’ (Unpubl. MA Thesis, Reformed Theological Seminary, 2016), p. 3.

¹² Reference to the poem is from Peter Lucas ed., *Exodus* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1977). Emphasis mine.

¹³ Lucas, p. 62.

insight into the conceptualisation of promise in saints' lives. Although Matthew is blinded by his adversaries, he continues to pray to and honour God in words. His speech, a mixture of sorrowful despair and affective piety, is responded to by God whose glorious voice offers him consolation (ll. 63–87). Matthew's physical blindness holds hermeneutic significance, and could be possibly interpreted under Augustine's theoretical framework of vision and visibility which was mainly discussed in the *De Genesi* and *Contra Adimantum*.¹⁴ In his tripartite classification of vision ('visio corporalis', 'visio spiritalis', 'visio intellectualis'), the third is the most valued; yet, it has nothing to do with real seeing but figurative seeing. It refers to an intellectual understanding or acquirement of truth aimed at a proper reading of Holy revelation:

tertium autem genus uisionis est secundum mentis intuitum,
quo intellecta conspicitur ueritas atque sapientia: sine quo
genere illa duo, quae prius exposui, uel infructuosa sunt
uel etiam in errorem mittunt.¹⁵

[The third kind of vision then happens through the contemplation
of the mind, by which the understanding of truth and wisdom are
perceived. Without this kind of vision the two kinds first introduced
would either be useless or even lead into error]

The paradox here is that the most superior form of vision must be non-visualised; God is discernible only in spiritual reality, not in corporeal reality.¹⁶ As a result, seeing God in *visio intellectualis* appears to imply heightened spirituality and religious devotion, thereby confirming one's purified inner state. If Augustine's approach is applied to the *Andreas*, we can argue that (at least symbolically) Matthew is deprived of *visio corporalis*, but his unwavering adherence to the promise and its constant verbal enactment (i.e., uttering words) compensate his visual loss:

Eadig ond *onmod*, he *mid elne* forð
wyrðode wordum wuldres aldor,
heofonrices weard, halgan stefne,
of carcerne (54–7a).¹⁷

[Blessed and resolute, he still valiantly glorified
the glorious Lord, heavenly guardian, with words
in holy voice from the prison]

The adjectives 'eadig and onmod' and adverbial phrase 'mid elne' indicate Matthew's heightened inner state through a lexical pattern. It is reinforced by the alliteration of *eadig* and *elne* and the semantic closeness of *onmod* and *elne*. Although Matthew's psychological landscape is not fully explored by the poet, these modifiers suffice in presenting his mental resilience. Therefore, we may safely suggest that another aspect of promise is the narrative focus upon the saint's internal

¹⁴ See Jesse Keskiäho, *Dreams and Visions in the Early Middle Ages: the Reception and Use of Patristic Ideas, 400–900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 137–216 (p. 139). Keskiäho suggests that although plenty of Augustine's later writings make covert reference to vision theory, it is only explicitly developed in the *Contra Adimantum*, and *De Genesi* where the theory of visions is fully discussed.

¹⁵ Translation taken from Keskiäho, p. 140.

¹⁶ As Keskiäho argues, for Augustine 'God cannot be perceived by corporeal eyes, but only by the intellect which perceives things which lack visible form'. See Keskiäho, p. 141.

¹⁷ Emphasis mine.

life. Often articulated through a well-crafted lexis, the internal life and internal qualities are crucial evidence of the saint's commitment to promise.

Meanwhile, the passage above conveys the notion that promise is fundamentally a speech act which entails a public and verbalised performance. Keeping a promise does not just demand physical actualisation but requires ritualised utterance. Because Matthew has completed his moral obligations, God responds with assurances of success:

... He his maguþegne
under hearmlocan hælo ond frofre
beadurofum **abead** **beorhtan stefne**:
'Ic þe, Matheus, mine sylle sybbe
under swegle' (94b–8a).¹⁸

[He declared fortune and comfort to his retainer,
valiant in battle and in the chamber of sorrow,
in bright voice: 'I grant you, Matthew,
my peace under the heaven']

The way in which God fulfils his promise is inherently verbal ('abead') and voiceful ('beorhtan stefne'). Such an exchange of words becomes a currency in this Christian dominion governed by the principle of covenantal promise. Emphasising the prominence of words in promise, Matthew's divine inspiration counteracts his physical blindness as he 'sees' God in *visio intellectualis* through religious devotion. The complex semantic network in this episode forges an emphatic pattern that examines promise through an alignment between heightened inner state and heightened verbal performance; the internal merges with the external to demonstrate how the holy bond with God can be maintained even in the most difficult of circumstances. This verbal quality of promise can also be proved through linguistic analysis. In the passage above, the verb *abead* (inf. *abeodan*) is literally translated into 'declared' (or 'announced'); yet, the context suggests that it could also be properly rendered into 'promised'. Semantically proximal to *(a)beodan*, *(ge)hatan* similarly denotes 'to promise' in a hagiographical context. One example is from the *Guthlac A*, which is preserved in a manuscript known as the *Exeter Book* (Exeter, Cathedral Library, MS 3501).¹⁹ The poem accounts the eremitic life of St Guthlac of Croyland, with a particular emphasis upon his spiritual life and the ultimate triumph of Christian faith over the demonic. In the poem, Guthlac once declares in direct speech:

Huru, þæs bihofað, se ðe him Halig Gæst
wisað on willan ond his weorc trymað,
lapað hine lipum wordum, **gehateð** him lifes ræste (361–63).²⁰
[Truly, it is need that the Holy spirit directs him in desire,
encourages his deeds, calls him with pleasant words,
and promises him rest after life]

¹⁸ Emphasis mine.

¹⁹ St Guthlac of Croyland (c. 674–714), once a Mercian warrior, ultimately chose to convert to God and became a hermit at Croyland (Lincolnshire). Much of what we know about him comes from monk Felix's *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, probably written between 730 and 740. The relationship between the *Guthlac A* and Felix's account is tricky, and it has been difficult in identifying the direct source of the poem. For a further discussion on this topic, see Jane Roberts ed., *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 19–29.

²⁰ All subsequent references of the *Guthlac A* are to Roberts' edition, unless otherwise stated. Emphasis mine.

The transitive verb *gehatan* (inf. of 3rd. pres. indi. *gehated*) is glossed by Jane Roberts as ‘to promise’ here. According to Bosworth Toller’s *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* online, OE *gehatan* is commonly glossed with three groups of meanings: 1). to call, to name 2). to bid, to order, to command 3). to promise, to vow.²¹ Etymologically, the PGM. of the stem of *gehatan* (i.e., without preverbal *ge-*), suggests Guus Kroonen, is *haitan, s.v. ‘to call’.²² Some Germanic cognates of OE *hatan* include Old Norse *heita* ‘to call, be called’, Old Frisian *heta* ‘to call, to command, to promise’, and Old Saxon *hetan* ‘to call, to command’.²³ Whilst the question as to how those different meanings of OE *gehatan* are interrelated lies beyond the scope of this paper, it suffices the purpose to observe that they are heavily interactional, relying upon verbal expressions to establish pragmatic relationships between actors and recipients.

Up to this point, hagiographical promise could be seen as comprising three essential elements. Firstly, the framework of biblical covenant is deployed to underscore the moral force in the mutual promise between the saint and God. It is a means through which dynamic connections between heaven and earth can be forged. We have also seen that promise has two representative features in religious poetry: it requires heightened verbal performance (external) and heightened inner state (internal). Both aspects shall be further explored in the ensuing discussion of the *Guthlac A* where their literary, theological and linguistic complexities are fully examined. As I have sought to demonstrate through Matthew’s blindness, hagiographical narratives often emphasise the saints’ spiritual qualities over the temporal duration of promise. Such a focus upon the psychological and the emotional suggests that the interior dynamic associated with promise is as much reiterated as its exterior, verbal force. Since the *Guthlac A*-poet avoids the conventional mode of narrating the saint’s life by demonstrating an interest in the ‘psychology of eremitic and monastic lives’ and the ‘spiritual warfare for the soul’, the poem establishes a semantic network to present Guthlac’s Christian subjectivity enlivened by his commitment to promise.²⁴

In Guthlac’s fifth verbal counterattack against the devil’s hostile intimidation (ll. 592–684), his utterance of saintly promise is almost ritualised:

Eom ic eaðmod his ombiehthera
þeow geþyldig. Ic gepafian sceal
æghwær ealles his anne dom (599–601).

[I am his humble obedient servant, patient retainer.
I shall solely and entirely obey his decree everywhere]

This assurance of humble obedience and unconditional submission is part of the formulaic language universally shared by all the saints. It is unique in this poem, however, that Guthlac’s specific promise is that he will be the authorised guardian of the *beorg* (hill, mound) revealed by God.²⁵ Reciprocally, the divine promise constitutes two dimensions. One is timely, which

²¹ Joseph Bosworth, ‘hatān’, in *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*, eds. by Thomas N. Toller et al. (Prague: Charles University, 2014).

²² Guus Kroonen, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Germanic* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013), p. 202.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Clayton, xiv.

²⁵ The *beorg*, the site of Guthlac’s hermitage, carries symbolic significations and is crucial to the theme and the structure of the poem. As Stephanie Clark suggests, the spiritual struggle between Guthlac and demons is firmly rooted in a struggle over land possession. Although other saints’ lives often describe the relationship between a hermit and their hermitage site, the *Guthlac A* stands out as attaching great importance to eremitic landscape. For a further discussion, see Stephanie Clark, ‘A More Permanent Homeland: Land Tenure in *Guthlac A*’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, (40) 2011, pp.75–102.

includes spiritual inspiration and empowerment ('þætte Guðlace God leanode ellen mid arum, þæt he ana gewon' (449–50)).²⁶ The other is eschatological, which concerns the saint's access to eternal bliss and eternal home in heaven. This transcendental immutability seems to be the ultimate goal for Guthlac as this 'ham in heofonum' ('heavenly home') consistently remains his hope. Hope is always associated with the future, thereby suggesting a temporal discrepancy between the current reality and the prospective situation. It is a period of time of mystery and self-estrangement, in which Guthlac's inner qualities ('gæst') are examined as evidence of his unequivocal commitment to the promise. From line 170 to 204, for example, *gæst* appears four times with subtle variances:

God wæs Guðlac! He in *gæste* bær
heofoncundne hyht [...]
Gyrede hine georne mid *gæstlicum*
wæpnum ond wædum [...]
Ne meahton hy æfeste anforlætan,
ac to Guðlaces *gæste* gelæddun
frasunga fela [...]

No þy forhtra ws
Guðlaces *gæst*, ac him God sealde
ellen wiþ þam egsan [...]
(170–1a; 177–8a; 187–9a; 201b–3a).²⁷

[Guthlac was good! In the spirit he bore heavenly hope;
he eagerly prepared with spiritual weapons and armours;
they [i.e., demons] could not forsake their envy,
but brought to Guthlac's spirit many temptations;
Guthlac's spirit was by no means frightened,
and God gave him courage against the terror]

The first occurrence suggests the purification of Guthlac's inner state, as heavenly hope is what his *gæst* is directed towards. Compared with the second occurrence where Guthlac's courage is expressed through martial images, it puts more emphasis upon his undisturbed focus upon the promise, in that only when his promise to God is fulfilled can his heavenly hope become materialised. Moreover, the third occurrence makes it clear that to fulfil the promise Guthlac's internal qualities are constantly put to test; his *gæst* must prove itself capable of triumphing over the demons' temptations through an unambiguous display of steadfastness ('mægenfæste gemynd' (476a)). This extract does not just eulogise these saintly qualities but highlights their association with God. The link between Guthlac and God through the word *gæst* indicates that the two parties in the promise are always in a dynamic exchange which is both profoundly spiritual and cooperative.

So far in my discussion I have used *gæst* as a convenient replacement for inner qualities. It is necessary to justify this choice. In the heroic poem *Beowulf* (c. 7th – 11th centuries), line 86 first introduces Grendel, and he is depicted as an 'ellengæst'; throughout the poem, he is again referred to as a 'grimma gæst' at line 102 and 'gæst yrre' at line 2073. In terms of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, OE *gæst* was derived from 'the same Germanic base as Old Icelandic **geiski*

²⁶ 'God, by virtue of his magnificence, rewarded Guthlac with courage, as he fought alone'.

²⁷ Emphasis mine.

‘fear’, Gothic *usgaisjan* ‘to terrify’, *usgaisnan* ‘to be terrified’.²⁸ Therefore, the fundamental meaning of *gæst* is terror and the ability to terrify. Nevertheless, there seems to be a semantic discrepancy between the negative implication of *gæst* in *Beowulf* and the more Christianised, more spiritual implication in the *Guthlac A*. This phenomenon was systematically studied by Peter Clemoes who treated *gæst* as ‘the only member of pre-Christian Germanic vocabulary signifying a malevolent spirit to become sufficiently purified to denote the Christian benevolent spirit in all its forms’.²⁹ In addition to this change of value, the semantic abstraction from denoting concrete beings like Beowulf and Grendel to denote spiritual beings by virtue of the word’s association with immateriality is more prominent, because it is on this basis that we speculate that *gæst* could signify ‘a human potential for supreme good’ and ‘divine and human spiritual interplay’.³⁰ Therefore, the poem’s emphasis upon Guthlac’s spirit reflects an Christian eagerness to probe into his inner world; it consists of an enabling faith, an optimistic attitude towards salvation, and a perpetual pursuit of what is intellectually wise, morally good, and heavenly secure. From this view, the correlation between ‘gæst’ and interior qualities is legitimised. Moreover, ‘gæst’ embodies a ‘linguistic currency’ that interpersonally connects the mortal’s spirit with that of God.³¹ It is perfectly natural that Guthlac’s commitment to his promise is focalised through both psychological and spiritual lenses.³²

Nevertheless, to demonstrate Guthlac as a soldier of Christ, internal steadfastness is not adequate, as it must conjoin with a harmonious correspondence between speech and action. Although I previously pointed out the performativity of promise through words, it is worth noting here that saintly promise would lose its spiritual prominence without appropriate actions to substantiate what is verbalised. For Guthlac, to fulfil his promise of guarding God’s *beorg* against demonic invasion, consistent articulation of faith must be conflated with stoic endurance of physical agonies. Prior to Guthlac’s third speech (ll. 361–89), we are told that in spite of the demonic attack he is not deviated from the will of God (‘Symle hy Guðlac in Godes willan fromne fundon’ (348–49a)).³³ His resolute actions are particularly lauded when examined by demons in the darkness of night (‘nihta genipu’). That demons think Guthlac would relinquish the *beorg* out of a desire of reintegrating into human society (‘monlufan’ (353b)) contradicts with his determination to integrate into divine love (‘lufan Dryhtnes’ (652b)). This antisocial action taken by Guthlac is transformed into one that cannot be interpreted within the human epistemological framework. As Bjork states, ‘saints are humanity transcended. Beyond life, they rise above the mutable world, becoming one with the imperishable, unchanging body of Christ’..³⁴ Besides, the mention of ‘nihta genipu’ further underlines Guthlac’s commitment to promise, as darkness becomes a foil to his spiritual brightness. Such an association of sainthood and light is made explicit in another speech:

Eom ic soðlice
leohte geleafan ond mid lufan Dryhtnes,

²⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. ‘ghost (n. & adj.)’, Etymology’.

²⁹ Peter Clemoes, ‘This World as Part of God’s Spiritual Dominion’, in *Interactions of Thought and Language in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 438–87 (p. 441).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 445 and 415.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 439.

³² The word *gæst*, in addition to denoting Guthlac’s blessed soul (spirit), is assigned to God’s angel (‘frofre gæst’ (136b)). Interestingly, it is also used for demons (‘earmra gæsta’ (339b), ‘se atela gæst’ (116b)) perhaps for the purpose of spiritual contrast.

³³ ‘They always found Guthlac firm in God’s will’.

³⁴ Bjork, p. 20.

fægre gefylled in minum feorhlocan,
reostum inbryrded to þam betran ham,
leomum inlyhted (651b–55a).³⁵

[I am truly pleasantly filled with bright faith,
with the love of God in my breast, inspired in my mind
towards the better home, enlightened with radiance]

Following this powerful display of Guthlac's deeds is his unwavering utterance of words. In the first part of the third speech (ll. 361–68), he verbalises God's promise and his own, and underscores the significance of words in their spiritual bond ('lapað hine liþum wordum'). This lays foundation for the second part of the speech (ll. 369–89) which concentrates on conceptual pairings including body and soul, transience and eternity, words and deeds:

þeah ge minne flæschoman fyres wylme
forgripen gromhydge gifran lege,
næfre ge mec of *þissum wordum* onwendað (374–76a).³⁶

[Although you, fierce-minded, assailed my body
with surge of fire, greedy flames,
you are not to turn me away from these words]

Based on the text, 'þissum wordum' should be referring to Guthlac's iterations of obedience and verbal counterattack of demonic obsession with transitory goods. Empowering and enspiriting, they serve as an inexhaustible source of his heroic sanctity, constantly reminding himself, God, and his adversaries of his sacred promise(s). In this sense, embodying actions, words also compensate actions to fulfil obligations within the spiritual bond of *halige heah treow*.

Since my philological analysis at the beginning of the article has demonstrated that verbal enactment is vital to promise, it is worth noting that this indulgence in words also has broader theological prominence. The most remarkable evidence is perhaps from the Gospel of John: 'In principio erat Verbum, Et Verbum erat apud Deum, Et Deus erat Verbum'.³⁷ By organising words into coherent speech, Christians express their affective piety, 'emulate the Creator himself, praise him, and become part of his everlasting body'.³⁸ Being transactional and interactional, this linguistic network within which people verbalise faith and promises allows them to participate in God's reality, because for Karl Barth, human words used for this purpose are equal to God's own word. He argues that 'our words then possess the entire veracity which they have in God himself, in which God the creator, who places them at our disposal, knows about himself, and with which he describes himself'.³⁹ To access God's reality is essentially to grasp a reality of His presence, for it is God's incarnation that gives a full meaning to Christian discourse. To illustrate this point, Andrew Moore conceptualises God as the 'grammar of Christian faith'.⁴⁰ Since

³⁵ Emphasis mine.

³⁶ Emphasis mine.

³⁷ 'In the beginning was the word, and word was with God, and God was word'. For a further discussion of the relationship between the significance of words and its theological sources, see Bjork, pp. 18–20.

³⁸ Bjork, p. 6.

³⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, Volume II: The Doctrine of God, First Half-Volume* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), p. 231.

⁴⁰ See Andrew Moore, 'The Grammar of Christian Faith and the Relationship Between Philosophy and Theology', in *Realism and Christian Faith: God, Grammar, and Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 108–137. Emphasis mine.

grammar regulates the possible combinations of words, thereby giving language an order and a meaning, God orders the practices of faith. Failure to recognise such divine realism would result in an incomplete understanding of Christian theology. As Moore claims, ‘practices help us discover the meaning of Christian discourse, but unless they are pursued in obedience and acknowledgement of God’s involvement in them, they are an inadequate guide to meaning’.⁴¹ Therefore, if we turn back to the poem, Guthlac’s incessant practices of verbalising promises to God are not simply a semantic participation in God’s reality but a means to grapple with His presence, to become one with His body, to touch that immutable truth.

Saints’ words and speech matter. This argument has been undisputed in terms of literary representation and theological explanation. Yet, no attempt is made in the *Guthlac A* to interrogate and instruct the nature of God’s verbal promise. In fact, God barely intervenes in human affairs in the poem. By contrast, the *Andreas* is featured by divine interventions; without His handful guidance, Andreas would not have accomplished his mission. It is in this poem that an answer to the essence of divine promise is found. Much of the poem’s focus is on the apostolic missionary bond between Andreas and God. It is another type of mutual promise encountered in hagiography, slightly differing from the one between Guthlac and God, given Andreas’ peculiar role as Christ’s apostle. Nonetheless, it is homogeneous to the sacred promise in the *Guthlac A* by virtue of the eulogy of heightened spirituality, self-sacrifice, and commitment to moral obligations. Focusing upon Andreas’ repeated calls for divine assistance, and the narrative suspense created through a misperception of his being forsaken by God, the following discussion attempts to argue that divine promise is featured by eternity and infallibility.

In the second part of the narrative, instigated by Satan, Mermedonians rush out to capture Andreas. At this critical moment, God reveals in holy voice that he must fortify intellectual and emotional faculties (‘modsefan’ (1209b), ‘hyge’ (1213a), ‘heortan’ (1213b)), embrace the forthcoming assaults (‘mirce manslaga’ (1218a)), and believe that God remains with him (‘ic þe mid wunige’ (1218b)). Yet, God also emphasises that although Andreas’ body is to be substantially disabled, he will not die (‘Ne magon hie [...] deaðe gedælan’ (1215–17a)). This is explicitly set as a test of Andreas’ commitment to his promise of adhering to divine guidance, and of completing the sacred commission. Since saintly suffering evokes Christ’s Passion and consequently gestures towards an increasingly typological conflation with Christ, Andreas’ corporeal body must be disabled so that his saintly body can be enabled. In the meantime, the assurance that ‘ic þe mid wunige’ (1218b) (‘I remain with you’) symbolises God’s promise that is instrumental to Andreas’ navigation of the foreign land. This pledge of divine protection and companionship has in fact already been underscored in the first part of the narrative when Andreas recalls Christ’s speech:

Bodiað æfter burgum beorhtne geleafan
ofer foldan fæðm. ***Ic eow freoðo healde*** (335–6).⁴²

[Preach the bright faith in cities after cities,
over earth’s embrace.
I shall hold you in peace]

Such thematic repetition lends more authority to Christ’s promise, thereby leaving no room for interrogation. As Cardwell notes, ‘the poem emphasises the continuing presence of Christ with his followers after his ascension (‘ic eow freoðo healde’), which is drawn specifically from

⁴¹ Moore, p. 118.

⁴² Emphasis mine.

Matthew 28 (*ego vobiscum sum*)'.⁴³ As 'the central tropological or even "pastoral" concern of the [Andreas] legend', it provides an enhanced assurance of the intervening power of Christ-as-God.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, over the three-day torture Andreas grows increasingly skeptical about the validity of divine promise. In his first appeal to God the speech is marked by an emotional display of vulnerability and an emphasis on God's power (ll. 1281–95):

Ic gelyfe to ðe, min liffruma,
þæt ðu mildheort me for þinum mægenspedum,
nerigend fira, næfre wille,
ece ælmihtig, **anforlætan**,
swa ic þæt gefremme, þenden feorh leofað,
min on moldan, þæt ic, meotud, þinum
larum leofwendum lyt geswice (1284–90).⁴⁵

[I believed in you, my source of life, that you,
compassionate Saviour of men and eternal Almighty,
will never forsake me because of your majestic power,
so that I, while I live my life on earth,
contrived little to be false to your pleasant teachings.]

Andreas reiterates the fact that he has kept to his promise of remaining true to the divine teaching. This statement is not false because, as the poet tells us, 'hæfde him on innan ellen untweonde, wæs þæt æðele mod asundrad fram synnum' (1241b–43a).⁴⁶ Although Andreas' sainthood proves exemplary, it is by no means flawless as he subsequently interrogates God's credibility by hinting at the possibility that he has been forsaken ('anforlætan'); the multiple references to God's 'mægenspedum' convey the subtext that 'since I have been true to my promise, and you are omnipotent, where are you now?'. Around 110 lines later comes Andreas' second appeal and the key word 'anforlætan' thematically unifies the two speeches (ll. 1401–28):

to fæder cleopodest,
cininga wuldor, ond cwæde ðus:
'Ic ðe, fæder engla, frignan wille,
lifes leohtfruma, hwæt **forlætest** ðu me? (1410b–13).⁴⁷

[[Christ] cried out to the Father, the glory of kings,
and thus said: 'I want to inquire you, Father of angels,
Author of light and life, why you forsake me?']

Andreas quotes from Christ's own words; by associating Christ's fear of abandonment ('forlætest') with his own, he offers a superficially convincing justification for his despair. Divine promise seems to have become void of authority, given that Andreas explicitly contrasts his present corporeal deformation with Christ's previous pledge of the twelve apostles' bodily

⁴³ Cardwell, p. 14.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 15.

⁴⁵ Emphasis mine.

⁴⁶ 'he had within himself undoubting courage; that was a noble mind sundered from sins'.

⁴⁷ Emphasis mine.

wholeness in combating the adversaries.⁴⁸ The iteration of the trope of bodily dismemberment, in addition to creating a sympathetic pattern, suggests the saint's figurative dismemberment of selfhood: Andreas descends into an existential crisis.

At this point, narrative suspense is created, and the ensuing resolution is marked by a climatic revelation of God in holy voice that reassures Andreas of His everlasting authority:

So þæt gecyðeð
mænig æt meðle on þam myclan dæge,
þæt ðæt geweorðeð, þæt ðeos wlitige gesceaft,
heofon ond eorðe, hreosaþ togadore,
ær awæged sie **worda ænig**
þe ic þurh minne muð meðlan onginne (1435b–40).⁴⁹

[It is true that many people at the assembly on that great day
will reveal it shall come to pass that this beautiful creation of heaven
and earth shall perish together before any words
that I begin to speak through my mouth are made void]

That God's promising words will not be invalidated even though 'ðeos wlitige gesceaft' (this beautiful creation) perishes counteracts Andreas' previous skepticism. Charles D. Wright's study of the formulaic expression 'þurh+demonstrative pronoun+adjective+gesceap/gesceaft' in Cynewulfian poems demonstrates that the 'focalisation or reference point [of this expression] is often human rather than divine [...] the specific referent of *gesceaft* in the sense 'creation' is almost always determined deictically'.⁵⁰ However, this formulaic phrase is used here as an exception, because the focal point is not humans but God. His self-reflection upon the ephemeral nature of 'ðeos wlitige gesceaft' persuasively conveys the idea that divine words are incapable of perishing. Therefore, God's declaration embodies a self-reflection upon the immutable essence of speech and promise. His voice, more crucially, recovers Andreas' almost disintegrated sainthood.⁵¹

While Guthlac's psychology and spiritual state are very much in focus, he remains depersonalised simply because he is too flawless. This is largely due to the generic requirement of hagiography; rather than create a complex individual self, the aim is to make Guthlac into a mouthpiece for Christian doctrine. In contrast, the literary representation of Andreas is more interesting. Although he is conventionally characterised by saintly excellence, the poet does not entirely erase his human nature, that is, an intrinsic predisposition to imperfection. As Amity Reading similarly points out, 'Andreas is not a perfect type of Christ, but rather a weak one, *full*

⁴⁸ ðu ðæt gehete þurh þin halig word,
þa ðu us twelfe trymman ongunne,
þæt us heterofra hild ne gesceode (1418–20).

'You promised through your holy word, when you began to fortify us twelve, that the maniac war against enemies would not harm us'.

⁴⁹ Emphasis mine.

⁵⁰ Charles D. Wright, 'An Old English Formulaic System and Its Contexts in Cynewulf's Poetry', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 40 (2012), 151–74 (p. 170).

⁵¹ As Mary Hayes indicates, 'Christian subjectivity itself is constructed as being voiceful [...] Andreas concludes by reinforcing the notion that the Christian voice's economy is one that holds up eternally, under any circumstances'. See Mary Hayes, *Divine Ventriloquism in Medieval English Literature: Power, Anxiety, Subversion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 98.

of promise but flawed'.⁵² His transformation from a doubtful apostle to a fully-fledged soldier of Christ does not only illustrate his commitment to and fulfillment of promise, but also symbolises the completion of his self-promise. In the spiritual bond of *halige heah treow*, saints' promises to God are concurrently externally and internally directed. The latter is to create a more spiritually desired self, infinitely close to the body of Christ, close to perfection. Two pieces of evidence are supportive in revealing Andreas' renewed subjectivity.⁵³

The first piece of evidence is that the bloody track caused by Andreas' wounds is transformed into groves with fruits:

Geseh he *geblowene* *bearwas* standan
blædum gehrodene, swa he ær his blod aget (1448–49).⁵⁴

[I saw groves in full flower and blossom standing
where he shed his blood before]

The likelihood is that the fruits symbolise healthier food aimed at rectifying Mermedonians' cannibalism because 'in early Christian thought, anthropophagy threatened to interrupt the continuity of the human from living body, to corpse, to resurrected body', suggests Leah Parker.⁵⁵ Spiritually, the 'supernatural fecundity' of Andreas' blood embodies a Christianising force that combats Mermedonians' moral sinfulness. In this sense, Andreas is signified as capable of fulfilling his ultimate missionary promise to Christ (i.e., to convert non-Christians).⁵⁶ The second piece of evidence is that as a result of God's miraculous power, Andreas' deformed body is made unharmed:

Næs him *gewemmed wlite*, ne wloh of hrægle
lungre alysed, ne loc of heafde,
ne ban gebrocen, ne blodig wund
lice gelenge, ne laðes dæl (1471–74).⁵⁷

[He was not disfigured in appearance.
Neither the garment fringe [was] entirely torn off,
nor lock of hair or bone broken,
nor bloody wounds on the body left,
nor any portion of harm [remained]]

Such rehabilitation from disability is significant as it goes beyond the corporeal boundary to denote spiritual completeness and empowerment. Several scholars such as K. B. Wallace and Fay Skevington propose the word *unhælu* as an Old English counterpart of impairment or disability; it is often deployed to 'refer to physical impairment and disease, mental disorder, and spiritual

⁵² Amity Reading, 'Baptism, Conversion, and Selfhood in the Old English *Andreas*', *Studies in Philology*, 112 (2015), 1–23 (p. 20). Italics mine.

⁵³ Although Reading suggests that the indication of Andreas' acquirement of full apostolic selfhood is his baptising and instructing the Mermedonians at the end of the poem, I am inclined to argue that his renewed subjectivity has been explicit after bodily sufferings, after the holy voice of God is revealed to him.

⁵⁴ Emphasis mine.

⁵⁵ Leah Pope Parker, 'Eschatology for Cannibals: A System of Aberrance in the Old English *Andreas*', in *Monstrosity, Disability, and the Posthuman in the Medieval and Early Modern World*, eds. by Richard H. Godden and Asa Simon Mittman (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2019), pp. 227–48 (p. 235).

⁵⁶ Parker, p. 245.

⁵⁷ Emphasis mine.

degeneracy'.⁵⁸ Thus, we can infer that the semantics of *hælu* should incorporate bodily and spiritual wholeness alike. Andreas' symbolic resurrection directly points towards his self-renewal and fulfillment of his self-promise to become a soldier of Christ.

To conclude, examining the concept of promise in the *Andreas* and *Guthlac A* has been useful in shedding light on the literary landscape of Old English verse hagiography. The morality in the spiritual bond between God and saint, which is the nature of promise, bears affinities with the covenant in biblical theology. It is also observed that hagiographical promise has two representative features. Externally, linguistic analysis of Old English verbs denoting 'to promise' shows that they are interactional, relying upon words and language to establish relationships with others. Meanwhile, this indulgence in words carries broader theological prominence, a means to grapple with God's presence. Internally, the saint's psychological and emotional landscape shows that heightened inner qualities are crucial in unveiling the saint's commitment to and fulfillment of the promise. In the *Andreas*, there is a self-conscious meditation on the transience of the created world which suggests divine promise is infallible and incapable of perishing. Furthermore, Andreas' transformation from a flawed to a flawless apostle reveals another implication in saintly promise: the saint's fulfilment of the promise to God is an accomplishment of the promise he has made to himself. The promise does not simply enhance the saint's Christian virtue, but forges a more human and subjective self.

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⁵⁸ Karen Bruce Wallace, 'Grendel and Goliath: Monstrous Superability and Disability in the Old English Corpus', in *Monstrosity, Disability, and the Posthuman in the Medieval and Early Modern World*, ed. by Richard H. Godden and Asa S. Mittman (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2019), pp.107–26 (p. 108).

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Promise and *Kairos*: A Study of Queen Elizabeth I's Promise to Parliament

NABANITA CHAKRABORTY

The speech act of promise is a verbal commitment made to an audience in a particular context. A pragmatic individual would wait for the right timing and right circumstances before making a promise. This concept of suitable time associated with an action is termed as *kairos*. This article examines the relationship between *kairos* and the illocutionary speech act of promise. It argues that promise depends on the trope of *kairos* and follows the principles of correct time, place, and audience. To illustrate this relationship between *kairos* and promise, I draw upon Queen Elizabeth I's speech to her Parliament (November 5, 1566) on the issue of her marriage and succession. Queen Elizabeth's counsellors persuade her to marry and name an heir, but she is aware of the exigencies and does not wish to commit. A close reading of the speech has been undertaken to analyse critically how her promise is a political strategy to evade the moral responsibility of keeping the promise.

Keywords: *Kairos*; Promise; Queen Elizabeth I; Political Rhetoric

A promise is a verbal commitment, a speech act carrying an illocutionary force. In *How to Do Things with Words*, J. L. Austin formulates a theory of speech acts in which he defines three kinds of utterances: the locutionary as actual utterance consisting of semantic and syntactic meaning; the illocutionary, a performative utterance carrying an intended meaning such as a promise or a caution; the perlocutionary, the actual effect of the speech act whether intended or not. Theorists of pragmatics have distinguished different kinds of illocutionary acts such as constatives, directives and commissives. Constatives convey information or knowledge, while directives are orders and requests. However, a binding force is implied in the commissives, whereby a person is committed to act as per his/her speech, as in the case of an oath or promise. As such, the action is predicated upon the speech act. In other words, the illocutionary speech act is performative or is associated with quasi-action since it is almost equivalent to undertaking the activity. Austin underlines this when he asks, "Can saying make it so?" (7). Moreover, commissive speech acts, like promises or vows, must be uttered within a particular context and in the presence of an intended audience. A performative utterance would be hollow or void if uttered by an actor on the stage or if introduced in a poem or spoken in a soliloquy.¹ A promise requires the speaker to have intentions, placing them under an obligation.² The imperative nature of a performative speech act makes it a matter of caution: the speaker must be aware of the contingencies that may lead to a breach of the promise. A pragmatic individual would wait for the right timing and right circumstances before making a promise. The concept of a suitable time associated with an action or quasi-action is termed *kairos*.³ My article examines the relationship between *kairos* and an illocutionary speech act of promise. I argue that promise depends on the trope of *kairos* and follows the same principles of correct time, place, and

¹ John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p 22.

² John R. Searle, *Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

³ *Kairos* in classical rhetorical theory means the right time to act or speak.

audience. To illustrate this relationship between *kairos* and promise, I draw on Queen Elizabeth I's (1558-1603) speech to Parliament on the issue of her marriage and succession.⁴ A prince's promise is always regarded with utmost solemnity by the subjects, but Elizabeth makes a promise which does not become binding. This article seeks to understand the conditions and clauses which make a promise more indissoluble and trustworthy.

The English queen singlehandedly ruled the country for more than four decades. The first half of Elizabeth's reign marked a period of intense debate and discussion on the issue of marriage and succession. The issue of her marriage had become a grave concern for the Church and her parliamentary counsellors. As the nation waited impatiently for her to marry and have a Tudor successor to the throne, she had to encourage various suitors and engage in elaborate games of courtship. She promised to take marriage vows, but did not wish to make the promise binding. I argue that it was a rhetorical trope of *kairos*, or waiting for the opportune moment to take a marriage vow. Meanwhile, prolonged courtships promised short-term strategic and diplomatic gains without a serious commitment to marriage. She feared that any marriage alliance with continental neighbouring countries might prove hazardous for England's destiny. She was trapped between the patriarchal ideology of marriage and succession, and her prime political responsibility of safeguarding her nation from foreign powers. Marriage was both politically desirable and prudent for a young, female monarch who had been raised to be a consort to a male monarch. I examine how Queen Elizabeth manipulates the illocutionary force of a promise. However, the relationship between *kairos* and promise must be discussed first.

As Renaissance men became more conscious of temporality in action ('*chronos*') with advancements in clock-making, humanists raised awareness of prudent deliberation and right timing in effective rhetorical practice through the classical Greek concept of *kairos*.⁵ The notion of *kairos* is typically understood as the 'timing' or the opportune moment of articulation. Gorgias observes the necessity of adapting one's discourse to rhetorical circumstances and exigencies, including the orientation of both the speaker and the listeners, the moment, and the place. In his formal discourse of rhetorical *paideia*, Isocrates, a Sophist from Athens and a rival of Plato, further develops the concept of *kairos*.⁶ He conjoins *phronesis*, practical wisdom, and pragmatic ethics within the situational and temporal grids. Isocrates develops the idea that opportunity is based on an awareness of occasion, audience, and situation rather than chronological time. Cicero places "a high value on a sense of *opportunita (kairos)*" and "a grasp of the relationship of choice to circumstance";⁷ he associates *kairos* with *prepon* (propriety or fitness).⁸ In his *De Inventione*, Cicero distinguished *occasio* (a period of time offering a convenient opportunity for doing or not doing an action) from *tempus* (time).

Following Cicero, modern scholars have focused on situational rhetoric. *Kairos* in the modern sense has been explained as the 'decorum' or 'propriety' of any given moment of a rhetorical

⁴ A few versions of the speech are available in *Elizabeth I: Collected Works* ed. Leah S. Marcus et al (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 94-98. The version I cite from is taken from The Syndics of Cambridge University Library, MS Gg.III. 34 fols. 208-12. This copy is based on a memorial account of one of the members of the parliament. The other version is available in *State Papers Domestic, Elizabeth 12/41/5*, fol.8.

⁵ Philip Sipiora and James S. Bauman eds, *Rhetoric and Kairos: Essays in History, Theory and Praxis*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), p. 140.

⁶ The term *rhetorical paideia* merges concepts of both curriculum and way of life.

⁷ Nancy S. Struener, *The Language of History in the Renaissance Rhetoric and Historical Consciousness in Florentine Humanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 116.

⁸ James L. Kinneavy, 'Kairos in Classical and Modern Rhetorical Theory', in *Rhetoric and Kairos*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 58-76.

speech act.⁹ It has also been understood as the opportune moment, a spontaneous or timely act. Here we can draw on the distinction between *kairos* (practical/opportune/moment/qualitative/subjective time) and *chronos* (chronological/objective/measurable/sequential time) developed by John E. Smith.¹⁰ He develops three distinct concepts of *kairos*: it is primarily understood as 'right time' rather than clock time, but it is also a time of tension and conflict, a time of crisis that calls for a decision at that moment. Thirdly, the concept of *kairos* means that the problem or crisis brings with it a time of opportunity to accomplish a purpose that could not be carried out at another time. Aaron Hess conceptualises *kairos* as 'the consideration of the decorum of a situation along with the inventive goal of creative deliberation'.¹¹ The speaker also decides the propriety of *kairos* in any given situation based on the kind of audience. Thus, *kairos* is related to rhetorical performance. Lloyd Bitzer's article 'The Rhetorical Situation' argues that rhetorical discourse is responsive to a particular situation governed by three elements: an audience, an exigency, and constraints. After judging these facets, the rhetor prepares the appropriate rhetorical response.

J. R. Searle's theory of promise rests primarily on the speaker's intentions to keep the promise. The hearer's role in drawing inferences from the speech act to discover the speaker's intentions is also important to Searle. A successful speech act does not depend on the subject's intent but rather on the communicative intent only, that is, the intent that the promisee has understood.¹² The promisee's or audience's role is equally important in the speech act of promise. The audience expects the subject to keep his/her promise. I argue that the act of promise is similar to, and also relies on, *kairos* since it is based on the notion of an appropriate time for the utterance. Like *kairos*, a promise has to be uttered in the presence of an intended audience. The speaker must be aware of the constraints and the exigencies which might prevent the fulfilment of a promise. The act of making a promise and its resonance for the principle of *kairos* is central to my argument in this paper.

Critical interest in recent years has focused on this important phase of Elizabethan history; her refusal to commit herself to any marriage alliance has been the subject of speculation. Recent scholars in rhetorical studies have examined Elizabeth's speeches but have focused only on her gendered language.¹³ Feminist critics have posited that Elizabeth's decision to remain unwed was a deliberate response to consolidate her authority. Sixteenth-century patriarchal English society showed scepticism about female governance and insisted on Queen Elizabeth's marriage and the production of heirs. In an act of defiance, Queen Elizabeth refused to marry as she did not wish to share her power over her kingdom with her husband and be relegated to a secondary status. This contention is reinforced by the fact that the Scottish ambassador had commented:

⁹ Victoria Ann Kahn, *Rhetoric, Prudence and Skepticism in the Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 34.

¹⁰ John E. Smith, 'Time and Qualitative Time', in *Rhetoric and Kairos*, pp. 46-57.

¹¹ Aaron Hess, *Rhetorical Ethnography: Engaging the Politics of Advocacy*, dissertation (Arizona State University, 2008), p. 31.

¹² Maarten Henket, 'Contracts, Promises and Meaning: The Question of Intent', *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* (1989), 129-158 (p. 140).

¹³ Samantha A Morga Curtis "Prudence even beyond other women: The rhetorical maneuvers of Queen Elizabeth I" (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Tennessee, 2002); Daniel Ellis, "Free from Any Other Meaning: Truth and Politics in the Rhetoric of Queen Elizabeth I" (unpublished doctoral thesis, Temple University, 2009); Danelle L. Clair, p "Speaking her self: Ethos in the rhetoric of Aspasia of Miletus, Queen Elizabeth I and Ida B. Wells" (unpublished MA thesis, University of Alaska, 2001).

Madam, I know your stately stomach: ye think if ye were married, ye would be but Queen of England, and now ye are King and Queen both; ye may not suffer a commander.¹⁴

The feminist contention does not hold ground since a marriage agreement was drawn up during the alliance with the French Duke of Alençon, stipulating that Queen Elizabeth would continue to rule the country as she had in the past. Scholars have overstated issues of gendered role-playing in discussing Queen Elizabeth, which though vital, is not necessarily the only point of entry into Elizabethan scholarship.

The New Historicists emphasise the myth created around the iconic figure of the Virgin Queen; they have focused on the ideological attempt to identify Elizabeth with the Virgin Mary and the heavenly intermediary of God to invoke her divine right and power.¹⁵ However, Queen Elizabeth engaged in several marriage negotiations and had never vowed celibacy until she was past her prime. In fact, Elizabeth's speeches reflect that she had never ruled out the prospect of marriage. Susan Frye observes:

By engaging in her own construction through language and action, by declaring herself to be a woman at the same time that she acted outside defined female roles, by politicizing the language of virginity... Queen Elizabeth constituted a challenge to the essentialist patriarchal sign system that presents gender identity as natural and immutable (Frye, 6)

Frye's argument underlines a fundamental idea about Elizabeth's self-conscious linguistic performativity.

I argue that political power is neither present in Elizabeth's 'virginity' nor in the perceived 'language of virginity'; rather, it is in her ambiguous 'language' only. Often, scholars view discourse as essentialist — as constituting gender rather than reflecting it. I would like to approach the subject of rhetoric without giving prominence to the gendered inflexion of language. I intend to read a speech regarding the issue of her marriage. Susan Doran reminds us that historians and biographers of Queen Elizabeth had dismissed the queen's courtships as 'empty charades', 'political dalliance', or 'diplomatic games'.¹⁶ While marriage negotiations were diplomatic measures adopted by Queen Elizabeth to maintain the political stability of her reign, my study aims to underscore how her insincere promise, laced with conditionals, is designed to evade the obligation to marry. This prudent approach is the rhetoric of *kairos*.

Queen Elizabeth replied to a petition forwarded by the Lords and Commons on the issue of her marriage and succession on November 5, 1566.¹⁷ Robert Bell of King's Lynn was one

¹⁴ John E. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I* (London: Cape, 1934).

¹⁵ Louis Montrose, Roy Strong, Michael Dobson, Philippa Berry are some of the New Historicist scholars on Queen Elizabeth I.

¹⁶ Susan Doran *Monarchy and Matrimony: The Courtships of Queen Elizabeth I* (London: Routledge, 1996), p 1.

¹⁷ The speech is compiled in Leah S Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose. Eds. *Elizabeth I: Collected Works* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 94-98. The source is The Syndics of Cambridge University Library, MS Gg. III.34. fols. 208-212. Elizabeth's speeches have been put together in collaboration or after consultation with her parliamentarians. Most of these have been written down by her audience rather than by her. So there is no single authentic text but many versions of the same speech. Moreover, the editors of this collection have modernised the spellings and punctuation in this volume to make it accessible to readers. For original spelling version, see *Elizabeth I: Autograph Compositions and Foreign Language Originals*, ed. by Janel Mueller and Leah S Marches (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

member of Parliament who negotiated with the Lords' committee over a joint written petition to the queen to ask her to name a successor. The members of Parliament want her to promise to marry and also name an heir to the throne. She is aggrieved and indignant that her subjects have not trusted her act of promise. Elizabeth is incensed that the issue of succession is being discussed in the House of Commons, which goes against the order and decorum of the Parliament. She blames the lords for being seduced by Robert Bell and his accomplices into agreeing to write such a petition on this matter. She also accuses two bishops, the Archbishop of York and Bishop of London, of having persuaded the lords of the upper house to put pressure upon her to name her successor:

But there, two bishops with their long orations sought to persuade you also with solemn matter, as though you, my lords, had not known that when my breath did fail me I had been dead unto you and that then, dying without issue, what a danger it were to the whole state. Which you had not known before they told it to you (Marcus et al, 95)

From the beginning of her speech, she creates a rift between the lords of the upper house, the commons and the religious heads. The strategy is to divide the audience by their position and social order, so that any joint delegation can be prevented. She then proceeds to make a vow to marry:

I did send them answer by my Council I would marry, although of mine own disposition. I was not inclined thereunto. But that was not accepted nor credited, although spoken by their prince. And yet I used so many words that I could say no more. And were it not now I had spoken these words, I would never speak to them again. I will never break the word of a prince spoken in public place for my honour's sake. (Marcus et al, 95).

Queen Elizabeth makes it clear that marriage is not her intention, but that she is committing to it because her subjects want it, thus placing the onus of her promise upon her subjects. She further elaborates that she had already agreed to marry when a previous petition was presented to her. However, her subjects do not trust her reply. This raises an important question: how should a verbal promise be enunciated to be taken seriously and accepted by others? Is agreement different from a promise? In this case, the person agreeing to marry is a queen whose utterances become laws or royal commandments for the people in early modern England.

Christian theology has always maintained the primacy of the 'Word' or 'Logos': 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'.¹⁸ 'Word' became a controversial term in the Elizabethan age; both religious groups, Papists and Reformers, claimed to have true knowledge of God's Word. To resolve the matter of the state religion, the state was to equate the word of the ruling monarch with God's true religion. Thus, the Queen's religion was truth, while any aberrant practices were considered falsehoods. With Queen Elizabeth's accession to the throne, a religious settlement was enacted that established moderate Protestantism, a middle ground between the Catholic Papacy and Puritanism. Given the sacred nature of the Queen's word in all matters, it is surprising that her promise to marry is not taken seriously by the subjects. She expresses her discontent and decides to answer the plea once more. She reiterates that as a prince, she has an ethical responsibility to honour her

¹⁸ Hymn to the Word, Gospel of St John, *New Testament*, verses 1-18.

commitment. But the reason why her loyal subjects do not believe her is implied in the rest of her speech. She proceeds to assure her audience that she will marry and name an heir, but her speech is laced with conditionals:

And therefore I say again I will marry as soon as I can conveniently, if God take not him away with whom I mind to marry, or myself, or else some other great let happen. I can say no more except the party were present. And I hope to have children; otherwise I would never marry, (Marcus et al, 95)

She utters a performative speech act 'I will marry' but does not provide any specific time, place or person with which the action can be associated. J.L. Austin mentions that a vow of marriage saying 'I do' is a solemn promise of marriage since it is in the first person, simple present, indicative and active voice, carrying a binding force. The vow of marriage, taken with a partner in a church at a specified hour, in the presence of the priest and guests, becomes indissoluble and irrevocable. However, Elizabeth's promise to marry is in the future tense, with no time, person, or place mentioned. It, therefore, loses its sanctity or force of a promise. However, in this case, a prince making a promise carries an inviolate force even if it sounds more like an announcement than a promise. If the queen simply enunciates her intention to marry, it carries the force of a promise or an injunction. Yet she complicates an act of promise by conjoining it with conditionals. She will marry if the intended suitor stays alive, or if she does not die soon, or if some great catastrophe does not take place. A promise of marriage presupposes that the actants remain alive to fulfil the act. So the queen need not mention the conditions since they are already and always present in the act of promise. The necessary condition that grounds any promise is the temporality of the action. The queen does not specify a time for fulfilling the promise and instead leaves it open-ended, referring to hindrances and obstacles such as death or catastrophes that may prevent her from fulfilling it.

The next part of the speech is as follows:

A strange order of petitioners that will make a request and cannot be otherwise ascertained but by the prince's word, and yet will not believe it when it is spoken! But they, I think, that moveth the same will be as ready to mislike him with whom I shall marry as they are now to move it, and then it will appear they nothing meant it...there hath been some that have, ere this, said unto me they never required more than that they might once hear me say I would marry. Well, there was never so great a treason but might be covered under as fair a pretence, (Marcus et al, 95)

Elizabeth points out that her counsellors want her to marry, but when she promises to do so, they are not ready to believe it, even though it is uttered by an honourable prince. This accusation holds that the promisee or audience is equally responsible for trusting the speaker. Jay Conison emphasises how promise has functions for both speakers and hearers.¹⁹ The audience's perception of the speaker's intent is more important than the speaker's intent. Clearly, the responsibility of the audience to trust the speaker is emphasised here, even though the queen fails to make a proper commitment to marriage. The fact that she promises to marry without naming the person leaves out a major clause of the promise. Elizabeth blames the petitioners for

¹⁹ Jay Conison, 'The Pragmatics of Promise', *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence* 10.2 (1997), 273-322 (p. 275).

distrusting her and thereby committing treason. On the issue of naming her successor, she argues that it will invite danger to her and her subjects. She makes another conditional promise:

But as soon as there may be a convenient time and that it may be done with least peril unto you, although never without great danger unto me. I will deal therein for your safety and offer it unto you as your prince and head, without request (Marcus et al, 98)

Her promise rests on a 'convenient time' (*kairos*) which might never arrive. The queen's ambiguity in her response and delay in committing herself are political strategies to preserve order in England and prevent military attacks from powerful foreign powers. She is also wary of naming an heir and successor, fearing she will be displaced from the throne. She therefore employs caution, and *kairos* while making a promise.

David Hume raises the question 'What are promises? And why are they binding?'.²⁰ Hume's focus is on the ethical and moral responsibility of the promisor. Scholars of language and pragmatics like J.L. Austin and J. R. Searle are interested in understanding the promise behind a speech act. My focus in this paper has been to examine how the speech act of promising depends on the appropriate time, place, and person. Queen Elizabeth's counsellors persuade her to marry and name an heir, but she is aware of the exigencies and does not wish to commit. She responds with an effective strategy to make a conditional promise without specifying time, place or person. She is prudent and tactful in her approach and knows how to evade the moral responsibility of keeping the promise. On being compelled to make a promise to marry, the communication of her intent becomes more important than her real intentions. A promise in her speech is therefore a rhetorical act of *kairos*, which requires awareness of the audience's expectations *and* an opportune moment. A promisor must be prudent and pragmatic to avoid any obligation under a promise. Queen Elizabeth's speech to Parliament exemplifies her proficiency in putting caveats or conditions while making a promise. Her promise to marry does not specify any time or person. A promise is a performative act, and so the temporality of the action is of immense importance for it to be binding. Elizabeth charges her subjects with treason for not believing her word. The onus of trust lies with the listener rather than the speaker. This rhetorical strategy conceals her real intentions before the Parliament and keeps her subjects suspended between hope and fear.

²⁰ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, book III, part 2, sec 5 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).

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CREATIVE WORKS

An Unspoken Promise

LYDIA PEARSON

Our chants
rise into the air,
an unspoken promise.
A hand reaching out
to find yours, but unable to—

just yet.

Our chants
stick in our throats,
leaving an aftertaste on our tongues.
Your oppression is a weight, holding you down.
We wish to ease the heavy burden in your hearts.
We are not free until we are all free. Your freedom has not been secured

just yet.

Our chants
gradually breathed into life,
birds lifted by the wings of hope and love.
We are a delicate and strong thread, tighter and tighter.
You can break individual threads, but not our warmly-woven pattern.
We march on like the time that has passed without our fallen ones.
We are their voices. Not everybody will rise up and chant their song

just yet.

Our words are our promise,
tucked neatly into our hearts.
Each day brings a new sunrise, although this does not
wash away the blood that has been spilled on the streets.
We watch back at ourselves, retrace the paths, and mark
new ones with the sands of time we have been granted.
Life is not a promise. We still stand strong, undefeated,
a chain that cannot be pulled apart. We will create a wall
to protect and shelter you. We are far from victory. We are not there

just yet.

Yet, you can bet that we will fight hard for your rights,
and we will hold your words up like lanterns in the dark.
And your love, your lives, your courage—
do not fear; we will never forget.

Our protests are our promise, but we are not there—
not yet.

* * * *

Lydia Pearson is an emerging 22-year-old writer from Lytham St Anne's, Lancashire. She has had over 35 poems published, alongside 16 posts for Mental Health Notebook, 5 pieces of short fiction, 14 blog posts and 24 articles. In addition to this, she has published 260+ works on AO3 since April 2019. She was shortlisted for The Guardian's Positive Action Disability Scheme 2025. She is currently studying English Literature and Creative Writing at Lancaster University and hopes to get a 2:1 when she graduates in July 2026. She has also done some work for radio and TV, and works part-time as a tutor and a Sales Assistant, and volunteers at her local food bank. Her writing explores a variety of themes, including social issues, romance, friendship, identity, loss and more. She is working on her debut novel currently and hopes to become a high-profile journalist, poet and author one day.

The Promise

NICHOLAS SAMARAS

I made you promise
to come back to me
after death. I pressed
the issue as hard
as a child could
because a child's need
for a parent is bigger
than God's need.
The light in our parlour
was golden that night,
casting a halo and shadows
over everything. Your
grey mane and grey beard
was the foggy comfort
of my youth and I never
thought in that evocation
of how you would feel to be
away and apart from me.
I made you promise
to come back to me after death—
shocked to see your face crinkle
and burst into tears, sobbing.

* * * *

Nicholas Samaras was born and raised in the village of Foxton, eight miles south of Cambridge, England. He was later taken by his parents to live in Patmos, Greece (the “Island of the Apocalypse”) and, at the time of the Greek Junta military dictatorship (“Coup of the Generals”) was then brought in exile to be raised further in America. He’s lived in England, Greece, Wales, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, Germany, Yugoslavia, Jerusalem, thirteen states in America, and he writes from a place of permanent exile. His first book, *Hands of the Saddlemaker*, won The Yale Series of Younger Poets Award. His current book is *American Psalm, World Psalm* (Ashland Poetry Press, 2014). He is completing a new manuscript of poetry and a memoir of his childhood years lived underground, while he is working hard to write his way back home to Foxton.

this is what august tastes like

MISHA S. MCDANIEL

when we were children, our grandmother would tell us to pray to the pear tree. it stood towering over the little blue house our nana and papa bought when they were young, before their knuckles cracked into echoes and before their ears struggled to hug the sounds around them. nana used to wash the dresses and skirts of white women across town, while papa drove their husbands to work and other places. they lived in and out of apartments back then, and finally, after too many peeled back nails and work nights that didn't end until dawn, they piled all the crumpled bills and quarters and nickels they had shoved into their work clothes pockets and gave them to the bank. they wanted a home, they used to say, a home like their bosses had, one with a yard and a tree. a home where our mother could grow and call it hers.

by the time we were born, our grandparents were half-way retired, and those days, nana would take us to the backyard while our parents worked downtown in offices past five. the untrimmed grass would tickle my shins and toes as i stood still in the yard, my brother running as fast as his short legs could take him, panting, inundated with joy. he always ran headfirst into everything he did, headfirst and screaming, sweaty. he came out the womb that way, my mother used to say. i didn't.

eventually, our grandmother would tug us along for our evening prayer, after the thrill of being outside and in the sun wore off, straight to the back of the yard that ended with a thin wired fence. the pear tree stood massive there, its trunk the width of two of my father's torsos, its bark blacker than the galaxy above. the branches stretched over the roof of the house like an umbrella, its leaves a rich green the color of stained glass. its pears, however, were small and hidden until august when they'd finally bloom in bright pinks and soft yellows, the fruit dense and soft and sweet. plucking season. my favorite time of year.

our grandmother was the daughter of a bewitching woman. that's what our father told us when i asked why she kept drawers full of thread and hair and flower petals and loose cinnamon captured in clear glass bottles that fit in the middle of my palm. she had books older than the pear tree, she told us, older than her too, stuffed into wooden creaking bookshelves that made walls all over the little blue house. our grandmother used to move as if floating, her long skirts shielding her ankles and feet from view. she had a smile that stretched on forever, like a rainbow, like a promise, her unpainted lips exposing the blinding white of her teeth. she was old then, lines etched into her face around her eyes and cheeks and neck, but her dark coily hair never grayed.

"she uses a spell to keep it dark like that," our mother used to joke, and our grandmother would hit her on the hip with that infinite smile on her lips and say,

"don't tell the world my secrets." our grandmother was a simple woman guided by simple rules of life. never leave the bacon grease open near the stove. when you feel a storm coming, rub a little lemon behind your ear to keep the lightning away. stretch in the morning and before sleep at night to keep your bones from echoing. never grab milk from the front of the shelf, always from the back. and pray to all fruit bearing trees—especially the ones that feed you.

do unto the earth as you would have done unto you.

~

He's 37. His brother is 42. Their grandmother has been buried for over a decade now. Their parents have moved up and away to somewhere warmer and less expensive. To a place with no offices. The little blue house their grandparents bought is theirs now. And today, his brother is cutting down the pear tree.

He's told his brother over and over that their grandmother would be disappointed, but the older brother only scoffs at him, ignores him, says the pear tree is dangerous—it might fall and crush the little blue house. He and his brother have always been on opposite sides of everything, his brother pummeling his way through life, sweaty, screaming. And as the youngest, he has always let him; he has always not quite known how to make his brother stop and stand still in the grass.

The two men are the color of auburn sunsets, their dark coily hair now spotted with strands of silver. (And no, they never did learn their grandmother's spell.) As they walk to the back of the house, his brother's thick fingers grip the ax tightly.

"Don't you remember how we used to pray to the pear tree before we ate its fruit?" the younger one asks, as he follows his brother to the backyard.

The older brother barely glances back. "I never prayed," he tells him with a laugh.

The younger brother, his arms crossed over his chest, stands a couple of paces in front of the backdoor, the overgrown grass tickling his shins and toes. Meanwhile, the older brother struts to the pear tree, to its thick dark trunk nearly bursting through the thin wired fence. The world's silent for a moment, the wind in the air heavy and sweet with summer. The pears have another month left before they bloom. He had begged his brother to wait until after plucking season, but "August brings storms," his brother said dismissively. He didn't ask if his brother remembered what their grandmother used to say about keeping the lightning away. He knows he doesn't.

Finally, the older brother pulls his arms back, elbows bending sharply like lightning. He steadies his feet. He takes a deep breath, his chest lifting like wings.

He swings.

The younger brother doesn't watch as his older brother hacks at the pear tree their grandmother used to tell them to pray to. Instead he goes inside to their grandmother's office, the one with the clear little bottles of things. (And yes, the room still smells of orange and cinnamon.) He sits in his grandmother's chair, closes his eyes, and prays to the pear tree for forgiveness. Then he finds a lemon and rubs its juice behind his ear. To keep the lightning away.

When it's done, his brother comes in panting, his face and neck and shoulders and collarbones glistening with sweat. The younger brother stares at him quietly. The older brother winks and heads to bed. He doesn't stretch.

That night there is no storm, but the wind does holler until dawn. The younger brother dreams of their grandmother and her rainbow smile. She makes him a promise.

When he wakes up, the sun has crawled halfway up the pale blue sky. There are no birds chirping. He hops out of bed, stretches, bends his tall body across himself, touches his toes. He shuffles around the creaking little blue house, slowly, to his older brother's room. He knocks on the door once, twice.

Silence.

Finally, he pushes the door. At first, the door pushes back against him as if something's in the way. So the younger brother braces his foot behind himself, summons the strength of a man, and finally the door groans open. Immediately, he trips over dozens of pears, the color of cotton candy and freshly cut grass.

He tumbles straight to the floor, into a sea of them.

The younger brother blinks for a moment. All he can see from his place in the pear sea is the edge of his brother's bed, even more pears falling from it, a waterfall. The sugar in the air is heavy. He stands up. He looks.

Where his brother's eyes used to be are pale yellow flowers. The kind of yellow that's almost white. Little pools of galaxy-black soil leak from his brother's ears. His nostrils are filled with vines as green as stained glass, curling at the ends. His brother's mouth is open, as if in prayer, and long dark thin branches are spewing out of it, twisting and twirling around one another all the way to the ceiling. Like a spider's limbs. Like lightning. His brother's ribs have cracked open to make room for the trunk of the pear tree that has now rooted itself in his body.

His sunset skin is striped with chlorophyll, his limbs more leaves and vines than skin and muscle. He can see where the tree has replaced his brother's bones with its own bony roots, his brother's blood staining the sheets brown beneath him, but he can barely see the blood through all the branches and leaves and pears. There are so many pears surrounding his brother's body, on top of his brother's body, on the floor, underneath the bed. Piles of pears. A storm of pears. He looks like a sculpture. It's the first time, he realizes, that he's seen his brother so still.

The ax his brother used to cut down the pear tree lies next to the bed, discarded, buried underneath another sea of pears. In a grave of sorts.

Do unto the earth as you would have done unto you.

The younger brother, now an only child, plucks a pear from one of the branches emerging from his brother's hip. He can't help it. The sugar in the air taunts him. He takes a bite. And no, he doesn't taste blood, but fruit dense and soft and sweet. He tastes august.

* * * *

Misha S. McDaniel is a fiction and prose poetry writer born in Harlem, NY and raised in Atlanta, GA. She is also a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Chicago, specializing in Black Atlantic speculative literature, Caribbean Studies, marronage, and enslaved resistance narratives.

Misha has been invited to present her scholarship at the American Studies Association, Caribbean Studies Association, and American Comparative Literature Association annual conferences. She also has fiction published in *The Los Angeles Review*.

Sea Swimming

FIONA O'MALLEY

I've known how to swim since I was six. I knew how to doggy paddle before then, but a few days after my sixth birthday, my father announced that he would teach me, 'how to swim properly'. He brought me to our local pool, fitted my armbands, took me to the deep end, told me to pinch my nose and chucked me in.

The initial immersion was a sensory overload— an amalgamation of feeling heavy yet weightless, my feet kicking out in short, staccato beats. The water enveloped my body, disrupting any concept of gravity, suspending the usual restrictions of the body's weight. My feet lost contact with the ground, and I was in a strange dance, a slow-motion freefall, staying in the same spot. The environment of floating, bobbing and thrashing was simultaneously exhilarating and unnerving.

It was the first time I was totally submerged in water, albeit for a split second, until the air in the armbands lifted my scrawny body to the surface.

As I coughed and spluttered, I heard a splash, felt a rain of chlorine water drizzle over me, and saw my father's head bobbing in the water next to me. 'I'm in the deep end!' I announced with glee, as though it was an achievement my father was unaware of.

Thinking back on this moment, I don't recall if my father laughed or rolled his eyes. Once I got over myself and the achievement of doing absolutely nothing, being propped up by armbands in the deep end, I followed by father's instructions to lie back in the water, keep my back straight and let the water carry my weight; to become acquainted with the water's temperament and might.

Initially, I struggled to coordinate my limbs and balance myself in the water, leaning forward or backward too much, creating a symphony of splashes and sporadic, flailing limbs. I imagine I must have been a source of entertainment for any onlookers, but I don't remember anyone else being in the pool. Just me and my father— in our own bubble. I felt confident with my father next to me. Confident in the promise of the process.

Over time, I learned how to conduct and control my body and paddle my way into the aquatic ballet rhythm of swimming.

My great-great uncle was a fisherman who lived on Clare Island, off the coast of Mayo. He grew up with nonsensical superstitions and practices, like fishermen not learning how to swim, and this was one my great-great uncle honoured. Unfortunately for him, the boat he was fishing in met very choppy waters (like all the waters off the coast of Mayo) and he was thrown overboard. There was a buoy on the boat, but nobody threw it to him. Nobody. They just let him drown.

When my cousin told me this story I recoiled and my face contorted in horror, imagining these men looking at him flailing in the water, gasping for breath, choking, and sinking slowly into

the white-webbed waves, his arms wheeling around wildly, his hands grabbing and grasping at the air.

‘Why did they do that?’

‘They believed if the sea wanted someone, they’d take them. It was bad luck to save them.’

‘Bad luck?’ I said incredulously, ‘*Bad luck?* Bad luck to save a man’s life?’

She raised her eyebrows and nodded.

I don’t know where this tradition of fishermen not learning to swim came from. Was it a pagan belief, or just local folklore? My great-great uncle went to mass every week and died with a crucifix around his neck. It didn’t do him much good in the end.

Although I knew how to swim from a young age, I wasn’t a strong swimmer. I certainly wouldn’t have been able to save myself from drowning if I was thrown overboard off the west coast of Ireland.

I had to improve my speed and stamina when I signed up for a triathlon. It was on my bucket list for a while, and I decided to enter. I misread the race distances. I thought the swim was 150 metres, which pushed my swimming capabilities to the limits. It was only a month before the triathlon when I realised the swim was actually 750 metres.

I wasn’t physically able to do this. I was exhausted after 150 metres. I booked swimming lessons to see what I was doing wrong, which, I learned, was almost everything.

The instructor told me I was pushing off too fast and swimming too quickly at the start, exhausting my lungs because I was focusing on my speed and not my breathing. Every time I lifted my head to take a breath, I was stopping my flow in the water. The instructor’s voice echoed across the tiled pool when she shouted at me to slow down and focus on my breathing.

‘You’ll exhaust yourself Fiona! Turn your head and breathe deep!’

I never thought as a grown adult, I’d have to learn how to breathe properly, but it was a pivotal turning point of my lessons – the art of rhythmic inhaling, aligning with when my arm cupped over my head into a new stroke, and then exhaling down into the water beneath me, creating ribbons of bubbles in the water. My instructor also told me, before I retrained myself to ‘swim breathe’ properly, that I was stopping or almost stopping every time I needed to take a deep breath, something I wasn’t even aware I was doing. When she pointed it out to me, I could see the regressive pattern of stopping or slowing down, lifting my head out of the water, taking a deep breath, and then ploughing ahead again in the water. This interrupted the flow and fluidity of my swimming. My haste was slowing me down.

I felt free in the water, pushing forward with every stroke of my arms, and breathing deeply through the side of my mouth. I felt weightless and fluid, after a while almost part of the water, my arms weaving in and out of it, pulling my torso along.

Between the laps I swam, there were moments where I involuntarily gulped water. I tried not to think of how many people had relieved themselves in the water or how many chemicals I ingested when I swallowed pool water, but it wasn’t as bad as accidentally swallowing a mouthful of sea water.

Swimming in the open water was a totally different ballgame. There are elements in sea swimming you never experience in a pool, like the invigorating smell of sea salt and seaweed; the sheer force of the waves; the freezing water which brings a unique rush of terror and adrenaline after the tingling shock makes the body numb or burn; the screaming, hushing and shushing of

the water; and the drops of water on top of the sea that take flight into the air as the wind whips them up.

Sea swimming is far more beautiful than swimming in a pool. The sea draws the eye. I watched the gurgling, frothing waves curling into themselves, like butter being scraped by a butter-knife before it's spread onto bread. The tapestry of the sea throwing itself onto the seashore is bewitching. The backlash of the water, spraying back from the force of its smash into the cliff edge, thousands of drops flung into the air. I could stare at it for hours. If I stared at a pool for hours, someone would probably call security (quite rightly).

The further you swim out, the more the sea unveils its treasures, like a mosaic, foggy at first and then gradually coming into view. A dull glint becomes a shard of glass. A protruding shadow becomes a plank of wood. The water creates a shimmer over the seafloor littered with swaying seaweed, half-shells, and the odd plastic bottle. The water is ever-changing, ever-moving and ever-moody – either triumphant or vicious in its ever-dramatic movements.

The sound of the waves brings an orchestra never experienced in a pool. The sea sounds are both a lullaby of whispers and a melody of percussion. On the coastline off the west of Ireland, it creates a constant low drumroll that crescendos and decrescendos, punctuated with the sound of screaming seagulls overhead and the cries from children racing each other on the sand. The drumroll beckoned the locals to meet every morning for a dip in the water and they came to swim in the spring, summer, autumn, and winter. One man lost the feeling in his toes because he swam in the water when it had blades of ice woven through it. A woman told me, through gritted teeth, she never misses her daily swim. Frowning, she walked into the freezing water. 'It's good for the head!' she shrieked before plunging into the waves. She emerged two seconds later, gasping and laughing. The swimmers came out of the water smiling and invigorated.

When I looked out at the wild waves in Achill, I could see Clare Island in the distance, a hazy expanse where the sea meets the sky —a small blip in the coastline, like a long, faded slug. Sometimes when the clouds descended and met the sea, you couldn't see Clare Island at all. Sometimes you couldn't see past a few hundred metres because of the veil of mist cloaking the sand, the sea, and the sky.

Sometimes when the sun shone, it danced upon the rippling waters, the light bouncing off it, like diamonds on gold, creating a mirage of serenity amidst the ever-restless waves. In these fleeting moments, when I stood against the ebbing and flowing shoreline, it was as though time stood still, as if nature held her breath in reverence. You could always feel the storms coming. You could feel it in the air. The locals would say 'it's very close' before looking out to the sea, gripping their windbreakers, and pulling their hoods down. Like the tension before an argument. Or an unspoken strain building and building. I knew the gentle swell of the waves would soon mount to water smashing against the concrete blocks along the pier. Passionate and violent. The weather was forecast to change. Like it always did.

I thought about how brave the fishermen of Clare Island must have been three generations ago, without the technology fishermen rely on today. They had no temperature detectors, no weather forecast apps, no mobile phones, and no RNLI helicopters to help them if they got into trouble. No ambulances that could reach them. No God that could save them.

When I first heard about the fishermen letting anyone who fell overboard die, not throwing them a buoy, and that the fishermen, often families of fishermen going back generations, who didn't teach their own children how to swim, I thought this was barbaric. It was utterly nonsensical. Stupid. Ridiculous. A senseless waste of life. Who on earth would decide not to teach their own child to swim, and then send them out to sea every day?

But then when I looked at the power of the waves before my eyes, I thought even the strongest swimmer I knew wouldn't survive a storm in those seas. Perhaps they knew, or assumed, their loved ones couldn't possibly live past falling into the turbulent waters and it was a kindness, albeit a warped one, letting them die. It would have ended their suffering sooner. It was a practical tradition. Wise. Thought-out and considered. It was a tradition for a reason.

* * * *

Fiona O'Malley recently completed a Master's in Creative Writing in UCD. She works as the CEO of Sonas, the largest domestic violence services provider in Ireland. She worked previously for publications including *The Observer*, *The Sunday Times*, *VOGUE*, and *The Irish Times*. She is a qualified barrister and holds a Master's in International Human Rights. She is currently pursuing a PhD in law on the regulation of online misinformation. In her spare time, she enjoys hiking, Pilates, and reading murder mysteries.

No One is Voiceless...

Translated from Savita Pathak's Hindi story *Besadaa Koi Nahi*

SONAKSHI SRIVASTAVA

"Aunty, open the door – aunty, open the door!" Morning was yet to mark its arrival when the tapping of little Mannu's hands was heard... "Arre Shubhra, open the door. Mannu is here." "Good morning!" sang a voice from the outside.

Mannu's four-year-old voice seemed no less than a wonder in this lonely place. No matter how hard his mother tried to restrain him, he could not be stopped. The young child was delightfully aware that human responses are not toys. Unlike a remote-controlled car or a Jolly Chimp, these could only secure his heart's affection for a while.

His family had arrived on this particular floor of this particular apartment only a few months ago. The Verma family had been tenants here for a while. The little kid had arrived from the world of mohalla-daarii. Initially, his mother had tried to keep him amused by showing him a crow on some days and a squirrel on the other. In fact, it was because of him that she was able to pay attention to the natural order around her. Saptaparni, Shirish – these were names that had sounded unfamiliar to her ears as well. Little Mannu used to wave "bye-bye" to every passerby from his balcony. His greeting was sometimes reciprocated with a smile and sometimes with contempt – but he stayed unfazed. Nature and Man, they probably cannot inhabit a city together. His apartment building was enveloped in looming silence. Here there was no hullabaloo of the frequenting vehicles – only the rumble of the sky. Since there was an airport nearby, huge airplanes floating in the sky were a common occurrence. The child's mother would tell him the names of the airplanes to fill up the void within herself. And just like those airplanes, his chatter and his questions were boundless. And one cannot really say how, in the midst of it all, little Mannu would manage to get the neighbours to open their doors to him.

Mannu would begin with his usual chirping as soon as the doors were flung open, "Uncle, wake up! You are always dozing away. Arre, morning is for exercising. Aunty, wake uncle up!" And then he would begin with his catalogue of requests – sometimes by swinging from Vermaji's shoulders or jumping on his sofa.

Vermaji's family of three was lonelier than ever on this secluded island. Vermaji used to work on a ship until fifteen years ago. That was a different era. A lot of facilities were not available on board and he was just a labourer anyway. But how would any family know the trouble and toil of working on a ship? They only see the promise of chocolates and money of foreign lands. Away from his family for years, Vermaji measured out half his life counting the tides, memorizing the names of the harbours of various countries. His entire life was exhausted by shouldering the responsibility of his home and in earning the badge of estrangement from his family. During holidays, his time at home was spent more in contention against his wife rather than contending for her affection. Loneliness and deep-seated misunderstandings were at the roots of their discontent. As the body wore down, so did the chance of getting work on the ship. He tried his hands at other menial jobs but found no ready success. He knew how to keep afloat the ship of life on the water but it was here - with the force of life on land - that wearied him.

Anger occasionally tempers to assume the form of irritation. This irritation is so deadly that it often chars everything in its vicinity. A furrowed forehead is like a contagious disease. And like

any contagious disease, it spreads through the house. Vermaji had lost the sight of his eyes due to hypertension. And anyway, this disease was also in the air here – streams of screams and then a sea of silence.

A sharp scream from across the floor would pierce through the air right from four in the morning, “You do not seem to understand anything... Tell me, why can’t you... tell me?” This was the voice of a father from the neighbouring house, one who was always anxious about his daughter’s studies while the daughter seemed more weighed down by the beatings from her father than by her studies.

Little Mannu used to mimic him sometimes too. Vermaji used to break into laughter after listening to him, “Tell me, what do you want to eat? Chicken tikka, paneer tikka, popcorn, Hajmola?” Then he used to reassure him, “Once uncle gets his money, then he will treat Mannu to all these things...”

“Uncle, you will get your money tomorrow!” Little Mannu would quip without hesitation, and Vermaji would bloom with happiness despite the lie.

As a matter of fact, he had taken out an insurance policy and was waiting out his days in the hope of receiving its claim.

“Shubhra, Mannu was saying that we will get the money tomorrow.”

“You are so strange! Why are you so worked up? You will get the money. You spoke to them yesterday only. They have begun processing the documents...” Mrs. Verma replied irritably, her voice at once tinged with faint hope and the ache of splintered optimism.

“You seem to believe these company people a lot. Ask them how long will they take? They have been fooling us for the last four months. Ranjana’s husband is a real thug. He was such a smooth talker when he was getting this policy done...” And thus began his litany of the same age-old grievances.

Ranjana’s husband was the husband of Shubhra’s sister. He had filed a medical policy for Vermaji. It was this policy’s money that had been keeping the entire family on its toes.

The doctors harboured the hope that Vermaji’s eyesight could be restored provided he steered clear from tension. But this was almost like telling a poor man that he needs to stay away from dirt, smoke, and sunlight for his disease to disappear.

His plummeting savings and an escalating medical cost was making him very uneasy about his ailment. Handling the costs of allopathic medication was proving to be difficult. By a turn of luck, he had found some respite in homeopathic medication, or it was totally plausible that a cheap alternative had provided him that respite. Anyway, a sliver of light would sometimes impress itself upon his eyes, lending a ray of hope to his chance of recovery.

“Uncle, how big is a fish in the North Atlantic? Why did the pirates hit you in your eye? Did they want to snatch away some treasure from you...?”

“Yes, they wanted to steal away my treasure. But I beat them to a pulp and threw them into the Pacific.” Vermaji kept on concocting new stories.

The pats of the little child were full of life. In a world that was quick to poke fun at others, they made heroes of each other. Vermaji’s daughter had warmed up to Mannu. She would bring chips for him after school.

Mannu's family was going to Goa on a trip. Mannu had heard lots of stories from Vermaji about his adventures at sea. One fine morning, he became adamant in his demand, "Maa, uncle will also come with us to Goa."

"Which uncle?"

"Arre, the one who stays right across. Maa, I think uncle's eyes have forgotten how to see. Once he catches the sight of the sea, he will remember how to see. Let us take him, please!"

Tears welled up in his mother's eyes. She went to Vermaji's house along with Mannu. "Look at what Mannu is saying, uncle – that you should accompany us to Goa. You will remember how to see after seeing the sea there."

It is difficult to tell if the words of that little boy were a product of some cartoon film or a story or if those were anchored to a sense of concern. Whatever it was, a streak of light really did glimmer in Vermaji's eyes – that is what he told his doctor that evening.

Translator's Note:

Savita Pathak is a contemporary Hindi writer and a professor of English. Published by Rajkamal Prakashan, the leading Hindi publishing house, Pathak's words sear through the very fabric of Indian society to present in minute shreds the various hypocrisies, and the anxieties of inhabiting a patriarchal space. Her stories subtly bring to the fore the real face of contemporary India, jolting the readers to face the various positions of truth and of what it means to be a human in this country.

The story, originally written in Hindi by Dr. Savita Pathak is titled, *Besadaa Koi Nahi*. The story makes for an appropriate fit for translation because of the focus on "new voice" - not only of the author but also the translator. It is a joyful exercise as a woman translator to translate a woman writer, especially someone like Savita Pathak for her erudite examination of the human psyche. It is her attentiveness, her care, and her concern for the everyday that she deftly weaves with her words that also inform my own position as a literary translator. The story, despite being short, offers a promising respite (and perhaps that is the intent in it being short) from the freight of busy-ness that has so come to punctuate our lives that moments of joy have been frisked away from the everyday. It is a tale that prompts us to pay attention to the little things in life as our "endless and proper work" (Mary Oliver) - and how these little things may eventually envelop our lives with warmth and care, offering hope and the ability to see the extraordinary in the ordinary.

* * * *

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Potluck Zine, Hakara, etc. She is a former translation fellow with the South Asia Speaks programme.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Potent Promise: *Henry James and the Promise of Fiction*

FREDDY CONWAY-SHAW

Henry James and the Promise of Fiction. By Stuart Burrows. 2024. 256p. £85. Cambridge University Press. ISBN 9781009419697

That Stuart Burrows's monograph on the promise in Henry James's fiction opens with an analysis of the 'central moment' of the Belgian film *La Promesse* (1997) is reflective of the sprawling range of voices Burrows draws upon for his study (1).¹ Arguing that the promise is the 'governing trope' of James's fiction, Burrows moves effectively through philosophical and literary-theoretical thought as he outlines how the promise holds formal consequences for James's texts, and their subsequent impact on the novel form as a whole (12). Indeed, Burrows's study maintains that 'the relation between morality and literature is better posed in terms of form than in terms of content', an analytical focus that mainly produces readings of the perspectival or temporal consequences of promise-making, -keeping, and -breaking in James's texts (12). Moving from Plato to Sianne Ngai through Immanuel Kant and back again, Burrows populates his text with an eclectic array of thinkers. It is perhaps this eclecticism of Burrows's methodology that in part supports the multivalence of the promise for which he argues.

Burrows establishes the promise in James's texts as 'mak[ing] or break[ing] worlds' (3). While this may be termed the promissory umbrella under which the consequences of promises largely fall, Burrows demonstrates that the ways in which the texts navigate promising and promises are wide-ranging. It means that while the chapters deal with a different James novel or novella as their main focus, some of the most fruitful moments come in the connections drawn between similar but diverging promising across texts. Such gestures are made in Chapter 1, which focuses on James's early novel *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), establishing the loosely chronological patterning of the monograph which allows for a reading of the promising connections between this and later texts. Entitled 'Promising Others', this chapter looks in detail at the promise Isabel Archer makes to her stepdaughter Pansy: that she will come back for her. While it too looks at the ramifications of other promises—most notably the marriage promise to Gilbert Osmond—the chapter argues convincingly that Isabel's keeping of her promise to Pansy allows her to remake and rebuild her own world. Isabel, Burrows argues, 'repairs the temporal gaps that have structured her experience' (33). The critic's focus on temporality here is characteristic of his overarching argument with regards to the promise: that '[t]he double temporality of the promise binds together the moment of utterance and the moment of fulfilment' (4). Isabel is able to ensure continuity by linking the bound future to the present of the uttered promise, and in so doing, Burrows argues, fully establishes her character as one who is her 'own best friend' and simultaneously located 'outside rather than inside the self' (48). Isabel's keeping of her promise reveals the moral truth that we 'must' see our lives 'from the point of view of those to whom we belong' (45).

¹ Stuart Burrows, *Henry James and the Promise of Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024). Subsequent references will be parenthetically cited in-text.

Chapter 2, which focuses on James's horror novella *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) but also *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897) and *In the Cage* (1898), moves from the centrality of Isabel's consciousness in *The Portrait of a Lady* to characters outside their own fictions: ones who, in the case of Fleda of *The Spoils of Poynton*, are 'at the center of the narrative' but not 'the center of the story' (50). Not as concerned with the promise as such, the chapter focuses at large on the promise of *duty* that the governess feels in *The Turn of the Screw*, and one that positions her and the protagonists of the other two texts 'at a distance—temporal or spatial—from the incidents they record' (51). Burrows makes the admittedly 'perverse' but compelling reading that the governess exists 'only in the third person, and thus [...] outside the time of the promise', even though she narrates the story in the first person (53-4). Her narrative distance simultaneously sees time 'stilled', as 'every moment is actually five separate times in one' in the different ways the story is retold (66). The effect of this, Burrows argues, leaves the governess a 'non-person', whose 'overzealous sense of duty' has frozen a traumatic moment in time as it obscures her own position in it (73).

Just as the governess has a 'sense that time is not chronological but circular' because of the consistently returning 'past [...] in the form of a ghost', Chapter 3 examines the 'strangely circular form' of *The Ambassadors* (1903) (66, 76). It is interested in how Strether's character and 'sense of morality' are 'profoundly changed', as broken promises do not stop what has been promised from occurring regardless (76). Burrows gives the 'clearest example' of the promise Strether makes to ensure Chad returns to America—'by the end of the novel, Chad does indeed appear poised to go home [...] ironically, against the wishes of Strether' (76-7). He moves on from this explicit example, however, to examine how Strether's 'private pledge' to become a changed man fails, but in failing paradoxically allows himself to 'still [be] in a position to do so'—that is, to become the man he wishes to be (77-8). Formal analysis of the consequences of these moments once again tends towards the perspectival, as through James's 'third-person perspective' that is 'no more omniscient than the protagonist', Burrows concludes that James's 'narrative strategy' is one where 'the text [is] a product rather than a depiction of the protagonist's capacious and ever-growing imagination' (88-90). The developing text—and Burrows consistently draws parallels with James's compositional process—is a manifestation of Strether's moral development.

Chapters 4 and 5, on *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) and *The Golden Bowl* (1904) respectively, converge in their interests in relationship dynamics and truth-telling. Chapter 4 looks at the private promise between Kate and Densher to love each other, while Chapter 5 examines Maggie's lies to herself and to others to protect hers and her father's marriages from the affair she knows is happening. Much as in Chapter 3—indeed, Burrows draws the connection between James's three late masterpieces in the harmony between Maggie, Strether, and Densher—these characters are 'both in the novel and the means by which the novel takes shape' (135). For Densher in *The Wings of the Dove*, 'the past can be relived, reimagined, remade', but, tellingly, in a way that also rewrites the future—and I emphasise rewriting here to stress the parallels Burrows draws with the act of narration and textual production (116). Subtle, close analysis of the intertwining of reading, remembrance, and experience for Densher leads to Burrows's compelling conclusion that 'fiction possesses the power to bring into being the world it describes' (120). A parallel can thus be drawn between these descriptions and promises, where to describe promises the creation of the description, as the past and the present create the future. In contrast, it is Maggie's sense of self that is created alongside the novel which is 'narrated from inside itself, by one of James's own characters' (145). Faced with the 'startling knowledge' of broken marriages in *The Golden Bowl* but promising to lie to ensure their integrity, Maggie 'maintain[s] a coherent sense of self' through the promise's ability to 'collapse[...] the difference between past,

present and future' (152). Regardless of what she promises or how she keeps said promises, the act of promising strengthens her selfhood just as her 'developing consciousness' takes 'form' in the novel (136).

The briefer Chapter 6, which looks at James's novella 'The Beast in the Jungle' (1903), is looser too on its definition of the promise, looking at how Marcher 'has not kept a promise but been kept by it'—the promise of his future that has kept him 'in a state of perpetual suspense' (155). Burrows concludes with discussion of the 'promise of life' (168): that Marcher lives on in 'The Beast in the Jungle' to discover that the promise of life exists only in the present. The chapter represents perhaps the shortcoming of Burrows's monograph: such is the ambition and scope of the project that a tight definition of promising is left wanting, with Burrows drawing tenuous promissory connections. Regardless, the diversity of definitions with which Burrows treats promising in James's fiction is also a strength of the study, as is its ambition; the conclusions he draws with regards to the shape of the novel form as a whole mark the study as one with potentially significant consequences for literary studies. Undoubtedly, the book's scholarly range, rigour, and strikingly original formal analysis make it an important intervention in Jamesian criticism, and any future writing on the moral landscape of James's fiction will require reference to *Henry James and the Promise of Fiction*.

* * * *

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The Promise of Connection in Victoria MacKenzie's Retelling of Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich

SARAH R. WALLACE

For Thy Great Pain Have Mercy on My Little Pain. By Victoria MacKenzie. 2023. 176pp. £8.99. Bloomsbury. ISBN 978-1-526647-93-1

Margery Kempe is perhaps one of the most annoying women in English literature. Julian of Norwich is among the most comforting, famous for being shown that '[a]lle shalle be wele, and alle shalle be wele, and alle maner of thyng shalle be wele.'¹ Yet to encounter either woman in writing is to be annoyed, comforted, perplexed, and struck with recognition by turns. Scottish author Victoria MacKenzie's debut novel *For Thy Great Pain Have Mercy on My Little Pain* (2023) excavates the stories of two of these pre-eminent women in English textual history—Julian's *Showings*, written in the fourteenth century, is the earliest surviving English book by a woman, and Kempe's eponymous book, from the turn of the fifteenth century, is considered to be the first English autobiography.² MacKenzie's novelised retelling alternates their voices, creating a parallel structure that plays with their similarities and differences, foregrounding the tensions of religious devotion with the contingencies of women's historical and embodied experiences.

For Thy Great Pain is well-attuned to how inextricable the material, social, and spiritual are from each other. The Prologue immediately introduces the particularly religious and social dimensions of Margery's distress: 'I fear that my neighbours are right, that it is the devil inside me' (Prologue). Shame and doubt seem to be the forces that impel her, as she begins to narrate her physical and spiritual discomfort. Pregnancy and childbirth are especially distressing for MacKenzie's Margery, whom a presentist reading might diagnose with pica, postpartum psychosis, and self-harm.³ Indeed, womanhood in both its material and social conditions often seems to be the primary problem of Margery's life. Her father's disappointment in having a daughter, the trauma of menstruation, and the narrow life prescribed for a girl all twist around her, choking her. Margery's turn to public preaching disrupts the ecclesiastical and political hegemony of men, revealing a miasma of misogyny as ubiquitous as that believed to carry the Black Death. Margery may be shocking and annoying, the novel suggests, but in a world in which a woman receives 'no kindness or sympathy' from her husband after she is almost sexually assaulted, an annoying woman may simply be a woman who dares to care for her own wellbeing.

While the book's counterpoint narrative suggests the title comes from one woman speaking to the other, the novel actually avoids the hierarchy of declaring Margery's or Julian's pain greater. Early autobiography, from St. Augustine to Kempe, is often a relentless depiction of inner life without the detailed 'world' or 'characters' that populate the realist novel of the nineteenth century onward. MacKenzie treads a fine line between readerly expectations and the spare furnishings of the primary texts. To today's reader, both the Margery Kempe of the original text and MacKenzie's fictionalised version may seem self-absorbed to the point of

¹ Julian of Norwich, *The Showings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. By Denise N. Baker (W.W. Norton, 2005), p. 39.

² Victoria MacKenzie, *For Thy Great Pain Have Mercy on My Little Pain* (Bloomsbury, 2023). Subsequent citations will be parenthetically in-text and the title shortened to *For Thy Great Pain*.

³ See Diana Jefferies and Debbie Horsfall, 'Forged by Fire: Margery Kempe's Account of Postnatal Psychosis' *Literature and Medicine* 32.2 (2014), pp. 348–64.

narcissism. Margery believes most of her wishes are ordained and facilitated by God; indeed, God and Christ seem to exist to defend and vindicate her:

Robert Spryngolde says there are so many against me that he fears there is only him and the stars and the moon on my side. But Christ says that one day those few of my neighbours that are permitted into heaven will see me sitting beside God as the most beloved of all the saints, and doted on by Jesus and his blessed mother. (124)

Christ appears more real to Margery than do her family members—especially her children, who are not even named in the novel. While Margery's husband and 'one of [her] youngest daughters' are arguing about the fate of the family dog, Margery hears 'the sound of air rushing through a pair of bellows... the Holy Ghost moving' (45). Narrator Margery recounts the story of the dog, but only as a backdrop to her own spiritual experience, which takes precedence even when her husband hits her daughter. Set against the violence and danger of her life, Margery's plaintive question, 'Jesus, what shall I think about?' appears as both a protest and a retreat from the assault of daily pain she experiences (Epigraph).

In contrast to the fraught social conditions of Margery's life, Julian is famous for her life as an anchoress, shut away from the social and material conditions of the world. Yet her fictionalised narrative often seems more attuned to life outside of herself. While her time of marriage and motherhood is short, with the plague killing her husband and daughter, her family brings pleasure to Julian while they live and are not merely obstacles to her devotion. Her grief for them causes her to retreat into the anchorage and mystic contemplation because she wants to 'feel what they had felt,' reflecting the promise of connection implicit in the practices of mystic devotion (46). MacKenzie is less successful with Julian's narrative than Margery's, when the former's experience of grief escapes the ordered language of the first-person linear account. One paragraph consists primarily of the repetition 'I prayed and prayed and prayed and prayed and prayed and prayed...' (44). Hovering between a simple and compound sentence, the words convey mind-numbing weariness, but I found myself wishing that MacKenzie would reach into her toolkit as a poet and make more creative use of the page to convey the agony of a mother's grief.

Throughout much of the novel, the body is often a problem for both Margery and Julian. Their meeting, however, leads to an acceptance of the embodiment, abjection, and beauty of the world. God may be in 'hazelnuts and fish scales and rain drops', but it is human touch that is ultimately a path to transcending the pitiful self. Julian—who must live decades closed off from others, not permitted even to touch her servant's hand—urges Margery to get out of her head, care for her children, and enjoy the physical world (141-44). In Mackenzie's account of their meeting, Julian sends Margery forth with a secret, and a memory of connection. In her characteristic conscientiousness, Margery thinks that she has 'never felt so utterly comforted (except when Christ comforted me himself, of course)' (143). The two women's encounter also carries a difficult promise as Margery tries 'to love [her] children better,' even though she thinks 'wearing a hair shirt might be an easier path to heaven' (156). The novel leaves the reader with such contradictions and annoyances: women who insist on self-abnegation while writing reams of autobiography; women who proclaim love for others while seeming to cut themselves off from typical ties. The Christian promise of redemption, for which both women live, does not expunge dysfunction, but in highlighting such ineluctable contradictions, the novel becomes intersubjective. It invites the reader, also, to consider and have mercy on the pain—little and great—that connects us all.

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The Promise of Control: Food, Sex, and Jewish Faith in Melissa Broder's *Milk Fed*

CATHERINE MARCOTTE

Milk Fed. By Melissa Broder. 2021. 304 pages. £8.99. Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.
ISBN: 9781408897126.

Rachel is obsessed with what she eats. A lapsed Jew, aspiring comedian, and resentful Los Angeles talent management worker, the protagonist of Melissa Broder's *Milk Fed* (2021) pursues calorie-counting and daily cardio with a religious zeal. She subsists on a carefully calculated parade of sugar-free, fat-free products, and supplements her isolation with elaborate fantasies of her coworker Ana: a snarky, thin, undeniably beautiful woman old enough to be her mother. But when her therapist convinces her to start a 90-day detox from her fat-phobic mother, and a new girl named Miriam takes over the counter at her favourite frozen yogurt shop, the promise of control Rachel locates in her food rituals begins to falter.

Bursting with introspection, blunt honesty, and unfiltered desire, *Milk Fed* is a deeply funny, wildly erotic tale that rethinks the binary promises of thinness and fatness we continue to be fed. Not unlike Broder's first novel, *The Pisces* (2018) – in which a depressed graduate student meets the man of her dreams only to realise he is half human, half fish – *Milk Fed* plays with the mythical, interweaving the Jewish folkloric figure of the golem into this otherwise realist novel. Usually made from mud or clay, the golem is defined as a magically created 'anthropomorphic being' (70). In *Milk Fed*, Rachel's golem is molded out of clay at her therapist's request and guided by her vision of the body she feels her unrestricted eating would promise. Her figure actualises the 'amorphous', 'disgusting', 'exploding', and 'out of control' body she fears becoming (36). But instead of lessening the imagined body's power over Rachel, as her therapist would hope, the figure only increases it, summoning Miriam, the 'undeniably ... irrefutably fat' young Jewish woman who takes over the counter of Yo!Good, Rachel's favourite frozen yogurt shop (40).

In Rachel's words, Miriam's body exceeds even her 'worst fears' for her own (40). Through Miriam, Rachel not only confronts the abject—the destabilising, disgusting force that interrupts one's sense of the body's wholeness—but the stunning knowledge that Miriam herself is entirely unfazed by her corpulence. Rachel's blatant equation of Miriam with her most feared self—she confesses to her fear of 'look[ing] like Miriam', and acknowledges her efforts to intimidate her with her slender figure—in some ways casts Miriam as her foil, a reductive role that too often polices deviant female characters to bolster protagonists (69). Yet in her commitment to showcasing Rachel's blunt introspection, Broder crafts an unusually nuanced portrayal of their pairing, offering readers an alternative view of how women's relationships can function in contemporary fiction.

So as her fear of Miriam's body gives way to an increasing attraction, Rachel soon agrees to try one of Rachel's full-fat, unrestrained signature sundaes. Under Miriam's hungry gaze, she plunges into a creation so loaded with hot fudge she knows she will never be able to calculate its calories. Although Rachel negotiates her transgression with further disorder—a 24-hour binge she caps with a week of even stricter restrictions—the allure of Miriam's presence beckons her further and further from her meticulously measured portions. Rachel begins indulging in sesame chicken at the Golden Dragon—Miriam's favourite Chinese restaurant, Twizzlers at the movie theatre, and challah at Shabbat dinner with Miriam's family, eventually falling into what she can only guess is normalcy: eating what she wants when she wants and stopping when she is full.

But as Miriam and Rachel negotiate their increasingly erotic relationship and Miriam's and her family's unflinchingly Orthodox values, the novel makes clear that Rachel's growing trust in food remains deeply fragile, held at the mercy of Miriam's continued affection. While Miriam alternately pursues and rejects her advances, Rachel's clay figure reappears after mysteriously vanishing, establishing itself as a guiding, comforting force in Rachel's turbulent life. Often explained as symbolic of a 'spiritual awakening' rather than as a materially real figure, the return of Rachel's golem is accompanied by vivid dreamscapes featuring Judah Loew ben Bazalel, the late sixteenth-century rabbi best known for his creation of a famous antisemitism-fighting golem (70). Through the rabbi's council, Rachel is ushered ever further from her days of caloric restriction and encouraged in her pursuit of Miriam. Here, Broder's quasi-mythical rendering of the historical figure declares the plurality of Jewish faith, insisting that there are many ways to be faithful, to ourselves and to each other.

It is the rabbi's guidance that propels Rachel toward a new kind of belief system and toward the sense that her relationship with Miriam must be divine intervention. She names their brief, feverish affair 'the seven nights of Miriam', conceiving of their time together as a sort of 'creation myth' that both frames the end of their relationship and the narrative of Rachel's rebirth (213). As she cuts her hair, leans into androgynous clothing, and eats more freely, Rachel understands she is 'changing,' emerging as a person no longer consumed by the thinness of her body, and the promise of safety she long associated with it (246). Even as the seemingly unconditional welcome of Miriam's family—a propelling force in Rachel's acceptance of her widening body—reveals its one condition, adherence to the heteronormative ideology that underpins their Orthodox Jewish faith, Rachel stands her ground, revealing a newfound ability to find value in her own acceptance.

In the end, Melissa Broder's *Milk Fed* is not a story of religious reform or fairy tale endings. Instead, it is a story of deep healing. A deeply funny, surprisingly sexy meditation on the gravity of our promises, both the ones we make to each other, and especially, the ones we make to ourselves, Broder's novel is impeccably timely while being impressively timeless, immersing readers in the question of who and what we are all being fed.

* * * *

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Winthrop Wetherbee's *The Ancient Flame*: Exemplarity, Intertextuality, and Illumination in
Dante's Re-Vision of the Past

The Ancient Flame: Dante and the Poets. By Winthrop Wetherbee. 2008. 304p. £36.
University of Notre Dame Press. ISBN 9780268044121.

ALANI HICKS-BARTLETT

*"Elli givan dinanzi, e io soletto
di retro, e ascoltava i lor sermoni
ch'a poetar mi davano intelletto."
(Purgatorio, 22.127–29)*

*[They were going on in front, and I solitary
behind, and I was listening to their speech,
which gave me understanding in poetry.]¹*

Dante Alighieri, the principal figure of the 'tre corone' of Italian literature and, according to T. S. Eliot, the most 'universal of poets in the modern languages' along with Shakespeare, has constituted an exciting, boundless field of study.² In recent decades, much critical energy has been devoted to Dante's dexterous handling of the textual representation of his own authorial agency and status. One of the most elusive, yet infallibly fascinating, points of critical intrigue regarding the *Commedia* (c.1308–21) is the matter of authorial self-representation and literary self-reflexivity—that is to say, Dante's difficult and complex negotiation of his own poetical voice and literary aims, his numerous autocitations and assertion of his own authority vis-à-vis his intertextual objectives, and the promissory obligations to his forebears that he may exalt, renegotiate, or repudiate entirely.³ As such, not only the discussion of his status as an author, but also the origin and development of his creative agency and poetic virtuosity are frequent areas of exciting critical inquiry. Similarly, as Dante's readers have long signalled, his poem's pointed yet varied treatment of a wide range of classical forefathers provides another riveting point of critical concern. Wetherbee's critical exploration of these tensions explicates Dante's debts and obligations to his forebears, whilst clearly articulating his own voice.⁴ Complicating a dichotomy of influence, this critic insists that Dante's self-promise is imbricated in his careful positioning as heir to past greatness, guardian, yet re-creator, of the poetic flame, and living progressive conduit for future poetics.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the conflicted relationship between classical and medieval exempla, or *translatio*, *imitatio*, and *aemulatio*, and their related Renaissance counterparts are precepts that assist understandings of Dante's medieval yet remarkably modern poem. These principles similarly foster recognition of the complex relationship between Dante, his classical models, and the wide range of epic and lyric poets that constitute his referential

¹ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Purgatorio*, translated with a commentary by C. Singleton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 242–43.

² T. S. Eliot, 'Dante', in *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1950), pp. 199–237 (p. 11).

³ On self-referentiality and autocitation in particular, see Teodolinda Barolini, "Autocitation and Autobiography," in *Dante's Poets: Textuality and Truth in the Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) pp.3–84.

⁴ Winthrop Wetherbee, *The Ancient Flame: Dante and the Poets* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008). Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in-text.

ambit.⁵ In his evident desire to revere and yet surpass, to acknowledge literary debts while also proclaiming independence, Dante's negotiation of his intertextual genealogy thus often seems to result in a rather 'anxious' interaction, to use a Bloomian vocabulary, with his poetic past.⁶

While numerous critics have sought to delve into the heart of Dante's intercalated relationships with other authors and authorial moments—from the series of catalysing actantial oaths that open the *Commedia* introducing to readers a Beatrice famously 'moved' by love, a Virgil then spurred to succour Dante due to the pledge to assist he has made to Beatrice, and Virgil's own words that coax Dante to follow him since they 'promise' the pilgrim 'such good' ("‘*Imio parlar tanto ben ti promette*’" (*Inf.* 2.126)]—aiming for a definitive solution to what seems to be the epistemological key of the *Commedia*, few have succeeded.^{7,8} One such success, however, is Winthrop Wetherbee. And yet, Wetherbee's monograph, *The Ancient Flame: Dante and the Poets* (2008), which was hailed shortly after its publication as being an 'important and beautiful book', and a 'masterful study', an 'endlessly fascinating book' that 'opened a great number of possibilities for scholars of Dante, who will benefit greatly from Wetherbee's masterful work of drawing connections between Dante's world and the worlds of the ancient epic', merits renewed critical attention.⁹ This distinguished scholar of the humanities scrupulously enters into a sustained dialogue not only with Dante's poem, but also with a selection of seminal critical works, all of which address similar questions of authorial agency, intertextual grounding, and the commitment to and (re)evocation of various authors and voices of the past.

Looking simultaneously to the past and to the future, just as the *Commedia* does itself, *The Ancient Flame* draws most heavily on the ground-breaking works of Barolini, Auerbach, Hollander, Mazzotta, Picone, and Moevs, while proposing new modes of reading.¹⁰ Yet, what

⁵ (Wetherbee 10-11; Barolini, *Dante's Poets* and *Dante and the Origins*, Baránski, *Dante e i segni*) By no means an exhaustive list, see, in particular, Teodolinda Barolini's aforementioned *Dante's Poets* and her *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture* (Fordham: Fordham University Press, 2006); Zygmunt Baránski, *Dante e i segni. Saggi per una storia intellettuale di Dante Alighieri* (Naples: Liguori, 2000); Massimo Verdicchio, *Reading Dante Reading* (Edmonton: University of Alberta, 2002); Peter Dronke, *Dante and Medieval Latin Traditions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Filippo Gianferri, *Dante's Education: Latin Schoolbooks and Vernacular Poetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024); and Natalino Sapegno, *Commento alla Divina Commedia*, 3 vol., (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1955-57). See also Albert Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), who examines the various levels of signification of 'author' and 'authority', and helpfully distinguishes between 'medieval *auctoritas*' and 'modern *authority*' (5).

⁶ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁷ Dante Alighieri, "Inferno," in *Commedia*, 3 vols., ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi (Milan: Mondadori, 1966-67).

⁸ Notable exceptions, including recent works, are: Barolini, *Dante's Poets*; Simone Marchesi, *Dante and Augustine: Linguistics, Poetics, Hermeneutics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018); Christopher Kleinhenz, 'Virgil, Statius, and Dante: An Unusual Trinity', in *Lectura Dantis Newberryana*, ed. by P. Cherchi and A. C. Mastrobuono (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), pp. 37-55; and Ascoli.

⁹ Piero Boitani, "The Ancient Flame: Dante and the Poets by Winthrop Wetherbee," *Speculum* 85:4 (2010):1038-40. Mark David Rasmussen, "The Ancient Flame: Dante and the Poets by Winthrop Wetherbee," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 41:4 (2010): 1279-81. Heather Webb, "The Ancient Flame: Dante and the Poets by Winthrop Wetherbee," *Renaissance Quarterly* 63:3 (2009): 868-69.

¹⁰ Wetherbee acknowledges his huge debts to various texts by Teodolinda Barolini, in whose 'footsteps' he follows, and cites in particular her *Dante's Poets*, referenced above, and her *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Erich Auerbach, *Dante, Poet of the Secular World*, trans. by R. Mannheim (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); Robert Hollander, especially his work on Virgilian resonances in the *Commedia* and his *Allegory in Dante's 'Commedia'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969); Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), and *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); and Michelangelo Picone's and Ronald Martinez's work on Dante's renegotiation of Ovidian myths and use of Statius, in 'Dante argonauta; La ricezione dei miti ovidiani nella *Commedia*', in *Ovidius redivivus: Von Ovid zu Dante*, ed. by M. Picone and B.

distinguishes Wetherbee's convictions from his own populous 'bella scola' of critics is the detailed and measured way in which he manages his exploration of the filial yet conflicted relationship between Dante and exemplary classical *auctores* without privileging one to the detriment of the other. In fact, as a distinguished scholar of Old French, Classical and Medieval Latin, and Middle English literature, Wetherbee's formation and long-standing interests, including poetry, chivalric romance, history, allegory, cosmology, Platonism, and philosophy, inherently allow him to parse Dante's intertextual borrowings in a vigorously original and broadly comparative manner throughout *The Ancient Flame*.

While Wetherbee does indeed hold Dante's rapport with Virgil, Ovid, Lucan and Statius as a primary line of inquiry, not once does he circumscribe the presence of the Latin poets with a myopic, uneven focus. Instead, he remains faithful to the specific textual clues presented by Dante regarding his feelings towards his predecessors, and his frequently reiterated promises to remember or recall their lives and their works. In so doing, he is able effectively to divorce himself from a facile straightforward acceptance of other critics' voices. Highlighting the vital space that separates Dante from the 'Poeti' who preceded him, Wetherbee comments in his introduction that, '[f]or many critics of the *Commedia*, Dante's undeniable distancing of himself from the Poeti has seemed to constitute an assertion of superiority. But this is a claim I do not believe Dante himself would have made. He would have been in full sympathy with Eliot's rejoinder in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' to the charge that we 'know so much more' than the classical authors did' (11).¹¹ Adroitly suturing together different temporalities in his own version of Dantean style, Wetherbee reveals to his readers the spiralling path of examination that his analysis will take. Indeed, the critical space in which he manoeuvres, much like the material of his argument, obeys no explicit temporal boundaries.

That is, in a similar fashion to Derrida's insistence upon the convergence of temporalities and the residue or 'traces' that unremittingly inform and comprise the present; Wetherbee insists that Dante draws from earlier literary and philosophical traditions while challenging and recodifying them, offering readers a polyhedral assessment of the remnants of classical tradition that shape and 'remain[n] significantly present' throughout the *Commedia* (227)¹². All the same, although it is difficult to perceive the singularity of a voice that both emerges from and is constituted by past echoes, the consideration Wetherbee gives to Dante's actual 'voice' is a clear testament not only to his sensitivity as a reader of the *trecento* author, but also to the attention he grants to precision of detail and interpretive coherence on a much larger scale.

From his introduction onwards, Wetherbee refuses a definitive diagnosis of Dante's use of the Poeti, precisely because of what he views as the pagan poets' widely different and constantly metamorphosing role in Dante's poetical, political, and spiritual imaginary. As he demonstrates most explicitly in the beginning of his second chapter, 'Virgil in the *Inferno*', and in the subsequent 'Virgil and Lucan: Judgment and Poetic Authority in Dis', he does not merely examine the religious or allegorical pertinence of the presence of the Poeti, as has commonly

Zimmermann (Stuttgart: M & P Verlag für Wissenschaft und Forschung, 1994), pp. 173-202; 'Dante e i miti', in *Dante: Mito e Poesia. Atti del secondo Seminario dantesco internazionale*, Monte Verità: Ascona, 1997 (Firenze: Cesati, 1999), pp. 21-32; and 'Dante and the Two Canons: Statius in Virgil's Footsteps', *Comparative Literature Studies* 32 (1995): 151-75, respectively.

¹¹ In full, the Eliotian moment from which Wetherbee is drawing is: "Some one said: 'The dead writers are remote from us because we *know* so much more than they did.' Precisely, and they are that which we know," from "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *The Sacred Wood. Essays on Poetry and Criticism*, (London, Methuen, 1920), pp.42-53, at 46.

¹² Consider, for example, Derrida's comments on phenomenology and the temporal convergences that constitute the 'now' and its wake in Jacques Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène* (Paris: Quadrige / Presses Universitaires de France, 1993), pp. 76, 95-96.

been done previously, nor does he privilege this over the historical, identity, and literary roles that these figures play. His analysis therefore depends on a consistent valorisation of the instances of concrete intertextuality that reveal Dante's own reading, understanding, and reaction to his Latin models.

In his noteworthy fourth chapter, 'Cato's Grotto', Wetherbee studies the curious presence of Cato in *Purgatorio*. He evinces how, in Dante's paradoxical representation of an exemplary Cato, the poet is borrowing an 'essentially "infernal" poetics' from Lucan's *Pharsalia* while furthering Lucan's 'deeply ambivalent portrayal of Cato' (97-103). As Cato is just one of two pagans in Purgatory, and a figure whose suicide would have normally prevented his ability to ascend to the mountain—let alone be its saved warden—Dante's framing of Cato points towards salvation yet reveals the infernal residue that remains present throughout the canticle. In turn, this leaves readers to question the hazy notion of virtue that remains unresolved until *Paradiso*. In Chapter Five, 'Ovid and Virgil in Purgatory', Wetherbee astutely analyses the 'problematic relation of the poem to epic tradition' (166) and examines Dante's fragmentary use of the Poet's texts in 'Statius' (Chapter Six). Wetherbee's elucidation of the crucial beginnings and eventual transference of poetic power from the Poet to Dante *qua* poet, as he first joins their ranks and then moves 'beyond', most firmly takes root in these chapters. He reaches the apogee of this extension past his intertextual and citational models in 'Lust, Poetry, and the Earthly Paradise', which discusses paternity and dependency, and marries the disappearance of Virgil from Dante's text to a brilliant yet brief exploration of moments of grief in the *Aeneid*.

Wetherbee's final chapter, '*Paradiso*', details Dante's interaction with a variety of classical models once again, and provides a particularly useful recapitulation of Dante's use of important personal and literary past events—from his exile to Cadmus' travels and Aeneas' vision, from the Donation of Constantine to the founding of Thebes—as crucial interpretive keys for what the future holds, as well as for the lengthy trajectory that his poetry and 'historical vision' have taken. As Wetherbee's own language is stylistically formal and tends towards enargia and dramaticism, he is able to vividly accentuate the epic quality of Dante's voyage as a pilgrim, as well as the subtler, yet similarly heroic feat of Dante's writing process and rhetorical trajectory.

The work is not without its points of contention. Greater attention to the physicality and spatial descriptions with which the relationship between Dante and Virgil is depicted would have bolstered the arguments put forth in 'Virgil in the *Inferno*' and 'Ovid and Virgil in *Purgatory*'. These chapters examine fundamental moments of the *Commedia* that not only rely heavily on Virgil's presence and specifically accentuate the physicality of the relationship between Dante and his exemplary 'maestro' and 'autore', but also serve to proleptically announce Dante's insertion of himself into the pagan poets' ranks. Occasionally, while Webb rightly offers a Dantean justification for the open-endedness of some of Wetherbee's claims, *The Ancient Flame* often seems to hint at phantasms of arguments that never really come to fruition.¹³ For example, Wetherbee's frequent repetition of the terms 'alien' and 'alienation' in the first part of the book portends a possible line of argument that he does not fully take up in the latter part, even despite the relevance of historical and thematic examples of exile to many of the figures he studies. His preoccupation with valuing Dante's use of the classical poets as 'ideal', 'necessary', or 'effective foils'—which he stresses numerous times across the course of the book (14, 16, 17, in the first chapter alone)—and his reflexive association of anything sooty, foggy, murky or obscure with the 'smoky darkness of fallen Troy' are memorable, but slightly distracting quirks given the copious amount of repetition. Finally, although his conclusion does put 'poetry in perspective', as

¹³ "[T]o quote Dante's Peter, [...] it is better to 'err in opening than in keeping closed,'" Webb, "*The Ancient Flame*" (Review), 869.

he has proposed to do, it is hurried to the extent of seeming elliptical, which is very much in discord with the steadier pace and hermeneutical robustness of his seven previous chapters (145-268).

Although his analysis remains perspicacious throughout, Wetherbee's vaguer treatment of *Paradiso* and his rather laconic conclusion subscribe to its popular characterisation as the least accessible canticle.¹⁴ Yet the ineffability of Dante's metaphysical transhumanation and spiritual development are part and parcel not only of his sublunary experience but of his entire charted trajectory beginning from his infernal descent, and there is much for invested readers to appreciate in any of the canticles. Wetherbee's use of increasingly slippery terms—for example, his mention of 'a great deal of mythic history'—a heightened level of abstraction, and a certain rushed fullness in the second half of his last chapter, are slightly unsatisfactory given the analytical style of the rest of his text, redeemed somewhat by the pithiness of his final paragraph (276).

Nonetheless, *The Ancient Flame* provides an engaging and sparkingly original contribution to criticism of Dante and his sustained engagement with the thought and works of Virgil, Lucan, Ovid and Statius. Like Dante himself, Wetherbee offers readers a methodology built around resurrection and reverence. He disabuses what has typically been a more reductive management of the Poeti, and emphasises the intimacy of Dante's engagement with each of them. Wetherbee's own intimate approach to Dante's literary debts and the 'uniquely intimate relation' of Dante's poetry to that of his classical predecessors is invaluable. Not only does *The Ancient Flame* fulfil the promise of its title to shed new light on many of the long-standing traditional conceptions and popular assumptions regarding Dante's use of classical texts, it also illustrates how the sparks of these interactions illuminate the fertile intertextual topography of the entire *Commedia*.

* * * *

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¹⁴ Anthony Esolen calls *Paradiso* the 'least accessible' of Dante's canticles, while Robert Hollander writes in his and Jean Hollander's translation of the *Commedia* that '[o]ne finds few who will claim (or admit) that [*Paradiso*] is their favourite cantica'. *Paradise*, trans. by Esolen (New York: Modern Library, 2007), p. xii; *Paradiso*, trans. by Robert Hollander (New York: Doubleday, 2007), p. 2.

Fear is Not an Heirloom

KHUSHALI MAHAJAN

The Anniversary. By Andrea Bajani. 2026. 144 pages. £12.99. Penguin Classics.
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There is a particular kind of grief that comes not from loss, but escape. But when escaping from family, does the grief grow when it is from filial duties, or does it subside knowing the escape from your roots is essential when the roots turn into a noose? More importantly, in the end, who holds more grief: the one who promised themselves to break away from a tyrannical family unit, and succeeded at the cost of never returning, or the one who failed to provide the comfort of a family, forcing their own child to flee from them? It is this theme that the 2025 Strega Prize winner, Andrea Bajani, explores in his heart-wrenching autofiction, *The Anniversary*. The novel is a celebration of an important date: the tenth anniversary of the author's success in deliberately cutting ties with his parents. It is a novel that breaks a taboo with barely a raised voice, a heated confrontation, or the delusion of arrogant pride; quietly insinuating the exacting nature of the devastation it makes the reader feel. Translated from Italian into English by Geoffrey Brock and set to be released in July 2026 as part of Penguin Press' new International Writers Series, *The Anniversary* is a devastating narration of a dysfunctional family. The prose is spare and exact, and every sentence is load-bearing, with nothing decorative. The restraint mirrors the narrator's own emotional containment, the hard-won self-discipline of someone who grew up in a volatile household and learned early that feelings were best kept to a minimum. It is writing that trusts its reader and believes the weight of what is described does not need amplification.

This novel is a visceral narration of the memories of a controlling, abusive father and a deeply passive mother, which led to the destruction of the emotional and physical being of the narrator: Bajani himself, in all but legal acknowledgement. These memories rise like flood water, slow and unstoppable, carrying debris, through which Bajani reconstructs the architecture of a deeply patriarchal Italian-Catholic household, the existence of which depended on the mercy of a temperamental patriarch. Yet as the story progresses, the porous foundations of this architecture become apparent when the pretence of the oldest and most seductive promise of the patriarchy, that the man who controls, in exchange, provides and protects, falls. The father is rendered with the cold precision of someone who has spent years studying the wounds he's created. He is not villainous; he is just a man. But he is a man whose tyranny operates through petty acts of domination, setting a constant ringing of terror in the backdrop of his household. However, like most stories arising from the patriarchy, it is most powerfully told when the victim is placed at the centre.

The character of the mother is what makes the novel so complex and painful. Bajani does not grant her the dignity of victimhood without complication and is even resentful of her passiveness. Yet she does evoke the striking image of a woman who's alive only because she's not dead. She carried with herself a giant alarm clock around the city to ensure punctuality when meeting the father; she let go of her only friend when the latter was forced out of her life because she was instrumental in uncovering the father's affair; she allowed herself to be controlled when they finally got a telephone in the house, which was only picked up under the scrutinising eye of the father; she even minimised herself to the extent to brush her teeth with toilet water when she could not find the courage to tell the father that she had not brushed before he had switched the

supply off. She had rendered herself near invisible, even though she was never too much to begin with, but this self-erasure seemed like a glimmer of hope in the peace she was promised, and a bargain for the agency she lost.

Bajani presents the frustration he felt with his mother's submission in a very haunting manner, because till the end, she remained a woman who based her life on a false promise over evidence. He does not pity her because she also failed in her maternal duties when turning a blind eye to his father's anger and violence directed towards him. What is the most devastating moment in the novel is at the end, when Bajani concludes that he now only meets his mother in the reflections of her features in the face of his own child. He did not save her, for she had accepted her fate of a sinking ship. But he does save himself, and that is what germinates a new promise of breaking generational trauma. The author refused to accept fear as an heirloom not just by cutting ties, but also by not assuming the role of a tyrannical patriarch himself. He rose to question the system that destroyed his family by not accepting the benefits. In a simple promise of neither becoming like his father nor accepting the fate of his mother, the author did not commit a selfish act of abandonment, but a selfless act of non-participation, and can even be argued to be revolutionary.

As an Indian woman who has spent much of her life navigating the same structures, I found nothing foreign in Bajani's account. The patriarchy promises that surrender will be rewarded and obedience will produce safety, but Bajani's act of defiance stands as a fairly unexplored challenge. That he can share it in Italian, in a household an ocean away, and have it land with this kind of precision, is exactly what great translated fiction is capable of and what this series seems committed to delivering. This is a testament to the ethical values of Penguin Press' International Writers Series in choosing this novel to launch their list: their understanding that the architecture of patriarchal family is not a local or historical phenomenon but a blueprint that has been followed across cultures and centuries with devastating consistency; the failures and promises arising out of it echo indiscriminately.

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