



*Scientia et Humanitas:*  
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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR IN CHIEF

Middle Tennessee State University offers its student writers many avenues of publication, ranging from creative outlets such as *Collage* and *Off Center* to magazines like *Areté* and *Shift*. Among those publications, however, only one devotes itself exclusively to the promotion of student research: *Scientia et Humanitas*. In *Scientia et Humanitas*'s pages, students have the opportunity to experience their first taste of the peer review publishing process and, at the end of the process, the satisfaction of airing their research to an eager reading community of peers, instructors, and alumni alike.

As its name indicates, *Scientia et Humanitas* resists strictly defined disciplinary divisions and instead seeks to intermingle the various arts and sciences, presenting research from across the disciplines in a single, engaging volume. Historically, we have published papers from many fields, and this volume is no exception. Among the eight essays selected for publication, several arise from branches of philosophy while others spring from such realms as film studies, English studies, and the social sciences.

In the opening piece, "A Mind of One's Own," I marshal evidence from Virginia Woolf's wider canon to argue that her portrayal of relationships in *Mrs. Dalloway* not only depicts but also defends the importance of the individual internality that is modally reflected in her stream-of-consciousness narrative style. In the following essay, "Affection Deprivation and Weathering," **Alfred Holman**, **Jordyn Ewing-Roush**, and **Christal Goines** report on their primary research study regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the well-being of the African American community. L. B. Jefferies's look is placed under scrutiny in "Intellectual Virtues in *Rear Window*," in which **Patrick Gilchrist** employs Aristotelian ethics and twenty-first-century responsibilist virtue epistemology to evaluate the moral blameworthiness and intellectual praiseworthiness of Jefferies's voyeurism in Hitchcock's masterpiece. In "The Call is Coming from Inside the House," **Sage Andrews** probes published accounts by queer Christian individuals to demonstrate the transformative potential these individuals' testimonies offer their faith communities.

In the second half of the volume, **Nash Meade**'s "The Creature from the British Isles" argues for the ongoing significance of Thomas Hobbes's political philosophy by first establishing Hobbes's historical importance and then utilizing Hobbes's philosophy as a lens through which to interpret political responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. "Mothers, Daughters, and Vampires" by **Ashley M. Quinn** conducts a close reading of eighteenth-century vampiric poetry, connecting the liminal space of the vampire to convention-ridden codes surrounding female sexuality and ultimately underscoring the mother's role in constructing her daughter's sexuality in each poem. **Nich Krause** spans millennia to contrast the philosophies of eighth-century Buddhist monk Śāntideva and twentieth-century French existentialist Jean-Paul Satre, particularly teasing out similarities in their conceptions of

personal freedom and moral responsibility in his essay “Being and Emptiness.” Finally, in “Do I Have a Choice?,” **Aubrey Elaine Keller** employs a folkloric lens to examine the influence that folk community members exercise over marriage and courting relationships to which they are external in works by Amy Tan and Lee Smith.

Clearly, a volume such as this owes its existence to the efforts of many individuals. The most obvious contributors are the student writers themselves. The peer review process can be an intimidating one, and we appreciate the motivation and commitment to academic discourse each student displayed in submitting their work and persevering with us through each round of reviews and revisions. We hope each of you find the appearance of your finished work as rewarding as we do.

I wish to extend my deepest thanks to the committed team of associate editors and readers that make it possible for me to use the editorial “we”: Biven Alexander, Allison Haslett, Liam McBane, and Connor Methvin and Patrick Gilchrist, Sophia Maas, and Sophie Taylor. Your dedication has been immense, and I cannot thank you enough for the time you have carved out of your incredibly busy work, school, and life schedules to provide such thorough feedback on each essay and to work closely with authors to polish the articles to their current state. Both I and the authors you supported are grateful for your labor.

I must also extend thanks to the Honors College for supporting we students in our endeavors as both writers and editors, providing us with an excellent avenue through which to develop our linguistic skills. Special thanks goes to our faculty advisors, Dr. John Vile, Dr. Philip Phillips, and Ms. Marsha Powers, for their expert oversight. I would particularly like to thank Dr. Phillips for offering such insightful recommendations regarding the logistical aspects of managing all aspects of journal production when I first stepped into the role. I am likewise immensely grateful to Ms. Powers for the many hours she entertained me and other staff members in her office, providing us with advice and allowing us the pleasure of digging through her *Scientia et Humanitas* archives. I extend my further thanks to Susan Lyons and Rylee Campbell for their aid in designing the finished project; without you, all our work to edit and prepare the journal’s content would be futile.

Finally, we wish to thank you, our readers. It is your ongoing interest in and support of *Scientia et Humanitas* that makes its publication possible. We hope you enjoy the essays we have collected here and leave your reading of the journal with a sense of enrichment.

Percy Verret  
*Editor in Chief*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>A Mind of One's Own: Individual Internality vs. Interpersonal Intimacy in Mrs. Dalloway</b> PERCY VERRET .....	1
<b>Affection Deprivation and Weathering: An Exploratory Study of Black and African Americans' Well-Being during COVID-19</b> ALFRED HOLMAN, JORDYN EWING-ROUSH, AND CHRISTAL GOINES .....	22
<b>Intellectual Virtues in Rear Window: A New Look at L.B. Jefferies's Look</b> PATRICK GILCHRIST .....	32
<b>The Call Is Coming from Inside the House: How Queer Christians are Transforming their Faith</b> SAGE ANDREWS .....	52
<b>The Creature from the British Isles: The Historical and Contemporary Importance of Thomas Hobbes's Political Philosophy</b> NASH MEADE .....	66
<b>Mothers, Daughters, and Vampires: The Female Sexual Dilemma in Eighteenth-Century Vampire Poetry</b> ASHLEY M. QUINN .....	80
<b>Being and Emptiness: Sartre meets Śāntideva</b> NICH KRAUSE .....	98
<b>Do I Have a Choice?: Amy Tan and Lee Smith on Marriage and Courtship Customs</b> AUBREY ELAINE KELLER .....	114



# **A Mind of One's Own: Individual Internality vs. Interpersonal Intimacy in *Mrs. Dalloway***

*Percy Verret*

## ABSTRACT

*Throughout her early career, British modernist Virginia Woolf developed a literary style that gave modal priority to “internality,” or the inner workings of the inward mind. The most noteworthy instance of Woolf’s efforts in that literary style is the perennial classic, Mrs. Dalloway, whose delicate stream-of-consciousness narrative is universally regarded as exhibiting mastery over the style’s modernist prioritization of internality over conventional tropes in fiction. What is less widely recognized is that in Mrs. Dalloway Woolf crafted a piece that not only demonstrated a modal attentiveness to internality, but also effected a defense of individual internality—an exploration of the delineation between minds within intimate relationships and the impact of those delineations on the individual minds participating in the relationship. Accordingly, this essay examines Woolf’s theory of interpersonal intimacy by using tenets from her essay “Modern Fiction” (1919) and short work *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) to effect a comparative analysis of the relational practices of various characters in Mrs. Dalloway (1925), commenting particularly on those practices’ impact on the internal worlds of Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith.*

In her 1919 manifesto, “Modern Fiction,” Bloomsburian author Virginia Woolf urged her fellow modernists to abjure the clunky, externally-focused workings of the nineteenth-century novel and instead to employ their pens to “examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day... [to] record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall”; that is, to cast their allegiance with the emergent narrative form known as stream of consciousness.<sup>1</sup> Just four years later, Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) burst upon the literary scene, instantly garnering recognition as an examination of the ordinary mind on an ordinary day and assuming its status as a classic example of a formal mode that was reflective of the internal mind.

That Woolf’s employment of this interior-emphasizing mode was reflective of a prioritization of internality in her broader thought is robustly demonstrated by her explicit assumption of the theme four years later in her hallmark essay, *A Room of One’s Own*, in which she passionately explicated women’s need to have physical spaces of their own as a means of achieving psycho-spatial realms of their own.<sup>2</sup> While scholars have acknowledged Woolf’s prioritization of modal internality in “Modern Fiction” and her defense of psycho-spatial realms in *A Room of One’s Own*, few have recognized that *Mrs. Dalloway* represents an incarnation of *both* emphases—that in the novel in which she achieved her classic expression of modal internality, Woolf was, in essence, also advancing an argument for the primacy of and the importance of protecting internal modes of consciousness from intrusion. Indeed, while *Mrs. Dalloway* has long been recognized as a masterful modal instance of internality, I wish to argue that an examination of the several romantic relationships of Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith reveals that

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1. Virginia Woolf, “Modern Fiction,” in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Vol. 2, 8<sup>th</sup> ed.*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 2090. This work was originally published as “Modern Novels.”

2. In this essay, Woolf famously proclaimed that women needed “to have 500 a year and a room with a lock on the door” (105) in order to participate in the world of fiction writing. As she further explained on the succeeding page, the “five hundred a year stands for the power to contemplate, that... lock on the door means the power to think for oneself” (106). For Woolf’s fuller discussion of this theme, see *A Room of One’s Own* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1981), 105-106. That Woolf’s defense of spaces for women was equal parts literal and symbolic—physical and psycho-spatial—is reinforced by multiple interpretations of her work, including that by Sheheryar Sheikh, who concludes, “when Woolf focuses on the concept of the ‘room,’ it is used, and can be understood, in many different ways, the smallest of which is a physical room that enables privacy... Woolf thought about, and argued for, the room in the most abstract terms because she wanted it to appear simultaneously abstract and concrete.” Sheikh analysis of Woolf’s “room” is illuminating and may be found in “The Walls that Emancipate: Disambiguation of the ‘Room’ in *A Room of One’s Own*,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 42, no. 1 (Fall 2018): 20, 24)



*Mrs. Dalloway* is not only an *example* of modal internality but is also a *defense* of the preservation of individual internality within intimate interpersonal relationships.

The significance of internality as a modal element within *Mrs. Dalloway* is so elementary as to need no proof—as to be proven by the fabric of the text itself and by the fact that almost every word within its pages consists of the internal thoughts and reflections of its various characters' minds. Indeed, the basic appeal of stream of consciousness as a style lay, for the modernists, in its unprecedented capacity for accessing and depicting—that is, for prioritizing—the individual mind.<sup>3</sup> However, for novelists in the Bloomsbury set (of whom Woolf was the foremost), the style also demonstrated an unprecedented aptitude for examining a further aspect of internality that they regarded with corresponding curiosity: the impact of interpersonal relationships upon that internality. Indeed, as Bloomsbury scholar Jesse Wolfe asserts, not only had “literary Bloomsbury made intimacy central to its work, interrogating its meaning and imagining models—both positive and negative—of intimate relations,” but a more specific linkage had arisen between the definition of self and the relations of selves in their thought: “For Bloomsbury and its satellites, an examination of inwardness means an examination of intimacy: they bring to life the ways in which inwardness is not manifested in vacuo.”<sup>4</sup> We see this emphasis on the potential impact that interpersonal intimacy holds over a single inwardness almost immediately in *Mrs. Dalloway* as we, with Clarissa, plunge into the day of her party and we, with Clarissa, “find herself arguing in St. James’s Park, still making out that she had been right—and she had too—not to marry [Peter].”<sup>5</sup> The presence of this debate in Clarissa’s consciousness throughout the novel—and, indeed, the persistent theme of the relationship between selves and other-selves within *Mrs. Dalloway*—not only reinforces the emphasis placed by both the Bloomsburians and Woolf herself on the exploration of relationships between consciousnesses as a fundamental means of establishing the perimeters of individual consciousnesses, but also directs us towards our own contemplation of the Bloomsburians’ “crisis of intimacy” as we analyze *Mrs. Dalloway*.<sup>6</sup>

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3. Stephen Greenblatt, gen ed., “The Twentieth Century and After,” in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Vol. 2, 8<sup>th</sup> ed.* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 1838-39; the prioritization of the individual mind was, itself, a fundamental focus of modernism: “High modernism through the 1920s, celebrat[ed] personal and textual inwardness, complexity, and difficulty... the modernist novel turned resolutely inward, its concern being now with consciousness—a flow of reflections, momentary impressions, disjunctive bits of recall and half-memory.”

4. Jesse Wolfe, *Bloomsbury, Modernism, and the Reinvention of Intimacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2-3.

5. Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1981), 7.

6. Jesse Wolfe, “The Sane Woman in the Attic: Sexuality and Self-Authorship in ‘Mrs. Dalloway,’” *Modern Fiction Studies* 51, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 35.

In turning to an examination of the crises of intimacy within *Mrs. Dalloway*, we find three primary relationships to which we may apply our investigative lens. The first of these is the marriage of Clarissa's double, Septimus Smith, and his wife Lucrezia, who live erratically together in a small Bloomsbury flat. The second is the marriage of Clarissa Dalloway and her husband Richard, who live conventionally together in a Westminster mansion. The third is the marriage that might have been between Clarissa and her erstwhile suitor, the globe-roaming Peter Walsh.

Popular analyses of these relationships follow predictable lines based on the obvious features of the text. Lucrezia, the wife of Clarissa's double, is perceived as a doting if simplistic ministrant of care to Septimus whose constant attempts to engage him in conversation serve as a vital link between Septimus and reality. A representative example of this interpretation is provided by Juliane Fowler, who, in a brief analysis of Lucrezia Smith's performance in *Mrs. Dalloway*, lists a variety of closely related interpretations of Lucrezia's character, most of which revolve around the perception of her as "an access point... between Septimus the poet and a material world that is growing increasingly, untenably abstract around him."<sup>7</sup> Richard, Clarissa's husband, is perceived as a conventional, colorless individual whose inability to express or engage in connective emotion—poignantly encapsulated by his bestowment of a bouquet of flowers as a substitute for the vocalization of affection—has caused Clarissa to languish or decay internally. Their marriage, particularly, is regarded by many critics as an act of emotional cowardice on Clarissa's part, with Julia Briggs declaring of it, "her marriage is close and loving, yet passionless."<sup>8</sup> In contrast to the figure cut by Richard in these criticisms, Peter is popularly perceived as dashing, expressive, and stimulative—as a force that would have prevented Clarissa from stagnating by requiring her to engage with and to express her own emotion.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, some critics propose Peter—and the marriage Clarissa could have had with Peter—as the factor that might have preemptively prevented the development of the introversion that they choose to regard as a flaw in her character. Jeremy Hawthorn rather mildly summarizes this perspective when he states, "In cutting herself off from Peter... [Clarissa] may have cut herself off from a necessary contact with others." Peter, in this view, forms a bridge to the outer world for Clarissa that Richard simply does not afford. Thus, in the choice between

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7. Juliane Fowler, "'(for she was with him)': Lucrezia Warren Smith as Witness and Scribe in *Mrs. Dalloway*," *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* 91 (Spring 2017): 29.

8. Julia Briggs, "'What a Lark! What a Plunge!': *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925)," in *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2005), 149.

9. Jeremy Hawthorn, *Virginia Woolf's Mrs Dalloway: A Study in Alienation* (London: Sussex University Press, 1975), 13.

Clarissa's suitors, popular taste favors the rejected over the accepted.

In arriving at any such judgment of the relationships Woolf created in *Mrs. Dalloway*, however, we must regard as authoritative the attitudes of that creator—must recall that we are interacting with a modernist who was intent upon interrogating and deconstructing traditional attitudes towards intimacy. While such Victorians as the Brontës, with their Heathcliffs and Rochesters, had taught readers for decades to regard intensity of passion and intermingling of mind as the measurements of real love—and to regard as suspicious those loves that are less forthcoming, less explosive, less *demanding* in their expression—we must remember that the modernists were engaged in what Wolfe describes as “a debate about love and marriage spanning the Victorian and modern eras” that had resulted in the modernists adopting “a sharp feeling of alienation from Victorian mores.”<sup>10</sup> In embarking upon any such judgment of the relationships of *Mrs. Dalloway*, therefore, we must do so with the explicit acknowledgment that, in the depiction of those relationships, Woolf is engaged in the establishment of the defining line between self and non-self; in delineating the proper ways in which those lines may be negotiated properly without imbalanced demands made by the one on the other.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, the key to interpreting the relationships of *Mrs. Dalloway's* markedly internal protagonists lies within Woolf's own thought—lies tucked away in the pages of the great defense of psycho-spatial freedom already mentioned, *A Room of One's Own*. Here, while musing upon the mechanisms by which men enact their domination over women—and specifically why men react with such passion, such *bitterness* towards women whose opinions do not accord with their own—Woolf proposes the following theory to explain the curious features of these interpersonal dynamics:

Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size... That is why Napoleon and Mussolini both insist so emphatically upon the inferiority of women, for if they were not inferior, they would cease to enlarge. That serves to explain in part the necessity that women so often are to men. And it serves to explain how restless they are under her criticism... for if she begins to tell the truth, the figure in the looking-glass shrinks; his fitness for life is diminished.<sup>12</sup>

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10. Wolfe, *Bloomsbury, Modernism, and the Reinvention of Intimacy*, 4. By “Heathcliffs” and “Rochesters,” I, of course, refer to the emotive characters created by Emily Brontë and Charlotte Brontë, respectively.

11. Hawthorn, *Virginia Woolf's Mrs Dalloway*, 12. Hawthorn posits that Woolf believed that “we exist simultaneously in terms of but distinct from other people— together with and apart from them”; Woolf is therefore acutely interested in discovering the terms of that division.

12. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1981), 35-36.

With a few deft strokes of her pen, Woolf has painted a complete picture: those with more egocentric personalities select and then seek to transform members of their immediate circle into mirrors of themselves as a means of maintaining their own sense of self. As Woolf describes it, this selection and transformation roots itself within and can only be perpetuated through an abrogation of the identity and internality of the object of the process; it reduces the personhood of the object by demanding that that object's core self serve as a reflection of the emotions, perspectives, and ego of the abrogator. In the context of *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf is speaking of widespread cultural trends that necessarily have a gendered aspect. However, when interpreted in light of Woolf's more general discourse regarding androgyny of mind within the essay—and particularly the fact that Woolf's argument in this essay is based at least partially upon the idea that there is, inherently, more *sameness* than *difference* between the minds and needs of men and women—we see that, on the individual scale, this type of identity consumption is not *inherently* a gendered practice.<sup>13</sup> We see instead that it is not gender but egocentrism (most widespread in, but not limited to males) that funds these mirror-making campaigns and that this type of relationship evolves due to power imbalances—imbalances of emotive and sensitive personalities—within relationships. More importantly, we see that Woolf regards these campaigns as inadmissible regardless of the gender of the perpetrator; she regards as contrary to the individual's ability to achieve *a mind of their own* any methods of interpersonal relationships that so explicitly breach the internality of its object.

While Woolf nowhere employs the word “looking glass” in association with romantic relationships in *Mrs. Dalloway*, we nevertheless see her expanding suggestively on similar themes in Clarissa's internal monologue. Indeed, in one of the most direct commentaries on love in the entire novel, Clarissa shudders before love's propensity to act as an invasive force, comparing it unfavorably to religion as she internally remarks, “Love and religion! Thought Clarissa, going back into the drawing-room, tingling all over. How detestable, how detestable they are!... Had she [Clarissa] ever tried to *convert any one herself*? Did she not wish everybody merely to be *themselves*... love and religion would

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13. In regard to the question of androgyny, Woolf embarks upon a discussion of Coleridge's conception of androgyny in *A Room With a View*, 98, that leads her to the conclusion “that the androgynous mind is resonant and porous; that it transmits emotion without impediment; that it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided.” Feminist scholar Nancy Taylor proposes that a similar androgyny is afoot in *Mrs. Dalloway*, which she describes as “an androgynous creation of character, dramatic situation, and language that deconstructs the borders between male and female.” For Taylor's analysis see Nancy Taylor, “Erasure of Definition: Androgyny in *Mrs. Dalloway*,” *Women's Studies* 18 (1991): 377.

*destroy* that, whatever it was, *the privacy of the soul*.”<sup>14</sup> Although Woolf has substituted her previously-held looking glass for the language of religion in this passage, the fundamental concept is the same: those humans who are less appreciative of and respectful towards internality seek to transform other humans into versions or reflections of themselves, and when they do so it constitutes the destruction of the soul. Here, Clarissa—or, more accurately, Woolf—identifies the tendency to convert others unto one’s self as being built into the fabric not only of religion, but of interpersonal relationships; she identifies the tendency to convert as a more basic urge of humanity that emerges even within so-called love—or, as Hawthorn phrases it, “love has its negative side, where it resembles religion and conversion, where it involves a desire to subdue or consume the other person’s identity.”<sup>15</sup> Implicit in this urge, therefore—implicit in not all, but many practices of love—is the desire to homogenize; to abrogate or breach the other by seeking to make that other a function of one’s self until they are no longer their own self, but rather an echoic image of the radiating partner.<sup>16</sup> The creation of such an echoic image involves first the invasion of the object of affection by means of the egocentric expression of emotion and then the conversion or transformation of the individual into a likeness of self through the demand that that object become a reflective, regurgitative mirroring likeness for those expressions.

Now, newly armed with Woolf’s theories of love’s potential to act as a mirror- or convert-making force through its invasive intrusion into internality, when we return to the evaluation of Lucrezia’s, Peter’s, and Richard’s performances as partners, we discover curious patterns emerging in their behavior. In the case of Lucrezia Smith, a return to her performance as a bridge between Septimus’s mind and reality reveals that her methods involve less a bridging than an invading effect. Indeed, as we tally them, we see that Lucrezia’s basic strategy for “engaging” Septimus amounts to a series of intrusions upon his stream of consciousness, as is apparent within her variations of the cry “Look, look, Septimus!” when he is deep in thought,<sup>17</sup> her repeated inquiry after the time,<sup>18</sup> and her attempts to force him into a display of reciprocity by interrupting his thoughts with

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14. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 126-7, emphasis mine.

15. Hawthorn, *Virginia Woolf’s Mrs Dalloway*, 48

16. *Ibid.*, 45. Hawthorn specifically notes that the “consuming” of identity involves homogenization when he opines while analyzing Peter and Clarissa’s relationship that, “To love someone is to recognize their distinctness, their separateness from us, but the act of loving can, paradoxically, bring the loved one closer, can start to reduce this separateness.”

17. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 21, 23, 25, 26.

18. *Ibid.*, 69-70.

the query, “What are you saying?”<sup>19</sup> Lucrezia herself—and with her, her supporters—seeks to justify this intrusion by casting it as an application of the fearsome Dr. Holmes’ orders that Septimus “take an interest in things outside of himself”<sup>20</sup>; however, this is not an altogether honest framing of her behavior, for her own memories prove that her intrusiveness is not a new, but rather a longstanding habit.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, as her own memories reveal, a troubling number of Lucrezia’s past interactions with Septimus—interactions that date to *before* Dr. Holmes’ diagnosis—involve her interrupting Septimus in some way: snatching a paper from him because he was “reading a paper instead of talking” and “shutting the *Inferno*” when she finds him peacefully reading instead of speaking to her.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, her intrusion into his contemplative mode of existence has been of long enough standing that Septimus responds to it in the novel not by pondering, “Why had she begun to interrupt him?” but rather by sighing resignedly, “Interrupted again! She was *always* interrupting.”<sup>23</sup>

Given that this habit, contrary to the framing Lucrezia would have us believe, is rooted less in Dr. Holmes’s orders and more in Lucrezia’s own character—that her acting on Dr. Holmes’s advice is merely a furtherance of a pattern of action she had already pursued with Septimus—we find ourselves beginning to question the more general narrative of Lucrezia as being motivated primarily by a sense of care for Septimus in her behavior towards her husband. In returning to Lucrezia’s thoughts with this suspicion in mind, we find much to further complicate our understanding of her performance as an interpersonal partner:

She could not sit beside him when he stared so and did not see her... She put on her lace collar. She put on her new hat and he never noticed; and he was happy without her. Nothing could make her happy without him! Nothing! He was selfish. So men are. For he was not ill. Dr. Holmes said there was nothing the matter with him. She spread her hand before her. Look! Her wedding ring slipped—she had grown so thin. It was she who suffered—but she had nobody to tell.<sup>24</sup>

The egocentrism of this passage is immediate and overwhelming. Perhaps the most obvious instance of this egocentrism is the fact that, in a marvel of maneuvering, Lucrezia

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19. *Ibid.*, 25.

20. *Ibid.*, 21.

21. Even setting aside the question of Lucrezia’s motive, theorists Ghasemi, Sasani, and Abbaszadeh assert that, “This taking-an-interest-in-outside-things treatment implies a process of conformity, a plan for conversion” in “Mrs. Dalloway: Consciousness ‘Social Homeostasis’ and Marxism,” *Forum for World Literature Studies* 9, no. 4 (December 2017): 680. Conversion again!

22. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 16 and 88, respectively.

23. *Ibid.*, 25.

24. *Ibid.*, 23.

has reframed the situation to cast herself as the victim, herself as the primary sufferer of the two. She has achieved this reframing by both diminishing Septimus's suffering and simultaneously aggrandizing her own, a strategy that appears more explicitly elsewhere when she reasons regarding his wartime losses, "[Evans] had been killed in the War. But such things happen to every one. Every one has friends who were killed in the War. Every one gives up something when they marry."<sup>25</sup> In Lucrezia's view, the emotional toll of Septimus's wartime experience is comparable to her decision to choose to marry the man she loved; in Lucrezia's view, it is not Septimus, the war-ravaged veteran, who lives daily under the knowledge that his closest friend's body had been blown to lumps of flesh, that suffers, but rather it is *she*, who left her family in the best of health to marry a sensitive man, who suffers; *it was she who suffered*. Only the greatest egocentrism—the most blatant belief that one's own emotions are the center of existence—could effect such a comparison as Lucrezia performs here.

More essential, however, to our discussion of mirror-making within relationships is Lucrezia's conception of the nature of her suffering. This suffering she proposes as arising from Septimus's "selfishness," a selfishness she equates, puzzlingly, with his ability to experience happiness independently of her. Lucrezia ranges herself in passionate opposition to this "selfishness," marking herself as "unselfish" in her own perspective by proclaiming, "Nothing could make her happy without him! Nothing!" On its surface, this declaration appears to be one of love—a proclamation of value and affection. However, when evaluated for its implications, this statement reveals itself to be less a declaration regarding Septimus and more a declaration regarding Lucrezia; less a declaration of affection and more a declaration of emotional dependency. Indeed, in declaring that she cannot be made happy without Septimus, Lucrezia has, in essence, declared a deeper act of selfishness than any Septimus perpetuated—has established that she is incapable of arriving at individual, self-generated happiness, but rather *requires* the constant emotional participation of or funding by a second party to experience happiness. That such dependency places a profound burden on the object of that dependency is so elementary as to need no explanation; more sinister, however, is the fact that such dependency, rather than elevating its object, instead *reduces* that object by linking its value to its ability to bear that burden, its ability to sustain and *reflect* the emotional pitch of the dependent feeler.

Indeed, throughout this passage (and the novel) we see that Lucrezia's primary frustrations with her marriage—her sources of "suffering"—are linked to Septimus's failure to sustain the burden of her emotions, to act as an echoic reflector of her emotional projections. His "selfishness," in Lucrezia's view, consists of two primary aspects. The first

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25. *Ibid.*, 66.



is his ability to achieve happiness without reference to her, his ability to source happiness from within his own sense of self, independent of the emotions she is projecting—an ability that constitutes, in essence, a rejection of her echoic link. The second aspect of Septimus’s “selfishness,” consists, in Lucrezia’s view, of the fact that he does not respond to her attempts to cast him as an audience to herself—does not take notice of the superficial externalities (her new hat! her lace collar!) that she employs to try to bait him into a response to her. However, as painful as these marks of detachment must be for Lucrezia, it is not Septimus but Lucrezia herself who enacts the more ultimate reduction, the more ultimate selfishness when she articulates her response to his unresponsiveness to her: “Far rather she that he were *dead*.”<sup>26</sup> Such is the effect of entangling the value of one’s partner with their performance as a responder to self: over time the response itself becomes elevated over the value of the individual doing the responding—over time, as the responder falls stripped of emotional reserves, their value evaporates with that reserve.

Indeed, it is telling of Lucrezia’s status as an egocentric mirror-maker that the pitch of her unhappiness is not the fact that there might be something wrong with Septimus, but that *she had nobody to tell* of her emotions—that because Septimus is refusing to participate in an echoic emotional link to the extent that he is able to be “happy without her,” she has nobody who might act as a reflective audience to her emotion. This desire for the audience, this *need* to have a participant in her own emotions, is cemented by a later passage: “Since she was so unhappy, for weeks and weeks now, Rezia... almost felt sometimes that she must stop people in the street, if they looked good, kind people, just to say to them ‘I am unhappy.’”<sup>27</sup> Key to our understanding of this fantasy is that Lucrezia does not imagine these good, kind people as aiding her in the reparation of her marriage or as potentially becoming close friends whose individuality she might celebrate; their only function in her imagination is their momentary presence as an audience to her emotional expression, which bears ascendancy over all else in her system of value.

Having established Lucrezia Smith’s basic perception of interpersonal relations as a sphere of mirror-making, we turn to Peter Walsh with a sense of weather-worn wariness as we assay to examine the virtue most often attributed to his character: his ability to rouse Clarissa to emotional expression. As the most concrete instance of the couple’s interaction occurs when Peter calls upon Clarissa on the morning of her party, it is to this instance that we first direct our attention. Here we find that, upon arriving at Clarissa’s home, Peter’s first act is to put aside her maid (whom Clarissa has erected as a

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26. *Ibid.*, 23, emphasis mine.

27. *Ibid.*, 83. “Rezia” is a nickname for Lucrezia.



symbolic barrier between herself and the invasive world) with the declaration “Mrs. Dalloway will see me... oh yes, she will see *me*,” after which he bursts upon Clarissa, who, alarmed by the intrusion, “ma[kes] to hide her dress, like a virgin protecting chastity, respecting privacy.”<sup>28</sup> This series of actions clearly illustrates that, whatever else may be true of the terms of their interaction, Peter clearly perceives himself and his desires as taking precedence over any boundaries Clarissa may devise to protect her privacy. Indeed, the entire visit is marked for its usage of the language of *invasion*, which we already know to be the basic tactic for those attempting to engage in identity-conversion. This language is employed most noticeably by Clarissa herself, who conceptualizes his call upon her explicitly in terms of a breach when she describes how, feeling “like a Queen whose guards have fallen sleep and left her unprotected... [she] summoned to her help the things she did; the things she liked; her husband; Elizabeth; her self, in short, which Peter hardly knew now, all to come about her and beat off the enemy.”<sup>29</sup> Clarissa recognizes that this visit—that Peter’s treatment of her—constitutes an assault on her inscape, and she calls upon the elements out of which she has volitionally forged her identity to aid her in conducting a defense of that inscape.

Their conversation in the wake of this breach is best described by Clarissa herself, who ruminates later in the day, “he came to see her after all these years and what did he talk about? Himself.”<sup>30</sup> Indeed, throughout their encounter, Peter’s fixation upon and elevation of his own emotions—his egocentric sense that “only one person in the world could be as he was, in love”<sup>31</sup>—remains on constant display, leading Clarissa to recall that it was this very trait that had formed a fundamental element of her frustration with him: “it was... his lack of the ghost of a notion what any one else was feeling that annoyed her, had always annoyed her.”<sup>32</sup> That Peter’s egocentrism does indeed, as Clarissa asserts, distort his ability to assess accurately others’ (and particularly Clarissa’s) emotions is demonstrated by the result of his awkward attempt to evoke an emotional reaction from Clarissa through the parading of his new relationship before her.<sup>33</sup> After springing his news upon her, he reflects “second by second it seemed to him that the wife of the Major in the Indian Army (his Daisy) and her two small children became more and more lovely

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28. For both quotations see *Ibid.*, 40.

29. *Ibid.*, 44.

30. *Ibid.*, 127.

31. *Ibid.*, 48.

32. *Ibid.*, 46.

33. It is also proven by Peter’s hasty judgment of Clarissa’s daughter, Elizabeth (49), his evaluation of Lucrezia and Septimus Smith (70), and his interpretation of the ambulance he hears on the streets (151); in each case, his projections represent his own emotions only, not a decentered perspective.

as Clarissa looked at them... (for in some ways no one understood him, *felt with him*, as Clarissa did).<sup>34</sup> However, the reality is that Clarissa does not feel with him—Clarissa thinks that Peter has been duped by this wife of the Major in the Indian Army and that his love for her is somewhat ridiculous.<sup>35</sup>

That Peter so badly misjudges Clarissa's judgment in the same breath in which he opines that their feelings accord not only casts doubt upon his claim elsewhere that the two "went in and out of each other's minds without any effort" (itself a questionable virtue), but also suggests that Peter's engagement with Clarissa involves and has always involved a heavy measure of projection—that he regards her as and expects her to be reflective of his own projected emotions.<sup>36</sup> He wishes to evoke emotions from her, certainly, but the emotions he wishes to evoke *are not hers at all* but are rather reflections of his own. Indeed, the primary emotion that Peter, the great evoker of Clarissa's emotions, succeeds in evoking from her is not an expression of her core self, but rather a reflection of the very emotion she so dislikes in him: a sensation of "indomitable egotism."<sup>37</sup> To defend herself against his advances, Clarissa must tap into a version of the very trait that she regards as lesser and immature in Peter. Even so, it is still better than her alternative in interacting with him, which is to accept Peter's dictum that "everything had to be shared; everything gone into,"<sup>38</sup> a process which, when undertaken with such an egocentric character as Peter, could only result in catastrophe—in endless argumentation—should the second party refuse to echo the projector's emotions. This, of course, is precisely what occurred in the past between Peter and Clarissa and is precisely what would occur in the future should she cave to Peter's attempts to pursue her as an echoic mirror for his emotions.<sup>39</sup>

That Peter is predisposed to perceive women as performing the role of the reflective mirror—that he assumes that a relationship between a man and a woman

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34. *Ibid.*, 46, emphasis mine.

35. *Ibid.* In regard to news of "his Daisy," Clarissa has the following reaction: "She flattered him; she fooled him, thought Clarissa; shaping the woman, the wife of the Major in the Indian Army, with three sharp strokes of a knife. What a waste! What a folly! All his life long Peter had been fooled like that; first getting sent down from Oxford; next marrying the girl on the boat going out to India; now the wife of a Major in the Indian Army—thank Heaven she had refused to marry him!" As this passage demonstrates, Peter's evaluation of Clarissa's feelings is fatally colored by his own.

36. *Ibid.*, 63.

37. *Ibid.*, 45.

38. *Ibid.*, 8.

39. Clarissa recalls multiple instances of her fights with Peter, as when she contrasts her and Peter's argumentative habits—"she and Peter frittered their time away bickering" (120)—with her life of efficacy with Richard's "divine simplicity" (120).

necessarily involves the woman acting as a reflector of her partner—is most tellingly, if subtly, demonstrated by his inability to conceptualize the Dalloways' marriage as anything other than a reflective union.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, as Peter ruminates on Clarissa's marriage, we see him repeatedly assuming that Clarissa has fallen into a reflective role with Richard. This is most apparent when he contemplates Clarissa's party, which he refuses to accept might be an act of self-expression and regarding which he instead asserts, "these parties for example were all for him, or for her idea of him."<sup>41</sup> And yet, this perspective—so confidently set forth by Peter—is a rank falsehood, as is proven by the monologues of both Clarissa *and* Richard. Indeed, far from hosting these parties out of a sense of duty towards Richard, Clarissa perceives her parties as an ultimate offering of her person, a vibrant expression of her self; as "an offering for the sake of offering... her gift."<sup>42</sup> Far from pressuring Clarissa to host these parties, Richard thinks of them that "it was a very odd thing how much Clarissa minded about her parties."<sup>43</sup> Richard regards the parties as an aspect of his wife that he does not completely understand—and yet, as they make her happy, he is happy for her to host them despite the fact that he does not understand precisely why she does so. That she is happy hosting them is enough for him; already differences are beginning to emerge between Peter's and Richard's approaches to loving Clarissa.

In turning, finally, to survey Richard's performance as a partner to Clarissa, we again select for inspection the scene in that performance for which the performer is best known. In Richard's case, that scene begins as he wends his way homeward from Lady Bruton's luncheon. In this scene, Richard reflects on Clarissa's inscrutable qualities but nevertheless celebrates the joy of being married to her, thinking, "It was a miracle that he

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40. Less immediately relevant but far more demonstrative of Peter's desire for a human mirror on which to project his emotions—and of his perception of women as just such a mirror—is his selection of a young woman on the streets of London who, with a few flourishes of his imagination becomes "the very woman he had always had in mind; young, but stately; merry, but discreet; black, but enchanting" (52). Over the next few paragraphs, Peter tracks this woman through the city, imputing to her—the reflective mirror—all that he desires of an encounter with the feminine while simultaneously imagining that if he were to ask her to "'Come and have an ice'" she "would answer, perfectly simply 'Oh yes.'" (53) As Briggs opines in *Virginia Woolf*, 151, "[Peter's] imagination is most intensely aroused by the woman he follows across Trafalgar Square, a fantasy creature he can invent and control; unconscious of him, she makes no demands." This is what Peter, ultimately wants from a woman—this undemanding *oh yes*—and it is Clarissa's refusal to supply this undemanding *oh yes*, this echo of his fantasy, that so nettles him.

41. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 77.

42. *Ibid.*, 122.

43. *Ibid.*, 119.

should have married Clarissa.”<sup>44</sup> Borne aloft by his love for her, Richard wishes to give her a gift—“to open the drawing-room door and come in holding out something; a present for Clarissa.”<sup>45</sup> However, while he imagines the emotion of the scene, his emphasis in this gift-giving fantasy is on the act of the giving of the gift itself—on the bestowment of care and value, the expression of affection—not on any sort of rise of emotion he wishes to wrench from Clarissa. Moreover, in choosing his gift, Richard explicitly avoids projecting his own preferences onto Clarissa, and instead “doubt[s] his own taste” regarding what sort of jewelry Clarissa would like, electing instead to bring her an offering that is less conventionally valuable, but which our experience with Clarissa proves that she will find *individually* valuable: a bouquet of flowers.<sup>46</sup>

Much has been made of the moment in which Richard gifts these flowers to Clarissa; much has been made of his supposed inability to express his love to Clarissa in words rather than actions. However, a close examination of this encounter suggests an alternative interpretation of Richard’s silence, one that derives itself from the fact that, as he hesitates before her, about to say the words, Clarissa thinks, “Why? There were the roses.”<sup>47</sup> Clarissa’s response suggests that she prefers the gift of the roses to the vocalization of love—suggests that she finds them more meaningful as an expression of affection than she would find the usage of a phrase that is capable of losing its meaning through over-usage.<sup>48</sup> What this suggests is that Richard pauses upon the verge of the words and finally chooses to refrain from speaking them not because he is unable to speak them but *precisely because he is cognizant of Clarissa’s preferences in this regard*. Herein lies the primary difference between Clarissa’s two suitors, for while Peter insists that everything be gone into, insists that everything be expressed and established in terms reflective of his own style of being, Richard, as we have already seen, acknowledges that there are aspects of Clarissa that he does not understand and yet he chooses to be understanding in his non-understanding of them. Richard allows Clarissa the space

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44. *Ibid.*, 115.

45. *Ibid.*, 114.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid.*, 119.

48. While we might perhaps be tempted to regard Peter’s explosion into tears on Clarissa’s couch as a more frank display of emotion, Clarissa herself regarded that display as sufficiently superficial as to describe it as a “gaiety” (47)—in her eyes, it was a type of performance. For Clarissa, *strength* of expression does not necessarily equate to *depth* of expression. The deepest emotions may be expressed in the most commonplace, the most everyday gestures; as Woolf herself opines in “Modern Fiction,” 2090, “Let us not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small.” Clarissa takes this principle to heart.

to exist as herself without attempting to rouse or antagonize her; he does not seek to bend her out of shape or understand her to her own discomfort, but instead respects her autonomy and regards her as a separate, discrete individual.

This allowance of autonomy—this allowance of individuality—demonstrates that, far from desiring to breach Clarissa or coopt her to act as a reflective mirror of his emotions in the vein of Lucrezia or Peter, Richard is instead dedicated to allowing Clarissa freedom within their marriage, a coveted rarity within early twentieth-century discourse surrounding intimacy.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, rather than mount an assault on Clarissa's inscape, Richard has accepted Clarissa's decree that "There is a dignity in people; a solitude even between husband and wife a gulf; and that one must respect... for one would not part with it oneself, or take it, against his will, from one's husband, without losing one's independence, one's self respect—something, after all, priceless."<sup>50</sup> By accepting this dictum, Richard has deeded Clarissa the control of her own identity, a right to self-possession that is paramount to the happiness of inward-directed personalities such as Clarissa, who need "to see their intimate lives as narratives over which they [can] exert... control, as self-authoring subjects."<sup>51</sup> Rather than demand that Clarissa's sensitive soul reflect his own, more hearty consciousness, Richard has allowed Clarissa to choose her own methods of emotional expression within their marriage, methods that Richard categorically refuses to breach.

This series of examinations has served to illustrate that Woolf explicitly perceived and depicted interpersonal relationships in terms of their impact upon or interference with the individual internalities of their participants. However, the true body of Woolf's *defense* of the protection of internality within interpersonal relationships—which I proposed as a fundamental theme of *Mrs. Dalloway* at the head of this essay—lies not within her cataloguing of the *practices* of both types of interpersonal relationship but rather in her depiction of the *effects* of those relationships on the psyche. These effects are

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49. Wolfe, *Bloomsbury, Modernism, and the Reinvention of Intimacy*, 22, emphasis mine; Wolfe identifies the pursuit of independence in marriage as one of the hallmarks of Modernist conceptions of intimacy, noting that, in distinction to the priorities of previous decades, "Early-twentieth-century spouses *needed* to find freedom within marriage."

50. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 120.

51. Wolfe, "The Sane Woman," 38. Clarissa's marriage to Richard has also facilitated her ability to host parties, through which she is enabled to interact socially with and define herself in relation to other people while yet remaining firmly in control of the terms of that interaction—while not running the risk of their invading or breaching her internality. This ability to self-protect is essential for Clarissa, for whom, according to Taylor in "Erasure of Definition," 375, "the ability to choose when to open and when to close to others is important."

best illustrated by the divergent fates of the doubling characters of Septimus Smith and Clarissa Dalloway, fates which are themselves the crux of Woolf's defense of internality as an elemental aspect of identity and, therefore, existence.

Traditionally, the fate of Septimus's character has been read as a tragedy of war—his suicide as arising from his inability to reintegrate himself into reality in the wake of the trauma he endured as a soldier on the Italian front of the Great War.<sup>52</sup> However, in recent years, an alternative vein of criticism has developed that employs Woolf's early draft of *Mrs. Dalloway* to emphasize that Septimus's struggle with reality (and that struggle's attendant symptoms), which have traditionally been attributed to the war by critics, actually began *before* the war—or, as Kathryn Van Wert phrases it, “Septimus has *always* been the bearer of a message he can neither relay nor tell himself.”<sup>53</sup> This reading of Septimus proposes that the War did not *change* Septimus as much as it *exacerbated* his natural qualities—his ongoing struggle to express the inexpressible—and left him in possession of a sanity that would remain functional provided it was allowed to function in unintruded calm.

The maintenance of this calm, however, is complicated by Septimus's sensation of possessing an inscape that is not quite what it ought to be—is complicated by his sensation of being unable to *feel* as humanity has prescribed that he, as a member of their army, ought to feel.<sup>54</sup> It is as a means of rousing this feeling, which society tells him he *must* have to be of their number, that Septimus proposes to Lucrezia. It is upon the sensitive inscape he is seeking to soothe through marriage that Lucrezia's invasiveness crashes like a guillotine, for while he feels nothing, she feels *everything* and, moreover, is not satisfied to feel in isolation, but rather demands that her husband participate in those feelings the more fully to reinforce her own feeling of them. *Yet Septimus cannot feel them*—and she will not stop demanding his feeling of her feelings from him—a paradox

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52. This interpretation is blithely assumed in much criticism, as when John Batchelor declares, “Septimus Smith is, of course, a victim of the war, his suicide a delayed effect of shell shock” in “*Mrs. Dalloway*,” in *Virginia Woolf: The Major Novels*, ed. John Batchelor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 83.

53. Kathryn Van Wert, “The Early Life of Septimus Smith,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 36, no. 1 (2012): 77. In her close reading of *The Hours* (Woolf's original draft of *Mrs. Dalloway*), Van Wert specifically describes Septimus's early flight to London as being motivated by “the sense of besiegement he felt in his parents' home,” (84) a besiegement with which his sensitive spirit could have no traffic, but which Van Wert identifies as being reproduced through his association with Lucrezia.

54. Septimus speaks of this lack of feeling alternatively as a crime and a sin: “So there was no excuse; nothing whatever the matter, except the sin for which human nature had condemned him to death; that he did not feel!” (91). The irony, of course, is that Septimus feels a good many things within the course of the book, most noticeably the fear that he does not feel; he simply does not feel as (he believes) others feel.

that triggers his cyclical spiral *deeper into* rather than out of his internality: "His wife was crying, and he felt nothing; only each time she sobbed in this profound, this silent, this hopeless way, *he descended another step into the pit*. At last... he dropped his head on his hands. Now he had surrendered; now other people must help him. People must be sent for. He gave in."<sup>55</sup> Thus we see that it is not the impact of the war, but rather the impact of his life with a mirror-maker that sets the treatment of Septimus Smith in motion—that enables Lucrezia to send for doctors to follow her into the breach she has formed into Septimus's psyche.<sup>56</sup> The breach once effected, the doctors are upon Septimus relentlessly, for "once you fall, Septimus repeated to himself, human nature is on you. Holmes and Bradshaw are on you."<sup>57</sup> This treatment, in turn, and the fact that it allows Sir William to "dabble his fingers in Septimus' soul" as he campaigns to convert the whole world to his program of "proportion,"<sup>58</sup> sets the suicide of Septimus in motion—sets Septimus in search of a defense for his soul.<sup>59</sup>

For perhaps the most essential aspect of Septimus's suicide is the fact that *Septimus is not suicidal*. As Woolf records Septimus's own thoughts, "The whole world was clamouring: Kill yourself, kill yourself for our sakes. But why should he kill himself for their sakes? Food was pleasant; the sun hot."<sup>60</sup> Septimus has no distaste for living—has no dislike for the feel of the wind on his face, the sound of the dog upon his ear; even the war could not remove these things from him. No, his source of suicide arises from a different quarter than a distaste for *life*, as is proven by the last of his musings as he

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55. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 90.

56. Given the intensity of my tone here, I should note that, in my reading of *Mrs. Dalloway*, I do not believe that Lucrezia is motivated by actual malignant intent; merely that her self-centeredness results in malignant effects. It is, however, curious that Lucrezia does not exhibit sympathy with her husband's feelings until she learns that he actually *is* sick, at which point—learning that his treatment would require that he be removed from her—we encounter the following passage: "Never, never had Rezia felt such agony in her life! She had asked for help and been deserted!" (98). Again, although it is her husband who suffers, her husband who is soon to become the victim of Sir William's invasions, Lucrezia's perception of the event is that it is *she* who has been deserted by Sir William.

57. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 92.

58. *Ibid.*, 99-100.

59. Hawthorn, *Virginia Woolf's Mrs Dalloway*, 12. Woolf specifically marks out Sir William's "Proportion" as the sister of "Conversion"; her account of Bradshaw's marriage in is also singularly revealing: "Conversion, fastidious Goddess, loves blood better than brick, and feasts most subtly on the human will. For example, Lady Bradshaw. Fifteen years ago she had gone under. It was nothing you could put your finger on; there had been no scene, no snap; only the slow sinking, water-logged, of her will into his" (100). Lady Bradshaw, then, has been converted into a mirror for Sir William's more powerful will.

60. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 92.



perches upon the windowsill preparing to plunge: “He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings—what did *they* want?”<sup>61</sup> On the one hand, Septimus is baffled by human nature; yet in a deeper sense, he knows *exactly* what they want—they want to be upon him in inwardness-breaching conversion. And this, Septimus will not allow; this, his consciousness, which has survived the war (he would not go mad), Septimus will not permit to be ravaged. And so he leaps—leaps to give his life in defense of the integrity of his internal world.

All of this Clarissa feels instinctually when she hears of Septimus’s suicide later that night at her party. Having encountered Sir William Bradshaw only moments before, she instinctually identifies that he is “capable of some indescribable outrage—forcing your soul, that was it,” instinctually identifies the impact this breaching must have had on Septimus’s psyche “they make life intolerable, men like that,” and instinctually identifies that his suicide was linked to the protection of his internality as she wonders, “had he plunged holding his treasure?”<sup>62</sup> Moreover, while she cannot be aware of the role Lucrezia played in introducing the great proportionist into Septimus’s soul, Clarissa is instinctually led by Septimus’s suicide to reflect on the role of the spouse in protecting or defending the integrity of their partner’s soul: “Even now, quite often if Richard had not been there reading the *Times*, so that she could crouch like a bird and gradually revive, send roaring up that immeasurable delight, rubbing stick to stick, one thing with another, *she must have perished*.”<sup>63</sup> If she had not had Richard—if she had not had the unbreached life Richard allows her to lead, Clarissa reflects—yes, *if she had not had Richard, she must have perished*. Given the circumstances that lead her to conclude this—and given our recent observation of the effect on Septimus of Lucrezia’s mirror-making treatment of his sensitive soul—we must realize that equally accurate would have been the declaration that *if she had had Peter, she must have perished*.

Indeed, the truly cautionary nature of Woolf’s tale—the answer to the doubt Clarissa has felt lurking about her soul all day concerning her decision to reject Peter and accept Richard as well as the most dramatic element of the novel’s defense of internality—lies in the fact that Septimus, *Clarissa’s double*, has committed suicide as a result of relational practices that *Lucrezia and Peter share*. Within the narrative, Peter, like Lucrezia, has launched multiple assaults on his object’s will, which he identifies as “the devilish part of her—this coldness, this woodenness, something very profound in her... *an impenetrability*.”<sup>64</sup> In a more sinister twist, however, we see that while Lucrezia seemed

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61. *Ibid.*, 149.

62. *Ibid.*, 184-85.

63. *Ibid.*, 185, emphasis mine.

64. *Ibid.*, 60, emphasis mine.



unaware that she was doing battle with Septimus's core, Peter recognizes that Clarissa is mounting a resistance to his attempts at invasion as he describes that "He felt that he was grinding against something physically hard; she unyielding. She was like iron, like flint, rigid up the backbone."<sup>65</sup> Peter *knows* that he is locked in a battle with Clarissa's core self and *yet continues grinding*.<sup>66</sup>

Indeed, rather than respect her resistance, Peter derives a profound frustration from Clarissa's struggle to maintain a discrete sense of self before his grinding, a frustration that escapes him in pockets of bitterness, as when he shifts the responsibility for his present aimless state to her for refusing to marry him and live in an eternal mirroring state with him, thinking "what she might have spared him, *what she had reduced him to*."<sup>67</sup> Much as Lucrezia reframed her marriage to propose herself as the victim of her husband's selfishness, Peter here proposes that by refusing to mirror him—by refusing to enlarge him to himself and choosing instead to protect her internality—Clarissa has *reduced* and therefore *wronged* him. All of these similarities lead necessarily to the conclusion that, had she lived in close association with Peter as Septimus had with Lucrezia, Clarissa must necessarily have, like Septimus, given way before the grinding and succumbed to the trampling of her individual internality that is encompassed in Peter's idea of being one. Because Peter would have insisted on being in Clarissa's mind even while filtering that mind through his projections of his own emotions onto it, he would inevitably have driven her further into her own internality, have left her prostrated, have pushed her to her own windowsill, from which she, too, would have leapt. Woolf's message is clear: relationships in which one member seeks to breach the individual internality of the other in the name of interpersonal intimacy commits an outrage against that internality whose psychic and emotional impact can only be accurately communicated in terms of literal death.

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65. *Ibid.*, 64.

66. That Peter's version of mirror-making is slightly less simplistic—slightly more malicious—than Lucrezia's version is further proven by the fact that, while Lucrezia never intentionally seeks to inflict pain upon Septimus, Peter records that he told Clarissa that she would be "the perfect hostess" *precisely* because "he would have done anything to hurt her after seeing her with Dalloway" (62). Peter's willingness intentionally to inflict pain on Clarissa would have made the process of resisting his intrusions a dangerous business indeed.

67. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 80, emphasis mine. In *A Room of One's Own*, 35-36, Woolf describes the emotions of the resisted mirror-maker as being "not merely the cry of wounded vanity" but also "a protest against some infringement of [their] power to believe in [them]sel[ves]"; as registering "far more pain and rousing far more anger" than typical criticisms or rejections. This description sounds remarkably like Peter Walsh's disproportionate frustration with Clarissa.

No reading of *Mrs. Dalloway* could argue that Richard and Clarissa's relationship is an *idyllic* one. Indeed, the very fact that Clarissa continues to fantasize of the past—and specifically to mull over her rejection of Peter—suggests that she is not as happy, perhaps, as she could be in her married life. However, this fact should not be regarded as a detraction from or shortcoming of Woolf's portrayal of interpersonal intimacy, but rather as a fundamental element of that portrayal—an essential aspect of Woolf's argument that the *achievement of the idyll* in an intimate interpersonal connection is less essential than the *preservation of internality* in the midst of that connection; that the pursuit of idealistic oneness in interpersonal, and particularly romantic relationships has, historically, resulted in the destruction of the *real* individuals who participate in those relationships. Indeed, in distinction to the literature of previous decades—which had glamorized the individuality-consuming practices of grand passions—Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway* resolutely resists the widespread cultural conviction that one must be locked in a “passion” to enjoy a rewarding relationship and instead proposes a distinctly Modernist attitude towards passion, an attitude that rejects the desirability of any association that grounds itself within the abrogation of that which she *as* a modernist valued above all else—the unhampered freedom of the self-defining mind. While previous centuries had been happy to subordinate the needs of the mind to those of the heart within relationships, Woolf defiantly elevates internality by suggesting that internality, rather than passion, is the *basic* element that must be preserved within interpersonal relationships in order to avoid the catastrophic destruction of the individual. While modern critics may be tempted to interpret Clarissa Dalloway's story as one of passionless stagnation, Woolf herself passionately defends individual autonomy by proclaiming that the element that is most essential to ensuring happiness and integrity of soul within interpersonal relationships is not oneness of mind—which so often results in the destruction of the sensitive mind—but rather distinction of mind, that is, the preservation of *a mind of one's own*.

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# **Affection Deprivation and Weathering: An Exploratory Study of Black and African Americans' Well-Being during COVID-19**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates factors related to the well-being of African Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically, reports of discrimination, perceived stress, and affection deprivation through the lenses of Affection Exchange Theory and the Weathering Framework. Sixty-six individuals participated in a cross-sectional survey study through an online Qualtrics questionnaire. We predicted that Black and African American participants would report experiencing more discrimination during the pandemic than other people of color (POC) due to several overlapping pathways of racism (e.g., stereotype effect, internalized racism, and systemic racism) affecting Black individuals more than others. We also predicted affection deprivation for Black and African American participants would be directly related to their perceived stress. Results from an independent samples t-test indicated no significant difference of discrimination between Black and non-Black participants. However, in post hoc analysis, there was a significant difference of discrimination between Black and White participants, illustrating the greater strain on Black individuals during the pandemic when compared to their White counterparts. Finally, correlational analysis revealed a significant positive association between affection deprivation and perceived stress for Black participants. We believe this relationship reflects an important health problem Black Americans are facing during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which isolation through COVID-19 protective measures (e.g., quarantine) are exacerbating the burden of stress they already bear.

Black and African American individuals are at risk for experiencing greater discrimination than other populations due to the history of their position in the United States' social structure. Discrimination and microaggressions have enormous potential to cause harmful mental (e.g., depression, anxiety) and physical (e.g., high blood pressure) health problems (Geronimus et al., 2006). The challenges of a global pandemic, such as COVID-19, create additional stressors that can exacerbate the negative health outcomes associated with discrimination and related hardships. The current project explores this phenomenon through the lens of the Weathering Framework, which suggests that Black and African American individuals are at a greater risk for "high-effort coping." This style of coping leads to even greater stress and long-lasting health problems for these individuals because they have exponentially greater exposure to racial stressors (e.g., prejudice and discrimination) than other members of the U.S. population during the COVID pandemic (Music, 2020; Wakeel & Njoku, 2021).

Additionally, Affection Exchange Theory suggests that during times of stress, affectionate touch can help reduce negative health outcomes (Floyd, 2014; Floyd et al., 2018). However, when social distancing and other precautions are being used to prevent the spread of disease, especially at the height of the pandemic, the health benefits of affectionate touch cannot be accessed (i.e., affection deprivation; Floyd, 2014). Thus, affection deprivation during the pandemic would contribute to the "weathering" of Black and African American individuals, making the study of affection exchange during the pandemic an important endeavor. The current project explores these concepts in a cross-sectional survey study designed to help address concerns of well-being for members of the Black and African American communities during the pandemic.

### **Literature Review**

Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) have faced discrimination in America for centuries. Colonization and oppression have created deep rooted issues that affect the legal and social systems of today. Although all members of BIPOC groups have the potential to face discrimination in America, Black and African American people may be disproportionately affected due to the history of slavery in this country and the pathways of cultural racism (i.e., stereotype threat, internalized racism, interpersonal racism, and systemic racism) embedded in society, which have affected their daily lives (Wakeel & Njoku, 2021).

Of interest to the current study, many instances of discrimination against Black and African American people occur in the medical industry. For example, a disproportionate number of Black and African American people lack access to healthcare services (Chaney, 2020), and the quality of healthcare services available is often diminished (Wakeel & Njoku, 2021). Chaney (2020) asserts that Black people are less likely to be treated by a provider of their same race. According to Filut and Carnes (2020), “Blacks comprise approximately 13% of the U.S. population but only 5% of practicing physicians” (p. 1). The disproportionate number of Black healthcare providers means Black and African American patients are less likely to receive care from people who look like them and, therefore, understand their needs. Additionally, preference for same-race providers stems from frequent discrimination in different-race provider experiences (Malat & Hamilton, 2006). Furthermore, Wang et al. (2021) assert that healthcare workers are often “inherently and racially biased, which leads to misdiagnosis and therefore mistreatment of diseases BIPOC population could face” (p. 2). These conditions make it much more difficult to manage properly any range of health concerns, whether it is physical, emotional, or mental.

Coupled with systemic racism and related health determinants, Wakeel and Njoku (2021) identify the following as stressful life events co-occurring for Black and African Americans during the COVID pandemic: “unemployment or underemployment, increased isolation, reduced educational opportunities, postponement of preventive care needs, reduced access to public transportation as well as free or subsidized meals, and increased stigma related to racial or cultural identity” (p. 4). These negative experiences contribute to the immense stress towards the Black and African American community previously mentioned and appear to be affecting this population more than others. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

**H1:** Black participants will report experiencing more discrimination during the pandemic than other POC within the United States.

The stressors that Black and African American people within the United States must endure, in addition to the added stress of the COVID-19 pandemic, carry a rather large and negative weight. As a result, Black and African American individuals are more susceptible to developing an array of negative health conditions. According to Chaney (2020), Black people are at a higher risk of developing COVID-19 than other people within the United States. Millett et al. (2020) found that counties with a high population of Black people, which were predominantly located in the Southern United States, accounted for 52% of COVID-19 cases and 58% of COVID-related deaths. Thus, it is

imperative that we examine what might alleviate some of these compounding stressors during an especially high stress and high-risk period. Supportive communication has been shown to mitigate stress outcomes and should be tremendously helpful for this population.

Affection Exchange Theory (e.g., Floyd, 2006) suggests that affectionate communication facilitates connection between individuals and fosters growth and well-being. Furthermore, affectionate communication can minimize negative health outcomes that occur due to stress (Floyd et al., 2007). In a more recent study, Graves (2021) found a positive association between affectionate communication and positive emotion and a negative association between receiving affection and stress. Thus, as affectionate communication increases, positive emotions increase and stress decreases. According to Affection Exchange Theory and through the lens of the Weathering framework, affectionate touch should help to alleviate some of the allostatic load (“the cumulative wear and tear on the body’s systems owing to repeated adaptation to stressors”; Geronimus et al., 2006, p. 826) stemming from the stress of the pandemic and the systemic inequalities that Black and African American people face. Unfortunately, affection deprivation due to the pandemic prevents this buffering effect from happening.

Hesse et al. (2021) describe affection deprivation as when individuals report receiving less affection than desired. Affection deprivation is associated with depression, sadness, and loneliness, as well as worse general health, poorer relationship satisfaction, and a greater number of diagnosed secondary immune disorders (Floyd, 2014; Hesse et al., 2021). As the global spread of the COVID pandemic necessitated an increase in social distancing, people all over the world experienced loneliness and isolation. Thus, affectionate touch was received less frequently, especially for individuals who live alone. Therefore, it stands to reason that widespread affection deprivation is a direct consequence of the pandemic, contributing to an increase in stress for all (Hesse et al., 2021). However, the situation may be more dire for Black and African American individuals, whose stress during the pandemic is heightened due to systemic inequalities and other pathways of racism, which are now compounded by affection deprivation. Therefore, we propose our second hypothesis:

**H2:** Affection deprivation will be directly related to Black participants’ reports of stress during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Methodology

### Participants

Eighty-seven participants were initially recruited for this study. Data from 21 participants was deleted due to incomplete survey responses, leaving 66 participants. Participants within this study included 66 adults ( $M = 27.72$ ,  $SD = 12.35$ , range = 19-70). Among the participants, there were 43 (65%) who self-identified as female, 22 (33%) who self-identified as male, and one (2%) who self-identified as non-binary. Of the 66 participants, 28 (42%) answered “yes” to being a college student while 38 (58%) answered “no” to being a college student. Out of the 28 participants currently in college, two (7%) were undergraduate sophomores, 10 (36%) were undergraduate juniors, 11 (39%) were undergraduate seniors, two (7%) were undergraduate fifth year seniors, and three (11%) were graduates or receiving their master’s degree. Participants reported their race as White or Caucasian ( $n = 20$ , 30%), Hispanic or Latino ( $n = 1$ , 2%), Black or African American ( $n = 40$ , 61%), Asian or Pacific Islander ( $n = 1$ , 2%), and Two or more races ( $n = 4$ , 6%). After re-coding, there were a total of six non-Black POC included in analysis.

### Procedures

All procedures for this project were approved through a standing IRB protocol for COMM 3750 – Quantitative Research Methods in Communication. Participants were recruited through various means of social media (e.g., Instagram, Snapchat) and by word of mouth (e.g., co-workers, classmates, friends, family, and within campus organizations). Those who wished to participate, clicked a link to access a Qualtrics survey questionnaire and completed their participation fully online. For each measure, participants were instructed to focus on their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants took an average of six minutes to complete the questionnaire.

### Measures

**Perceived Discrimination.** Fifteen items were adapted from Williams et al.’s (1997) Perceived Discrimination Scale to measure perceived discrimination ( $M = .82$ ,  $SD = .60$ ,  $\alpha = .88$ ). The first six items instructed participants to report how many times they experienced discrimination based on their race or ethnic identity during COVID-19 by entering a whole number. Items such as “You were not hired for a job” and “You were prevented from renting or buying a home in the neighborhood you wanted” were included. Some participants seemed to misunderstand instructions and



responded to items with “no” in place of a numeric response. We interpreted these responses as equivalent to not having any experience with this event, so we re-coded the negative response with a “0.” Some responded with a “yes,” so we changed these positive experiences to “1” to reflect the event happening at least once. The final nine items instructed participants to choose from four responses in a Likert-type scale of four options (1 = Never and 4 = Often) where higher scores indicated more frequent experiences of discrimination. Items such as “You are treated with less respect than others” and “You are called names or insulted” were included.

**Affection Deprivation.** Eight items were adapted from Floyd’s (2014) Affection Deprivation Scale to measure affection deprivation ( $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = .87$ ,  $\alpha = 0.90$ ). Participants responded to statements with a 5-point Likert-type scale where higher numbers represented higher affection deprivation (1 = Strongly disagree and 5 = Strongly agree). Items such as “I often wish I got more affection from others” (reverse coded) and “In general, I feel deprived of affection” were included.

**Perceived Stress.** Ten items were adapted from Cohen et al.’s (1983) Perceived Stress Scale to measure perceived stress ( $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = .60$ ,  $\alpha = 0.87$ ). Participants responded to statements with a 5-point Likert-type scale where higher numbers represented higher frequency of stress (0 = Never and 5 = Very Often). Items such as “How often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?” and “How often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?” were included.

## Results

An independent samples  $t$ -test was performed to compare discrimination levels between Black and non-Black POC. Hypothesis 1 stated, Black participants will report experiencing more discrimination during the pandemic than other POC within the United States. Results indicated that there was not a significant difference between the two racial groups,  $t(41) = .30$ ,  $p = .77$ . Black people’s reports of discrimination ( $M = 1.09$ ,  $SD = .52$ ) were slightly higher than non-Black POC’s reports of discrimination ( $M = 1.02$ ,  $SD = .46$ ), but this difference seems to be due to chance alone. Thus, hypothesis 1 was not supported. However, post hoc analysis revealed a significant difference,  $t(55) = -6.30$ ,  $p = .000$ , between Black participants ( $M = 1.09$ ,  $SD = .52$ ) and White participants ( $M = .26$ ,  $SD = .37$ ) on the outcome measure of discrimination.

A Pearson product moment correlation analysis was performed to test the relationship between Black participants' stress levels and affection deprivation levels. Hypothesis 2 stated, affection deprivation will be directly related to Black participants' reports of stress. Results indicate a moderate, positive relationship between stress and affection deprivation,  $r(36) = .65, p = .000$ . The results suggest that an increase in Black participants' affection deprivation is related to an increase in stress. Because of this significant relationship, hypothesis 2 was supported.

### **Discussion**

We expected that Black and African American participants would experience greater discrimination than non-Black people of color (POC) during the pandemic due to the long history of prejudice and discrimination in the country. The analysis for hypothesis 1 did not support this. One explanation for why our results indicated more parity among the two groups could be that a climate of fear has developed during the COVID pandemic, leading to an increase in discrimination in general. Certainly, a virus that has been pejoratively referred to as the "Chinese flu" has incited an increase in anti-Asian violence (e.g., Reny & Barreto, 2020). Our post hoc analysis revealed that Black and African American participants reported far greater experiences of discrimination when compared to White participants, showing some support for the weathering hypothesis (Geronimus et al., 2006) and that Black and African American individuals bear more emotional and psychological burdens than White individuals during the pandemic (Wakeel & Njoku, 2021).

Supporting our second hypothesis, affection deprivation was significantly and positively related to Black and African American participants' levels of perceived stress. Consistent with the Weathering Framework (Wakeel & Njoku, 2021), Black and African American individuals are more likely to be negatively impacted by the stress related to the pandemic. The significant negative relationship between affection deprivation and perceived stress in our study sample supports previous findings (e.g., Floyd, 2014; Hesse et al., 2021) and the assertion that well-being is closely linked to receiving supportive communication and affectionate touch, the fundamental claim in Affection Exchange Theory. Indeed, these results suggest that Black people would benefit greatly from an increase in affectionate communication during the COVID pandemic.

## **Limitations and Future Research**

Sampling was a limitation in the current study. The sub-sample of non-Black POC ( $N = 6$ ) consisted of one participant identifying as Hispanic or Latino, one participant identifying as Asian or Pacific Islander, and four participants who identified as having two or more races. This sub-sample is too small to achieve any meaningful power and did not allow us to substantially test our first hypothesis. Future research should attempt to obtain measures from a larger and more diverse sample. Additionally, a more complex investigation of the Weathering Framework (Wakeel & Njoku, 2021) would be helpful for understanding the relationship between stress and affection deprivation during the pandemic.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of our research was to investigate factors related to the well-being of Black people during the pandemic. Based on these factors (i.e., affection deprivation, perceived stress, and racial discrimination), our goal was to contribute to the conversation about improving the lives of Black people in America, especially in ways that help to prevent further weathering as the result of a worldwide pandemic. To support our goal, we conducted a cross-sectional survey study with 66 participants. Results indicated Black and African American individuals experienced racial discrimination at similar rates when compared to non-Black POC and at higher rates when compared to White individuals. Furthermore, results indicated that an increase in affection deprivation is related to an increase in perceived stress for Black and African American individuals. These findings suggest that increases in supportive communication can act as a buffer for Black and African American individuals to help reduce the negative effects of weathering and pandemic-related stress.

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# Intellectual Virtues in Rear Window: A New Look at L.B. Jefferies's Look

*Patrick Gilchrist*

## ABSTRACT

*Alfred Hitchcock's Rear Window is a pillar of American cinematic history. Few would doubt that much. More questionable, though, is the moral character of the film's famed protagonist, L.B. Jefferies, who draws sincere pleasure from peering into the private lives of his neighbors. The moral blameworthiness of Jefferies's objectifying voyeurism has long been intimated by many scholars who have written about the film. I take these intimations as a starting point, translating and explaining the morally blameworthy dimensions of Jefferies's intrusive looks in terms of Aristotelian philosophy. Following this, however, I appeal to the work of twenty-first-century responsibilist virtue epistemology to draw out the intellectual praiseworthiness of Jefferies's obsessive gaze (a conclusion respective of but unconcerned with these actions' immorality). Because shots from the protagonist's point-of-view comprise so much of the film's visual storytelling, I argue that the film's primary narrative opposition is not between good and evil or secrets and discovery as one might assume; instead, the narrative opposition, I argue, is present in spectatorial judgement—the concurrent sense of moral blameworthiness and intellectual praiseworthiness that one is prone to feel when seeing through the eyes of L.B. Jefferies.*

The role of looking for *Rear Window's* curious protagonist, L.B. Jefferies (James Stewart), is an oft written about aspect of the film. Laura Mulvey, for instance, has appealed to Jefferies's controlling look in her well-known argument for the male gaze of traditional narrative cinema (15–6). Building on Jean Douchet's remark that Jefferies's spectating is an analogue for spectatorship in the cinema (8), Robert Stam and Roberta Pearson have explored the theoretical and moral implications of this analogy, concluding that *Rear Window* is “at once a cautionary tale for voyeurs and an ode to the cinema, present[ing] both alternatives with extraordinary lucidity” (205). Less cited but no less symptomatic of the critical relevance of Jefferies's gaze, Michael Walker has outlined voyeurism as one of the motifs central to Hitchcock's narratives, a chapter in which he posits *Rear Window* as cinema's “most profound film about voyeurism” (170). Whether one agrees with Walker's definitive statement is beside the point: the film's use of voyeurism is certainly profound.

Admittedly, this quick summary of writings barely scratches the surface of the critical approaches to the film. But while these studies and others like them deftly emphasize the psychological, narratological, moral, and even political implications of the protagonist's voyeuristic acts, the authors have a tendency to subordinate voyeurism's epistemological features: for example, when Stam and Pearson note in passing that Jefferies's look evolves “from scopophilia to epistemophilia, from indifference to concern” as the film progresses (203). The present essay, then, seeks to enhance the epistemological considerations of Jefferies's voyeuristic acts and the oppositional tension they create. After briefly demonstrating the similitude between Jefferies's acts of looking and Aristotle's characterization of incontinence, I will describe the various facets of so-called virtue epistemology to then show that Jefferies's morally suspect actions concurrently exemplify intellectually virtuous behavior. This, as a result, entails that an undergirding opposition of spectatorial judgement—moral blameworthiness on the one hand, intellectual praiseworthiness on the other—underwrites the look that constitutes much of the narrative in Hitchcock's film.

Lying dormant beneath this appeal to virtue epistemology is, of course, the underlying assumption that Hitchcock—or at least his methodical filmmaking—was to some degree philosophical. As Irving Singer notes, Hitchcock would have questioned such an assumption, viewing himself more as an entertainer who, accordingly, entertains (7). Like Singer, though, I see no need for Hitchcock's reservations to prevent philosophical readings of his work (8); a film of the complexity of *Rear Window* can certainly thread profound concepts into its narrative fabric without compromising its entertainment value. Of course, this does not at all mean one should imagine that

Hitchcock sat down with a pen and paper rigorously to contemplate philosophical truths and work out a way to weave them into a narrative. But it does require some degree of acceptance that Hitchcock's technical mastery of the medium through which he communicated engaging stories has the potential to effect readings of philosophical importance. At the very least, this seems to be the case in *Rear Window*.

### ***Rear Window* and the Moral Blameworthiness of L.B. Jefferies's Look**

To say wholesale what *Rear Window* is "about" would be rather reductive. There are multiple narrative threads woven into the film: for instance, the evolution of Jefferies's and Lisa Fremont's (Grace Kelly) relationship, an evolution that may mark Jefferies's progress from social, emotional, or sexual immaturity to maturity. Yet it would be fair to say that the film is at least partially about a pursuit of knowledge—in particular, knowledge of a murder—and this about-ness is of greater concern here.

Jefferies, a photojournalist with plenty of experience looking at and representing the world around him, has been injured on the job directly before the film's diegesis. Requiring a full-leg cast and a wheelchair while he recovers, this restriction of movement deeply contrasts with the daily freedom of movement provided for Jefferies by his career. Consequently, his bottled-up energy is projected elsewhere: namely, through his own window and into the windows of others, as he watches the lives and activities of his neighbors. Throughout the film, Jefferies's observations inform the fake names that he goes on to coin for these neighbors (e.g., Miss Torso [Georgine Darcy], Miss Lonelyhearts [Judith Evelyn], and The Salesman [Raymond Burr]). Jefferies's casual, intrusive gaze runs into trouble, however, when, following a loud scream, he notices a significant and mysterious change in the daily life of The Salesman and his wife (Irene Winston), soon to be known as Mr. and Mrs. Thorwald. Having previously been confined to her bed, where Jefferies and the spectator witness her and Mr. Thorwald argue incessantly, Mrs. Thorwald suddenly disappears. Her disappearance leads Jefferies—and, after some convincing, his nurse, Stella (Thelma Ritter), and his girlfriend, Lisa—to pursue knowledge of Mrs. Thorwald's suspicious disappearance, culminating in the discovery that she was murdered by her husband.

As of 1968, *Rear Window* was, in Hitchcock's words, "the most cinematic" of all the films he had made; he continues:

This film has as its basic structure the purely visual. The story is told only in visual terms. Only a novelist could do the same thing. It's composed largely of Mr. Stewart as a character in one position in one room looking out onto his courtyard. So what he sees is a mental process blown up in his mind from the purely visual. It represents for me the purest form of cinema which is called montage: that is, pieces of film put



together to make up an idea. ("*Rear Window* (1968)" 95-6)

The "purely visual" dimension to which Hitchcock here alludes is no doubt vital to the storytelling of *Rear Window*. For starters, L.B. Jefferies's life and recent accident are first delivered to the spectator through a series of shots of objects at the beginning of the film, including the cast on Jefferies's leg, his broken camera, a framed picture of the crashing car that caused his injury, a negative of Lisa Fremont, and a stack of magazines with Lisa's portrait as the cover. Without a word, the film provides at least a preliminary idea of Jefferies's character, relationships, and interests. Moreover, Hitchcock's use of the Kuleshov effect to display Jefferies peering into the courtyard and into the windows of his neighbors allows the spectator frequent access to the character's mental states as well as the objects and people that correspond directly to those mental states.<sup>1</sup> And the role of the visual is indispensable for more than the storytelling; it is also indispensable for the story. While the spectator may rely largely on the synthesis of images for their creation of ideas, Jefferies himself relies equally on sight, first for his own voyeuristic pleasure and, later, for the pursuit of knowledge—knowledge of a murder—that continues to help motivate both Jefferies's gaze and the progression of the narrative.

It is safe to say that this act of looking—this voyeurism, this scopophilia—of Jefferies is typically written about in terms that (rightly) imply some degree of moral blameworthiness regarding the act. Mulvey, for example, famously drew from Freud to qualify the scopophilic act as a way of deriving erotic pleasure from a gaze that objectifies other people (8-9); writing specifically about *Rear Window* (and two other Hitchcock films), Mulvey says, "the look is central to the plot, oscillating between voyeurism and fetishistic fascination" (15). Jon Gartenberg, as another example, has stated that "Hitchcock raises subtle moral issues in *Rear Window* about the dangers of voyeurism," noting that Jefferies's look "transgresses the right to privacy of other individuals" (5). In the paragraphs that follow, I address at greater length than Mulvey or Gartenberg the immorality of Jefferies's gaze through a brief appeal to Aristotelian virtue ethics. A full-scale reconstruction of Aristotle's ethical framework is well outside the scope of this paper, particularly because the philosophical focus is meant to aim at twentieth- and twenty-first century virtue epistemology. Nevertheless, Jefferies's pleasure in objectification, fetishistic fascination, and transgression of privacy can quickly be translated into Aristotelian moral terms, the most pertinent of which would be incontinence (*akrasia*).

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1. The Kuleshov effect refers to the ways in which a brief montage can synthesize the impressions left by individual shots to create new impressions inarticulable by any of those shots alone.

For Aristotle, incontinence, generally speaking, occurs when an agent performs an act in accordance with passions or appetites (such as pleasure or anger) that contradicts how they<sup>2</sup> would have acted had they followed their faculty of moral reason; incontinent actions are, importantly, still blameworthy, but not to the same extent as moral vice. Furthermore, incontinence can be spoken of as being qualified or unqualified, meaning one can speak of an agent as incontinent with respect to something or simply as an incontinent person (Aristotle 125-6). One such way of qualifying incontinence is recognizing the agent's subordination of reason to, say, pleasure due to "diseased states or habits" that guide their actions (Aristotle 128). If a diseased state prompts action towards a pleasure that reasoned choice would not permit, one would not say of the agent that they are unqualifiedly incontinent; however, one would note their subordination of reason as qualified incontinence: that is, incontinent with respect to whatever acts result from their habits or diseased states (Aristotle 128).

Jefferies's obsessive look could easily be read in this regard—as an action that runs counter to his reason and in accordance with his pleasure-creating habit—since he consistently shrugs off the justified remonstrances of both Stella and Lisa early in the film. In fact, before Lisa has become convinced of Mr. Thorwald's guilt, she interprets Jefferies's actions with an almost Aristotelian terminology: "Sitting around, looking out the window to kill time, is one thing—but doing it the way you are—with, with binoculars, and with wild opinions about every little movement you see—is, is diseased!" What Lisa picks up on here is Jefferies's qualified incontinence, his diseased habit's ability to induce action that contradicts what reason demands for moral action, his gaze's transgression against moral virtuosity. As Jefferies himself asks later in the film, "I wonder if it's ethical to watch a man with binoculars and a long-focus lens. Do you suppose it's ethical even if you prove he didn't commit a crime?" The answer? Well, no, it probably is not.

This after-the-fact moral reflection reveals a further dimension of Jefferies's incontinence: his impetuosity. Richard Kraut splits Aristotle's akratic (incontinent) person into two types, the weak and the impetuous. Both act with pleasure or anger and against reason, but the key difference arises as to when that reasoning happens. For the impetuous, it occurs following the action(s) in question:

At the time of action, the impetuous person experiences no internal conflict. But once his [sic] act has been completed, he regrets what he has done. One could say that he deliberates, if deliberation were something that post-dated rather than preceded action; but the thought process he goes through after he acts comes too late to save him from error. (Kraut sec. 7)

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2. Where hypothetical agents are concerned, gender neutral pronouns (they, them, their, theirs) are used.

Jefferies's deliberation concerning the morality of his actions only after they have been performed aligns him with this breed of *akrasia*. So while his obsessive, pleasure-deriving, privacy-transgressing gaze may escape a verdict of Aristotelian moral viciousness, the impetuous incontinence of his actions do, nevertheless, render him morally blameworthy.

I have no intention of attempting to save Jefferies's actions from this moral verdict, as I both believe he is blameworthy and doubt that many would be quick to provide moral defense for peeping into the private lives of unknowing others. However, to consider the voyeurism of Jefferies solely in terms of (a lack of) moral virtue is to restrict that consideration from addressing a different, important type of virtue: intellectual virtue. Since the 1980s, philosophers have been working to articulate an epistemology that assesses knowledge not by evaluating the justification or evidence for a true belief but rather by evaluating the intellectual virtuosity of the agent who produced that true belief; this has since been coined, "virtue epistemology."

### **Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology**

The contemporary notion of intellectual virtue and praiseworthiness has much historical backdrop. It would be remiss, however, not to begin with Edmund Gettier. In 1963, Gettier shocked the field of epistemology by casting significant doubt on the millennia-old justified, true belief theory of knowledge (JTB theory), a theory which held that the necessary and sufficient conditions for a subject having knowledge of a proposition are that (1) the subject believe that proposition, (2) the proposition is true, and (3) the belief is justified. This theory (or versions of it) had maintained predominant status since Plato's *Meno* and *Theaetetus*. In his brief essay, Gettier provided two counterexamples—now often referred to as Gettier problems or Gettier cases—in which subjects are shown to have justified, true beliefs that do not amount to knowledge (122–3). The soundness of Gettier problems has had many proponents and doubters, but regardless, the massive and widespread effect of his essay on the field of epistemology is certain: many responded with addendums to or clarifications of the JTB theory (Goldman) while others attempted to rework necessary and sufficient conditions for justification (Feldman and Conee) and still others sought to rework a theory of knowledge that did not rest on justification (Lewis; Code). Virtue epistemology is best thought of as the latter type, and it began with the work of Ernest Sosa and Lorraine Code in the 1980s. For current purposes, however, Heather Battaly's enlightening summarization of virtue epistemology's origins and directions is more relevant than a discussion of these early attempts.

Battaly outlines the many aims of epistemologists through a series of distinctions by which philosophical opinion has been notably divided. A few of these are quite helpful for contextualizing Jefferies's intellectual praiseworthiness. The first distinction—between belief-based and virtue epistemologies—is rooted in the difference in what one views as being most epistemically fundamental. Much of analytic epistemology's history is devoted to the former of these; belief-based epistemologies have held justification and knowledge to be the most fundamental concerns and belief to be the primary "object of epistemic evaluation" (Battaly 640). Accordingly, in these epistemologies, it is the belief of an agent that is evaluated for justification or knowledge. Virtue epistemologists, however, hold intellectual virtues and vices to be more fundamental, so the agent who produces belief is evaluated for the virtuosity or viciousness of their intellectual actions and motivations (Battaly 640). The difference is subtle but profound: either a belief is broken away from the agent who produced it and evaluated for its justification, or the agent's intellectual actions (and, for some, intellectual motivations) engaged in producing beliefs is assessed for epistemic virtuosity or viciousness. As a relatively simple example, say I believe that there is a cup in front of me. A belief-based epistemology would be most concerned with determining whether I am justified in holding this belief and, relatedly, whether that belief amounts to knowledge. A virtue epistemology may not deny that I have knowledge, but saying so is not its primary aim; instead, it aims first and foremost to evaluate my intellectual actions (and possibly motivations) in producing that belief.

This begs the question as to what qualifies as intellectual virtue and why. Here enters the distinction among virtue epistemologists: reliabilist virtue epistemology and responsibilist virtue epistemology. For virtue reliabilists, intellectual virtues are cognitive faculties that reliably produce or get at the truth; similarly, "virtuous thinkers are reliable truth-producers; i.e., their faculties of sense perception, memory, induction, and deduction reliably produce true beliefs" (Battaly 645). This notion of reliability is context dependent: it is no counterexample to virtue reliabilism to say that a faculty like 20/20 vision does not reliably produce true beliefs about microorganisms. Moreover, these faculty-virtues may be natural in an agent or acquired over time, and their use by the agent need not be intentional action motivated by some form of intrinsic epistemic good (e.g., love for knowledge, understanding, truth); in other words, for the reliabilist, an agent can virtuously acquire true belief without being motivated to do so (Battaly 646–7).

Because reliabilist faculty-virtues are often natural in the agent and enacted without the agent's choice, virtue reliabilists do not speak of agents as being intellectually praiseworthy, regardless of the intellectual virtues they exhibit. By contrast, virtue responsibilists hold that intellectual virtues are analogous to Aristotelian moral virtues,

meaning they are relatively stable traits of intellectual character such as intellectual courage or intellectual humility, and that these traits can only be acquired by an agent over time (i.e., they cannot be natural in the agent) (Battaly 648). The responsibilist intellectual virtues are virtuous not (or not only) because they reliably produce true belief but because the agent intentionally enacts them and is motivated to do so by an *intrinsically* valuing epistemic good, such as valuing the attainment of truth simply for truth's sake (Battaly 648–9). Finally, and importantly, an agent who acts with such responsibilist intellectual virtue is, in the voluntarist sense (the sense that praise and blame require volition), praiseworthy for their intellectual actions (Montmarquet 393–4, 399–400).

Though both kinds of practitioners of virtue epistemology agree that the intellectual virtues and vices are more fundamental concerns than justification or knowledge, this does not prevent virtue epistemologists from adapting their work to address the problems of traditional analytic epistemology, like the provision of necessary and sufficient conditions for propositional knowledge. These so-called “virtue theories” of knowledge (Battaly 641) could be expressed, in their most general form, as the following: a subject S has knowledge that proposition P if S produces the true belief that P as a result of intellectually virtuous acts. Of course, how one conceives of intellectually virtuous acts greatly alters what this theory states. For S to have knowledge that P, the virtue reliabilist would require only that S produced the true belief that P as a result of exercising reliably truth-producing cognitive faculties. The virtue responsibilist would have the much stronger requirement that, in order for S to have knowledge that P, S would need to have produced the true belief that P by acting with virtuous intellectual character traits, the enactment of which need be motivated by intrinsic epistemic good.

Separate from the theoretic or conventional attempts of responsibilist virtue epistemologists are so-called anti-theoretic (Battaly 640–1) or alternative efforts. These philosophers do not (or do not only) take up questions and problems central to traditional analytic epistemology; rather, they explore the distinctive features of individual intellectual virtues or vices or consider their real-world relevance, offering “profiles of individual virtues and vices, examinations of the relations among distinct virtues and vices, and the social, ethical, and political dimensions of cognition involved in misinformation, disinformation, propaganda” (Turri et. al sec. 4). It is this sort of work that best renders L.B. Jefferies's cognitive character in *Rear Window*: specifically, Lani Watson's profile of the intellectual virtue of inquisitiveness and Jason Baehr's profile of intellectual courage.

### **L.B. Jefferies's Intellectual Virtues**

Inquisitiveness and intellectual courage do appear to be two (but perhaps not the only two) responsibilist intellectual virtues that Jefferies exhibits in *Rear Window* as

he pursues knowledge of Mrs. Thorwald's murder. However, determining his intellectual praiseworthiness is not as simple as stating that Jefferies asks questions or persists through fear and doubt. As the previous section highlighted, the following conditions are required for agents to exhibit intellectual virtues *qua* virtues in a given circumstance:

- (i) The intellectual action(s) in question must satisfy the conditions for a particular intellectual virtue (e.g., satisfy the conditions for inquisitiveness or intellectual courage).
- (ii) The intellectual action(s) in question must be motivated by valuing epistemic good intrinsically (e.g., having a love of knowledge or valuing the attainment of truth for truth's sake).
- (iii) The agent(s) in question must possess the intellectual virtue as a relatively stable trait of their intellectual character.

Only when a responsibilist intellectual virtue satisfies each of the above conditions is the agent who exercises the virtue intellectually praiseworthy.

To draw out why this is so, consider the following example: A student is taking a calculus course. Throughout the semester, the student asks numerous, excellent questions, and the student intends that these questions will help them to better understand the material. All the while, however, the student's motivation for better understanding the material and, therefore, for asking questions, cannot be attributed to their care for the relevant knowledge—they will gladly forget how to perform derivations the moment the class ends. Instead, the student is motivated almost entirely out of the desire to receive good grades on their exams, a non-epistemic good. Thus, the student acts with paradigmatic inquisitiveness (asks good questions aimed at understanding the material) but does not appear to possess or act with intellectually virtuous inquisitiveness (because they are not motivated by epistemic good) and is, as a result, not due intellectual praise for their actions. If their actions had been motivated by epistemic good, then their inquisitive actions would have been virtuous; and if, in addition, this virtuous inquisitiveness was also a stable character trait of the student, then the student would be intellectually praiseworthy as an agent. In other words, condition (i) must be met for an action to manifest a particular intellectual virtue; conditions (i) and (ii) must be met for an action to manifest an intellectual virtue and for that action to be virtuous; and conditions (i), (ii), and (iii) must be met for an agent to be intellectually praiseworthy in connection to the action(s) in question. Crucially, then, L.B. Jefferies's and his intellectual actions need to meet each of the three conditions to be intellectually praiseworthy. Each condition will be covered in turn, beginning with condition (i).

## **Satisfying Conditions for Inquisitiveness and Intellectual Courage**

### ***Inquisitiveness***

On inquisitiveness as an intellectual virtue, Lani Watson is the leading contributor. Watson first characterizes inquisitiveness as “a tendency to question” with the aim of improving “epistemic standing” (276). However, after some consideration, Watson adds two additional features necessary for inquisitiveness: first, the requirement of sincerity, that is, that “a sincere question is one in which the questioner genuinely wants to know or understand the answer” (277); and second, the requirement of good questioning. Watson admits that fully elaborating on precisely what constitutes good questioning is bound to be difficult but holds that good questions must at least target relevant information and identify a proper context in which the question will successfully improve epistemic standing (278–9). By example, one can imagine an individual who asks genuine, thoughtful questions regarding a film they have recently watched, but who poses the questions to, say, their dog. Despite the quality of the questions, this individual’s actions would not satisfy the good questioning condition because the context is unlikely to improve the subject’s epistemic standing; therefore, the individual does not satisfy conditions for inquisitiveness.

In what ways, then, do Jefferies actions meet these conditions in *Rear Window*? The most obvious, of course, are the questions he asks of other characters that pertain to his initial suspicions. Not long after the loud scream and the crashing noise that initially stir Jefferies’s curiosity, he sees Mr. Thorwald leave and return to his apartment in the middle of the night numerous times with a suitcase. This unusual behavior gets Jefferies’s attention, and the next day, he poses a question to Stella: “Now what could he [Mr. Thorwald] sell at three in the morning?” The question not only gives verbal confirmation that an inquiry has begun, but it also reveals Jefferies’s sincere desire to improve his epistemic standing, for if Stella could produce an answer that reasonably fulfilled the question, it is quite feasible that Jefferies would release his suspicion, feeling it would lead to unjustified belief; likewise, if Stella could not produce an answer that reasonably fulfilled the question, his suspicion might progress to justified belief. In either case, Jefferies’s epistemic standing would improve: he either avoids a suspicion devolving to unjustified belief or progresses from suspicion to justified belief. Finding no defeaters to his suspicion in Stella’s sarcastic retort, “flashlights, luminous dials for watches, house numbers that light up,” Jefferies proceeds to express what has then become a clear belief: “I think he was taking something out of the apartment.” In addition, the question is both relevant and context-aware. The content of the question meets relevancy conditions in the sense that it acknowledges the occupation of the



subject in question (salesman), the function of the object in question (holding other objects to be sold), and the oddity of the subject using that object at three in the morning. If the epistemic goal was, as it seems to have been, to test the suspicion that Thorwald was removing something from his apartment, the question posed is highly relevant. Finally, the question was context-aware in that it was asked of a person with more than enough intellectual ability and life experience to give a satisfactory answer, if such an answer were available. The question, then, quite nearly manifests inquisitiveness.

Given Watson's characterization of inquisitiveness, the one component missing in the interaction between Jefferies and Stella is the *tendency* to question; a single question can hardly manifest a tendency. Jefferies, however, makes this tendency clear when he continuously asks questions of both Lisa and Tom Doyle (Wendell Corey). After asking a similar question to Lisa regarding Thorwald's late-night trips with the suitcase, Jefferies follows up with three additional questions all aimed at understanding Thorwald's behavior. And when Doyle informs Jefferies that Mr. and Mrs. Thorwald were seen leaving the apartment building at a time later than when Jefferies suspects Mrs. Thorwald was murdered, Jefferies asks, "Who said they left then?" and goes on to pose approximately ten more questions to Doyle as part of the same dialogue. While some of these questions are insincere in nature, many are as sincere, relevant, and context-aware as asking who witnessed the Thorwalds leaving the apartment building. Even from this fairly small sample, it is evident that Jefferies frequently employs the question as a communicative technique through which to accrue epistemic goods and improve epistemic standing.

However, to dwell for too long on the verbal evidence of Jefferies's inquisitiveness does a disservice to the film's visual storytelling; the spoken or written word is not strictly required for a spectator to grasp that questions are being asked. As Jan Alber points out, actors' facial expressions and body positions are the filmic equivalent to narrative prose's psychonarration—external representations that correlate to internal mental states (266–70, 279)—and Hitchcock no doubt made use of this in *Rear Window*. Just as the pleasure Jefferies garners from looking at his neighbors is shown in his wide eyes and smile, so too is his inquisitive, question-asking tendency shown through parted lips and raised brows; the point-of-view shots that follow his inquisitive facial expressions allow spectators to see what the objects of those questions are. In other words, Hitchcock's use of the Kuleshov effect enables a spectator to construct ideas of the questions Jefferies appears to ask internally but does not actually utter (see fig. 1).





*Figure 1. Rear Window.*

In this sequence of shots, Jefferies's facial expression and body position (propping up the camera) first establishes his inquisitiveness, the point-of-view shot establishes that at which his questioning is aimed, and the final shot establishes his reaction to receiving the answer. Roughly, the question he is asking himself might translate to, "What is Thorwald wrapping up in the sink?" and the answer, provided by Jefferies's long-focus lens, to "a saw and knife." As with the questions actually uttered, this, too, is a clear step in the direction of (but not amounting to) knowledge of Mrs. Thorwald's murder and understanding of Mr. Thorwald's behavior and is therefore sincerely aimed at improving epistemic standing. Similar to before, the relevancy of such a question largely derives from the atypical actions of Mr. Thorwald over the previous days and the sudden disappearance of his bed-ridden wife. Unlike his questions to Stella, Lisa, and Doyle, however, it is not the subject to whom Jefferies poses the question that determines its context-awareness; rather, in this case, what determines the question's context-awareness is the enhanced view enabled by the long-focus lens—to receive an answer to the question Jefferies appears to have in mind requires a context in which Jefferies is able to see the answer. The lens offers this context, and Jefferies uses it. Thus, demonstrated through both verbal and visual methods, Hitchcock clearly communicates the inquisitiveness of his protagonist.

### ***Intellectual Courage***

In *The Inquiring Mind*, Jason Baehr has offered one notable profile of intellectual courage and its features. Much like Watson on inquisitiveness, Baehr first submits the relatively "common sense" account that,

courage of any sort involves responding in a certain way to a conflict between the achievement of a particular good and one's own safety or well-being. With intellectual courage [...] the good in question is a necessarily intellectual one, while with other forms of courage some other kind of good is at stake. (164)

This characterization is not meant to be surprising, but it does raise some important questions. For instance, what precisely qualifies as a threat to one's safety or well-being? And what is the "certain way" one must respond to be courageous?

To answer questions like these, Baehr breaks down the features of intellectual courage into the virtue's context and its substance. The context for intellectual courage relates to the condition of threats to one's safety or well-being. Baehr notes that the internal experience of fear does not correctly qualify this context, as one can act courageously without ever experiencing such a feeling. Similarly, Baehr excludes the notion that a subject's perception of the threats at play must be rational, for continuing in one's pursuits in the face of even the most irrational perceived threats still requires courage (169–70). Accordingly, Baehr states that the context of intellectual courage requires only the *appearance* of a threat to one's well-being. The subject in question must have the judgement or belief that their pursuits "may risk social, political, professional, or bodily injury; or ... risk the loss of considerable *good* along these lines" (170, emphasis original). This judgement or belief need not amount to fear in the subject, nor must the judgement or belief be rational, but to manifest intellectual courage, the subject must at least judge or believe that some risk exists that conflicts with their actions in pursuit of intellectual good.

With context determined, Baehr turns to the substance of intellectual courage, which concerns the ways in which one responds to the appearance of risk when moved by intellectual good. The clearest of these ways is to continue the pursuit of an intellectual good: that is, if a pursuit has begun, faced risk, and continued despite the risk, then doing so likely manifested intellectual courageousness. But Baehr is sure to note that persistent pursuit aimed at intellectual goods is not the only way intellectual courage can manifest; the virtue can also be found in persistent intellectual states that remain in accord with intellectual good and in the persistent transmission of intellectual goods (174–6). For instance, one might need to exercise intellectual courage in maintaining a true belief that contradicts the belief systems of their friends and families, or one might need to exercise intellectual courage when spreading knowledge that is bound to be unpopular with the audience to whom it is addressed.

Together, the context and substance of intellectual courage amount to the following definition: "Intellectual courage is a disposition to persist in or with a state or course of action aimed at an epistemically good end despite the fact that doing so involves an apparent threat to one's own well-being" (Baehr 177). This definition thus provides the conditions that L.B. Jefferies's actions must satisfy to qualify as intellectually courageous.

To reiterate, the apparent threat need not be physical in nature; the threat of physical harm is sufficient for the manifestation of intellectual courage, but it is not necessary. The threat or risk may also be of a social kind. For instance, one might manifest intellectual courage in maintaining a belief or continuing a pursuit while undergoing criticism from their social circle for doing so. Jefferies actions quite clearly represent

this type of intellectual courage in *Rear Window* on a number of occasions. His social interactions are limited to the small social circle of Stella, Lisa, and Doyle, and not one of them initially find his belief that Mr. Thorwald murdered his wife convincing, nor do they encourage his pursuit of knowing this proposition. Stella, to be fair, does not attack Jefferies's character for having this belief, but Lisa refers to the pursuit as "diseased" and to Jefferies as "not being clever"; Doyle, in turn, refers to the proposed evidence as "hallucinations" and, mockingly, to Jefferies as an "amateur sleuth." In the face of this dissent, Jefferies persists in his doxastic state and continues his pursuit of knowledge despite social pressures to do the opposite. This is surely an example of the disposition outlined by Baehr, and in this case, the "threat to one's well-being" is the social risk of expressing and maintaining belief that faces unanimous dissent.

Fixating on dissent is not to say, however, that Jefferies's does not also judge or believe that bodily harm could not come to him as a result of his pursuit of knowledge. His awareness of at least the appearance of such a threat is first evident after he mentions Mr. Thorwald's suspicious behavior to Stella. Having helped Jefferies return to his wheelchair, Stella notices that Mr. Thorwald's blinds have been pulled up again, revealing the inside of his apartment. This prompts Jefferies to look in that direction and see Mr. Thorwald scanning the courtyard to determine if any neighbors are watching him; in response to this, Jefferies frantically rolls his wheelchair backwards into the apartment, and tells Stella to "Get back! Get back! Get out of sight! Get out of sight!" Even early on, then (well before the chilling moment in which Mr. Thorwald stares directly into Jefferies's lens), Jefferies clearly judges that looking at Mr. Thorwald could involve some sort of threat to his or others' physical well-being—which is an accurate judgement, as Mr. Thorwald eventually assaults Lisa and pushes Jefferies out of his window, breaking his other leg. Despite being aware that his knowledge-pursuing look might culminate in such harm, however, Jefferies persists in his course of action.

As with Jefferies's inquisitiveness, Hitchcock represents this intellectual courageousness not only verbally but visually. Jefferies's concern over the threat of being seen by Mr. Thorwald causes him and Stella to hide in the shadows of the apartment, presumably out of sight; while they remain in the shadows, viewers see through Jefferies's eyes that Mr. Thorwald is fixing his gaze on something in the courtyard. Finally, the camera turns back to a third-person shot of Jefferies coming forward into the light—again in view of Mr. Thorwald—so that he can see what that something is. The retreat to the shadows thus represents Jefferies's awareness of a possible threat to his and Stella's well-being, while the return to the light to learn at what Thorwald is directing his gaze visually marks the continued pursuit of knowledge despite this

threat. At this point in the film, Jefferies has already begun his pursuit of knowledge, an intellectual good. But it is in this scene that his belief that physical harm could result from his Thorwald-directed gaze first becomes obvious to a spectator, so it is from this moment forward that Jefferies's looks at Mr. Thorwald—his actions in pursuit of knowledge—could be qualified as intellectually courageous.

Through this interpretation of Jefferies's intellectual actions in the film (namely, his dialogue with other characters and his looks into Mr. Thorwald's apartment), I have argued that the actions themselves satisfy the conditions for both inquisitiveness and intellectual courage. However, for these intellectual actions to be virtuous—that is, for these intellectual virtues to manifest *qua* virtues—the actions in question must be in large part motivated by considerations of epistemic good's intrinsic value, such as an agent's love for knowledge or attainment of truth for truth's sake. It is this that separates inquisitiveness from intellectually virtuous inquisitiveness, and intellectual courage from intellectually virtuous courage.

### **L.B. Jefferies's Epistemic Motivations**

To begin this evaluation, take the previous example in which students were motivated to learn calculus only because they wanted to earn good grades. They were inquisitive, but not virtuously so. Now consider a different set of students who are in the same calculus course. These students, like the other, asks many relevant, context-aware questions with the sincere intention of understanding the material. Unlike the other students, these students are only partially motivated to ask such questions by the desire to earn good grades. They still, of course, care about the final grade they receive in the course, and this at times prompts their questioning. But in addition to this motivation, they want to learn about calculus for more epistemically-rooted reasons: they want to learn how to do derivations because they recognize the cognitive value of mathematics; they want know whether Newton, Leibniz, or both invented calculus because they recognize knowledge as an intrinsic good. Thus, while both students are inquisitive, only the second student is virtuously inquisitive because their intellectual actions are in large part motivated by intrinsic epistemic goods; they want to know because knowing is good.

That Jefferies is so motivated in *Rear Window* is rather clear, and this motivation is likely what Stam and Pearson were referring to when they stated that Jefferies's scopophilia transforms into epistemophilia over the course of the film. If scopophilia is loosely defined as pleasure derived from looking, then epistemophilia might be termed as pleasure derived from acquiring true beliefs and gaining knowledge. Still, one might establish this epistemophilia by eliminating other, non-epistemic motivations from having a dominant role in prompting Jefferies's intellectual actions. A person could, for

instance, be motivated to solve a murder for financial reasons (if there were a reward), public praise, or an internal sense of justice. If any of these played a dominant role in motivating Jefferies's pursuit of knowledge, his inquisitive and intellectually courageous actions would not be intellectually virtuous. The fact remains, though, that the film provides no reason for a spectator to believe that any of these three possible motivations play a more dominant role than Jefferies's sheer pleasure in knowing. There is no mention of potential financial gain; the inquiry is purposefully withheld from the public eye when Jefferies chooses to call Doyle, an old friend, rather than the police; and Jefferies makes no mention of the justice he feels in avenging Mrs. Thorwald's murder.

In fact, the only explicit insight spectators get regarding Jefferies's motivations confirm his desire to acquire truth for truth's sake. In Jefferies's apartment, after he has expressed his suspicions, Lisa asks of him, "What is it you're looking for?" and he responds, "I just want to find out what's wrong with the Salesman's wife." The response seems routine, insignificant. But its significance is in what it lacks: Jefferies does not name non-epistemic motivations in addition to his simple desire to "find out"; in other words, he does not want to find out what's wrong with the Mr. Thorwald's wife *because of* something non-epistemic (e.g., justice, money, praise). He just wants to find out, wants to know, wants truth. The apparent lack of non-epistemic motivations in Jefferies's pursuit of intellectual good combined with the explicit presence of epistemic good motivating his actions thus suggests that Jefferies's intellectual actions in *Rear Window* are not only properly understood as inquisitive and intellectually courageous but also as virtuously inquisitive and virtuously intellectually courageous. His actions express the intellectual virtues, and his motivations are largely epistemic in nature.

The final requirement in deeming Jefferies an intellectually praiseworthy agent, taken up in the following section, is concerned with establishing inquisitiveness and intellectual courage as stable character traits of Jefferies's cognitive character. To do this, the film must in some way suggest that Jefferies consistently manifests these intellectual virtues outside of just the pursuit of knowledge regarding Mrs. Thorwald's murder.

### **Inquisitiveness and Intellectual Courage as Character Traits**

Acknowledging that the film takes place over the course of only a few days, it is difficult to refer to particular actions of Jefferies as indicative of stable character traits. An agent could, to be sure, act with intellectual virtues for a few days but lack those intellectual virtues as stable aspects of their character. That possibility poses a challenge for determining that inquisitiveness and intellectual courage are stable traits of Jefferies's cognitive character. The challenge, however, is not insurmountable. Jefferies' career allows for a fairly strong sense of his stable intellectual character, as he has seemingly been a

photojournalist for some time. (It should be noted, too, that philosophers of intellectual virtues often use real-life journalists as models for intellectually virtuous character [e.g., Baehr 165–6].) While it is conceivable that some journalistic efforts may require little intellectual prowess or prolonged inquiry, Jefferies's efforts certainly seem to. For instance, after his editor (Gig Young), calls Jefferies to congratulate him on getting his cast removed, only to learn that the cast is not to be removed for another week, his editor expresses regret: "That one week is going to cost me my best photographer—and you a big assignment." The two discuss the assignment:

JEFFERIES. Where?

JEFFERIES'S EDITOR. Indo-China. Got a code tip from the bureau chief this morning. The place is about to go up in smoke.

JEFFERIES. Didn't I tell you! Didn't I tell you it was the next place to watch!

JEFFERIES'S EDITOR. You did.

JEFFERIES. Okay. When do I leave? Half-hour? An hour?

JEFFERIES'S EDITOR. With that cast on—you don't.

Not only does a viewer learn from this interaction that Jefferies is willing and eager to engage in long and difficult inquiry in order to acquire and disseminate truth and information (an epistemic good), but also that he is, according to his editor, the best at it. In other words, he is inquisitive—willing and able to ask thoughtful questions of the world around him—and his camera provides the best answers.

Regarding his intellectual courageousness, viewers are quick to learn that Jefferies's assignments frequently involve some form of danger that must be overcome. For starters, the film's narrative is to some degree prompted by the bodily injury Jefferies sustains while on the job. And later, when describing to Lisa why he thinks (incorrectly, as we find out) that she would not enjoy accompanying him on his trips, Jefferies summarizes some common struggles he has to face: "Lisa, on this job you carry one suitcase. Your home is the available transportation. You sleep rarely, bathe even less, and sometimes the food that you eat is made from things you wouldn't even look at when they're alive!" A spectator, then, would be quite justified in assuming that Jefferies frequently continues journalistic pursuits—pursuits that likely have some form of epistemic good attached, like acquiring and disseminating knowledge—despite the appearance of threats to his well-being. Thus, through these elaborations of Jefferies career, viewers get at least some insight into elements of his cognitive character: He is both willing and able to inquire successfully (inquisitive) and equally willing to face apparent dangers, struggles, and even sustain severe bodily injury in pursuit of epistemic ends (intellectually courageous).

If Jefferies's career provides spectators enough information to characterize him broadly as both inquisitive and intellectually courageous, then *Rear Window's* protagonist has met each of the three conditions required to be an intellectually praiseworthy agent. His actions in the film satisfy the distinctive conditions for inquisitiveness and intellectual courage, the inquisitive and intellectually courageous actions are motivated by intrinsic epistemic good, and the intellectual virtues are, finally, stable traits of Jefferies's cognitive character.<sup>3</sup> He is, therefore, intellectually (not morally) praiseworthy.

### **Conclusion**

Various levels and types of conflict are at play in the narrative of *Rear Window*. There is, for one, the obvious conflict between the protagonists, Lisa, Jefferies, and Stella, trying to uncover a murder versus the antagonist, Mr. Thorwald, trying to cover up the murder. There is also the emotional conflict between Jefferies and Lisa that charges many of the characters' interactions with one another. In this essay, however, I submit an additional, subtle opposition that is equally vital to the narrative tension. By reading Jefferies's scopophilia against Aristotelian virtue ethics, I have shown that his looks may often be deemed morally blameworthy insofar as they represent impetuous incontinence (i.e., unreflective pleasure getting the better of reason). At the same time, through an appeal to alternative—or anti-theoretic—responsibilist virtue epistemology, I have sought to show that Jefferies is nevertheless an intellectually praiseworthy agent, his look and character frequently manifesting both virtuous inquisitiveness and virtuous intellectual courage. This tension-creating conflict is not only problematic for spectatorial judgement regarding Jefferies as an agent (i.e., whether to subject him to praise or blame); it also deeply affects the experience itself of viewing the film. In the many, many point-of-view shots that place viewers in the subject position of Jefferies, a spectator is forced, as it were, to partake in this conflict of moral blame and intellectual praise, to weigh truth versus morality, knowledge versus the good life.

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3. Something should be said of Lisa's cognitive character, as well. She, too, could be said to exemplify inquisitive and intellectually courageous actions throughout the film—and, in fact, may very well be the more intellectually courageous of the two, given her venture into Mr. Thorwald's apartment late in the film. It is also quite likely that she manifests different, additional intellectual virtues that Jefferies does not, such as intellectual humility. I have chosen to focus on Jefferies primarily because it is his point-of-view that constitutes much of the film's visual storytelling, and thus his moral blame and intellectual praise that contributes to the oppositional spectatorial judgement that (I am arguing) comes about as part of the viewing experience.



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# **The Call Is Coming from Inside the House: How Queer Christians are Transforming their Faith**

*Sage Andrews*

## **ABSTRACT**

*The relationship between the queer and Christian communities in the United States is ever evolving and contains distinct overlap. In this overlap, queer Christians are transforming their faith communities by challenging the binary that is often presumed to exist between said communities and queer individuals. This challenging is evidenced through pushes for inclusion in the church and for queer understandings of Christian theology. This paper aims to demonstrate this transformative relationship and to show that it is rooted within church tradition. To accomplish these aims, this paper analyzes the published accounts of queer Christian individuals through the lenses of theory, Christian tradition, and biblical text. After presenting these accounts, this paper assesses the impact of this transformative relationship and its implications for the religious landscape.*

Within broad Western society the sacred and the profane are still seen as separate and incompatible spaces. In the United States, this perspective can be seen through the divides between the religious (sacred) and the secular (profane); the impact of this divide is that things which belong to one sphere are seen as being incompatible with the other. This divide is perhaps best illustrated by issues surrounding sexuality and most seen in the context of Western Christianity, as this religion has culturally influenced the United States to the extent that discussions of the religious and the secular often center on the concept of the Christian church and the state. Within this discourse, sex is seen as an aspect of the human condition, whether that be as a gift or a curse—a thing of the body and of earthly life. Due to this, within much of Christianity, sex has been turned into a taboo when it occurs outside of the boundaries of heteronormative marriage, which is seen as the only permissible outlet for sex.

Building on this understanding of sexual relations is the idea that sex is a desire of the flesh, and the flesh is sinful and not of God, a view that has been incorporated into the Christian religious history of the United States through the Puritans.<sup>1</sup> Within this mindset, therefore, sex should only be practiced in certain circumstances. Much of this belief can be understood as deriving from particular interpretations and implementations of Pauline epistles, which encourage marriage as an outlet for sexuality but can be understood as showing a disdain for sex and sexuality as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

As a result, Christianity as an institution has developed the reputation in the eyes of many as having a negative view on sex and as attempting to control it, only permitting sexual expression within very specific outlets.<sup>3</sup> As LGBTQ+ identities relate to sex, sexuality, and gender (and deviate from the permitted expressions) they are viewed as sinful themselves—as things of the world and thus incompatible with Christianity—by many who adhere to more theologically conservative sexual teachings. Thus, within this worldview, Christianity is sacred and the queer is profane. However, over the past several decades, an increasing number of Christian-identified queer people have begun challenging the binary that lies between sex (and by association, sexuality and transgender identity) and faith. In short, queer Christians are engaging in the work of queering their faith, of transforming it. This is not surprising because queer bodies are capable of queering the spaces in which they exist. Queering — a type of transformation that necessitates the breaking down of categories

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1. Kathleen Verduin, “‘Our Cursed Natures’: Sexuality and the Puritan Conscience,” *The New England Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (1983): 222-223.

2. 1 Cor. 7:6-9 NRSV

3. Gunter Runkel, “Sexual Morality of Christianity,” *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 24, no. 2 (1998): 106.

and all binaries in movement towards liberation<sup>4</sup> — can pose a threat to institutional power structures and thus can be interpreted by those who are supported by such power structures as something to be stopped and controlled.

These attempts at control present in and of themselves a different type of transformation. Christianity has often supported attempts to transform queer bodies away from queerness and into heteronormative power structures through means like conversion therapy. This reactionary response to queer bodies in religious spaces demonstrates the transformative power of queerness in religion; the reaction shows how queer presence has a strong potential for effecting transformation. When queer bodies exist in religious spaces, metamorphosis will occur. Today, we can see that much of Western Christianity is being transformed by the presence of queer members who are seeking to transform (queer) the church. This queering of the church is rooted in a rich Biblical and Christian tradition of figures who have sought to challenge the status quo, demonstrating that these changes are coming from within the Christian tradition itself and that the binary between Christian and proudly queer is demonstrably false.

### **Methods**

To examine the ways queer embodied experience is transforming Christianity, I will be looking at primarily qualitative data and interpreting it through the lens of theory. This qualitative data will primarily consist of stories told by individuals who self-describe as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer. These stories narrate their experiences with the Christian faith as it presents in the United States as described by themselves, in this instance particularly in books and articles. The three theorists that I will primarily be using to highlight the importance of embodied and performed religious experience are Judith Butler and her theory on performance, Kimerer L. LaMothe's discussion on the body, and Mary Douglas's theory surrounding purity and dirt. Additionally, I will be contextualizing these experiences with Biblical literature, church tradition, and theology, such as in the work of Chris Glaser.

It is important to recognize that there are multiple different theoretical frameworks for approaching subjects of the body, religion, and queerness. One theoretical framework cannot fully encompass every expression of embodied, religious, or queer experience. Rather than attempting to act as a definitive work, this research stands in conversation with other experiences, analyses, and theories as a voice that is needed, but certainly not the only voice that is needed. Additionally, there are also people who have already previously engaged with the idea of connecting queer religious

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4. Lisa Isherwood, "Queering Christ: Outrageous Acts and Theological Rebellions," *Literature and Theology* 15, no. 3 (2001): 252.

practices to Christian history, tradition, and Scripture. For instance, her article “Queer Nuns and Genderbending Saints: Genderf\*cking Notions of Normativity,” Jessi Knippel analyzes the ethnographic book *Queer Nuns: Religion, Activism, and Serious Parody* by Melissa Wilcox, to draw connections between the drag parody group the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence and gender non-conforming saints<sup>5</sup> such as Wilgefortis, and also to Jesus Christ as a religious figure himself.<sup>6</sup> What differentiates my work from such analyses is the additional focus on how this queer spirituality transforms and “queers” the Christian community in the Western context.

### **Embodied Queer Prophecy**

In her autobiography, *A Gracious Heresy: The Queer Calling of an Unlikely Prophet*, Connie L. Tuttle describes the call to live what she terms a prophetic life and to call upon the church to move towards inclusion for LGBTQ Christians, to appeal “for the community to return to its source. To love God. To do justice.”<sup>7</sup> Here, Tuttle clearly channels imagery of prophets in the Hebrew Bible such as Amos, who proclaimed, “I will not listen to the melody of your hearts. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”<sup>8</sup> Prophets like Amos as depicted in their respective religious texts regularly called for their people to change, to align their actions and hearts with the will of God. Tuttle’s self-proclaimed prophetic identity clearly connects to the idea of queerness as a transformative force within religion and connects her experience as a queer Christian seeking to change the church to a rich lineage of Biblical prophets. Tuttle said of her call to both pastorhood and prophethood:

I wanted to hold the prophetic and the pastoral in dynamic tension. A prophet rises up from the community, stands outside its borders, and calls the people they love to repentance. Contemporary Christian prophets say hard things that need to be said while challenging the Church to be the radical community Christ called into being. I also wanted to be pastoral, to walk with those who were afraid to enter the uncharted territory of God’s grace.<sup>9</sup>

Tuttle attended college at the Presbyterian-affiliated Agnes Scott College in Georgia, and during this time she began to encounter the socially constructed binary between queer and Christian existence. Having primarily lived in progressive neighborhoods and spaces in the preceding years, Tuttle had not anticipated how

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5. Jessi Knippel, “Queer Nuns and Genderbending Saints: Genderf\*cking Notions of Normativity,” *CrossCurrents* 69, no. 4 (2019): 402.

6. Knippel, “QUEER NUNS,” 410.

7. Connie L. Tuttle, *A Gracious Heresy: The Queer Calling of an Unlikely Prophet* (Eugene, Oregon: Resource Publications, 2018), chap. 1.

8. Am. 5:23-24 NRSV

9. Tuttle, *A Gracious Heresy*, chap. 26.

disturbing her presence as an open feminist and lesbian would be to many of her Christian classmates at the college. She was the only open lesbian at her college of which she knew,<sup>10</sup> and so, during this time, Tuttle connected with other lesbians and gay men in off campus environments. On one such occasion, Tuttle danced and flirted with a fellow lesbian and non-practicing Catholic who was surprised to find out that Tuttle desired to be a minister while still being comfortable with herself as a lesbian. She remarked to Tuttle, "...when I came out I figured I had two choices. I could choose to be myself and go to hell. Or not come out and die."<sup>11</sup> By simply existing as a Christian lesbian without attempting to hide either part of herself, Tuttle was defying the presumed binary categories to which many people expected her to conform.

This refusal to sacrifice one identity for the other proved to challenge many people's ideas of both Christianity and queer people. She was queering her faith. Her college classmates did not accept that a lesbian could have authentic Christian faith and felt challenged by Tuttle's presence in their classes.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, many of the queer people Tuttle was around struggled to comprehend someone who, rather than either rejecting the Christian faith of her upbringing or accepting said faith and suppressing herself, chose instead fully to embrace both and view them as non-exclusive identities.<sup>13</sup>

One way to analyze Tuttle's embrace of identities that appeared to others to be in opposition is through the lens of performance. Judith Butler wrote in her book, *Gender Trouble*, "identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its result."<sup>14</sup> Tuttle performed<sup>15</sup> her sexuality and her Christian identity during this time in a way that demonstrated that both categories were socially constructed, and this performance consciously or subconsciously worked to transform each category. Tuttle rejected the idea that she must express her lesbian identity by rejecting her faith or express her faith by rejecting her lesbian identity, as the girl she once danced with had believed.<sup>16</sup> Thus, Tuttle's experiences as a Christian lesbian function within and support the framework of Butler's theory of performativity as she contradicted common ideas about each category's mutual exclusivity and subsequently reshaped them in ways that showed they could be inclusive of each other.

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10. *Ibid.*, chap. 18.

11. *Ibid.*, chap. 19

12. *Ibid.*, chap. 18

13. *Ibid.*, chap. 19

14. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 33.

15. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 173.

16. Tuttle, *A Gracious Heresy*, chap. 19.

In addition to transforming ideas of each identity, Tuttle also subverted larger systems at play by challenging long held, often institutionalized prejudices that sorted queer expression into what Mary Douglas refers to as *dirt*. As elaborated on by Mary Douglas, *dirt* refers to a taboo or pollution, and something being deemed as dirt often stems from a system that sorts things into that which is clean, or holy, and that which is dirty, unholy.<sup>17</sup> Tuttle's very existence challenged the concept that queerness is taboo to Christianity and exposed the falsehood of the idea that queerness was a type of dirt that must be kept from contaminating the church.

By existing as a queer Christian, Tuttle made it apparent that a disdain for queer sexuality and relationships did not necessarily result from Christianity and that being a lesbian did not necessarily result in a disdain for Christianity. Performing both in subversive ways allowed Tuttle to challenge what each of these identities fundamentally were in the eyes of many with whom she interacted and, further, demonstrated a need for re-evaluation of a system that labelled queerness as dirt within the church. And this was all done before she, like Amos, began the act of actively and consciously proclaiming her message through her embodied experience.

Following her experiences at Agnes Scott, Tuttle began attending seminary at Columbia during the fall of 1983 to pursue ministry; very early into her time there, she was called to the Dean of Admission's office under suspicion that she was gay. Rather than deny the suspicions, back down, and continue her education without this knowledge becoming confirmed to the university, Tuttle asserted her lesbian identity. When the dean pointed out that the Presbyterian Church did not ordain homosexuals, Tuttle responded by pointing out that she had been called to ministry by the spirit and felt ready to bring the issue before the denomination's series of course.<sup>18</sup> As knowledge of her queerness spread through campus, she began to deal with encounters from students proclaiming she would go to hell for acting in accordance with her sexuality. While Tuttle did use the "born this way" argument and cited her belief that LGBTQ+ people were made that way by God,<sup>19</sup> an argument many queer theorists have pointed out to be reductive and complacent with the oppressive rhetoric they attempt to combat,<sup>20</sup> she explicitly rebuked the call from her male classmates to be celibate through other rhetorical appeals as well:

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17. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 44.

18. Tuttle, *A Gracious Heresy*, chap. 22.

19. *Ibid*, chap. 25

20. Karma Chávez, "Beyond Complicity: Coherence, Queer Theory, and the Rhetoric of the 'Gay Christian Movement,'" *Text and Performance Quarterly* 24, no. 3/4 (2004): 258.

“...do you assume that if someone is gay they are automatically called to celibacy? I can guarantee I have not been called to celibacy.”<sup>21</sup> Her language of calling again further places her lesbian identity and queer presence into the context of prophecy.

Additionally, while Tuttle was verbally proclaiming her prophecy at seminary, she was also embodying her prophecy. Many Biblical prophets embodied their prophecies, perhaps most well-known among them the prophet Hosea. Hosea took a wife who was unfaithful; this was to embody his prophecy that Israel had been unfaithful to God. Hosea embodied God, and his wife Gomer embodied Israel.<sup>22</sup> Despite adversity from the Presbyterian denomination, the administration of her school, and her classmates, Tuttle chose to make it known that she engaged in what might be considered lesbian, or queer, sexual and romantic acts. In this way, she intentionally embodied her lesbian identity.

While her classmates cited the Bible as proof that God disapproved of her lesbian identity and queer embodiment, Tuttle rebutted their arguments with experience. She still upheld the Bible, citing opposing scriptures to the ones her classmates presented to her, but she also drew on her own experience and call to defend her position.<sup>23</sup> In fields relating to religion and philosophy, bodily experience and reason have often been presented as opposing ends on their own dichotomy. Bodily experience holds the realm of those things which can be intuited, and reason holds the realm of things which can be analyzed and scientifically studied. This debate can be seen between scholars whose work has been impactful in the field of religious studies, such as Kant and Schleiermacher, and readings of their works by other, contemporary theorists,<sup>24</sup> a polarization elaborated on by Kimerer L. Lamothé in her book, *Between Dancing and Writing: The Practice of Religious Studies*.<sup>25</sup> However, this dichotomy does not necessarily exist in a binary state like other binaries that have been previously addressed. The issue between the two, and the issue that lies with their supposedly binary state, can also be seen within religious circles, showing up in debates like the one Tuttle had with her classmates.

By not drawing exclusively on one or the other, but on a combination of both bodily experience and religious text presumed to hold authority, Tuttle combatted the idea that reason and bodily experience are two opposing ends and that only one can be of

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21. Tuttle, *A Gracious Heresy*, chap. 25.

22. Hos. 1:1-2 NRSV

23. Tuttle, *A Gracious Heresy*, chap. 25.

24. Kimerer L. LaMothe, “What Bodies Know about Religion and the Study of It,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76, no. 3 (2008): 576.

25. Kimerer LaMothe, “Chapter 1: The Rift in Religion: René Descartes and Immanuel Kant” and “Chapter 2: Recovering Experience: Friedrich Schleiermacher” in *Between Dancing and Writing: The Practice of Religious Studies* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 22-64.



value to someone. In this situation, she combatted the idea that bodily experience and Biblical reason are two opposing concepts that are incompatible for authentic Christianity. She drew not only on Biblical text and interpretation, but also on her own understandings of topics such as love, consent, and her own refusal to accept the idea that her lesbian identity meant that she was being called to celibacy because such a claim did not match her lived experience and intuition.<sup>26</sup> Her queerness challenged the false binaries of queer versus Christian—and of reason versus bodily experience/knowledge—in a way consistent with the Hebrew prophets acknowledged by Christianity to have spoken God’s will to the people. This connected her queerness to Christian scripture and tradition even as she worked to transform her denomination fundamentally towards a more inclusive and queer understanding of sex and sexuality.

### **Queer Sacrament**

This experiential understanding of queer Christian faith and its connection to Christian tradition goes beyond merely the call to prophecy or call to pastorship some queer Christians may report experiencing. It also extends to other areas of Christianity, in particular the experience of the sacraments. According to the Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology, within the majority of Western Christianity (and in both Catholic and Protestant traditions) a sacrament is accepted as being something that both conveys and exhibits grace. Depending on the particular Christian denomination, the official sacraments may vary, but baptism and the Eucharist are almost always recognized.<sup>27</sup> For those brought up in the church, many of these sacraments additionally function as rites of passage. While some sacraments, such as communion, can occur multiple times throughout a person’s life, others do not (and one’s first communion may still be commemorated). For instance, the rite of baptism often occurs only once with potential rededications or confirmation ceremonies following. And a sacrament being observed on more than one occasion does not necessarily lessen its spiritual significance. For many queer Christians, typical queer rites of passage can function as a sacrament—an act through which divine grace is visibly conveyed, a sacred act of significance for the individual. By understanding how queer rites of passage can function as sacraments to queer Christians, we can see how queer Christians are transforming the concept of outward expressions of a relationship with the divine just as Christian thinkers have been doing throughout the history of the Church.

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26. Tuttle, *A Gracious Heresy*, chap. 25.

27. Ian A. MacFarland, ed., “Sacramentology,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 452-454.

In his book aptly titled *Coming Out as Sacrament*, Chris Glaser notes that the sacraments have not always totaled out in the two-to-seven range (depending on one's denomination, with common sacraments including the Eucharist, baptism, and confirmation), and that the early church may have had up to a hundred and fifty.<sup>28</sup> Glaser locates the sacraments as being part of an embodied experience: something that reminds those who partake in it that spirituality is an in-body or embodied rather than "out-of-body" experience.<sup>29</sup> Keeping these ideas about sacraments in mind, Glaser considers what he calls "unconventional sacraments" and how marginalized groups often have sacraments unique to their circumstances. These groups often have rituals or acts they partake in that are unique to their culture or circumstances and that allow them to embody their spirituality and acknowledge how their lives in and of themselves are expressions of the sacred and the grace of God.<sup>30</sup> Glaser goes on to argue that the rite of Coming Out acts as a sacrament for queer people, a "distinctive rite in which God was present, accessible, and experienced among [us]"<sup>31</sup>; it is something that is unique and divine in its role in the lives of queer people.

An example of coming out as a sacrament can be found in the coming out story of Christian millennial Nikko Espina. In Espina's coming out narrative, he recalls realizing that God loved all of him, including his sexuality, but also how alienated he felt from his parents as he was unable to share a portion of his life with them. He wanted to come out to them in a way that showed how queerness can be healthy and beautiful. Thus, rather than directly coming out, he made the choice to take them on a Lady Gaga tour where she would be singing the song "Born this Way," a song that contains lyrics directly affirming LGBTQ+ identities and experiences that spoke to Espina's experiences. Espina writes of the concert, "Lady Gaga and her message of self-love and self-acceptance was the gift that God bestowed upon me to help me form a deeper love of myself."<sup>32</sup> Through coming out to himself by fully accepting his sexuality and indirectly coming out to his parents, Espina developed a deeper understanding of who he was and of God's love: that he did not need to fear parts of who he was because he was a creation of God. Specifically, Espina uses embodied language: "I am no longer afraid of what is in my blood... I remain standing and continue to strive daily for a cherished relationship with God. Though being

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28. Chris Glaser, *Coming Out as Sacrament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 4.

29. Glaser, *Coming Out as Sacrament*, 5.

30. *Ibid.*, 6.

31. *Ibid.*, 8.

32. Nikko Espina, "In My Blood: Born This Way and Worthy of Love," *Whosoever*, September 26, 2020.

gay was an obstacle for me to love myself, it was never one for the Lord.”<sup>33</sup> This embodied language relates Espina’s experience not only to Glaser’s work, but also to LaMothe’s discussion of experience and embodiment as well.

Espina’s religion is subjective as it is filled with experience, which is highly compatible with Kimerer L. LaMothe’s theories discussing how the scholar’s encounter with a phenomenon being studied is not objective but is filled with experience. LaMothe writes, “Scholars reflect on their *experience* of phenomena—never on the phenomenon “itself”; they experience what their intellectual training primes them to apprehend as “religion.” There is no knowledge of “religion” that can be purely objective (according to some standard of rationality) or wholly true to the phenomenon itself.”<sup>34</sup> By reading Espina’s experience in the framework of LaMothe’s theory, we can see that Espina’s religion is subjective as it is filled with experience. However, Espina is not alone in having a subjective experience of religion.

As LaMothe highlights in the previous quotation, there can be no purely objective experience of a religious thing, but rather all experience is subjective as all experience is bodily,<sup>35</sup> consequently, many elements of religion both communal and institutionalized are as subjective as individual experiences. This is perhaps most easily seen with the sacraments: they are an outward and visible sign of interior grace, an act of sacred and mysterious significance<sup>36</sup> that reflects the presence of God.<sup>37</sup> It is easy to see how Espina’s act of coming out to himself and to his family is sacramental when we recognize his own self reporting of the experience: his account that it brought him deeper into experiencing the presence of God and God’s grace. He experienced the sacred through community with his family and fellow queer people, and through Lady Gaga’s music. As he writes, “I needed to be at that conference so that I could understand God’s foundational love for me as both a believer and member of the LGBT community.”<sup>38</sup> The ability that coming out has to be experienced as a sacrament places many people’s queer experience firmly in the language and context of Christianity. This challenges the boundaries placed on Christian experience and sacrament and thus demonstrates that attempts to transform the church into a more inclusive, queered space (as Lady Gaga called for during the concert Espina attended<sup>39</sup>) are completely within the boundaries of Christian tradition.

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33. Ibid.

34. LaMothe, “What Bodies Know,” 578.

35. Ibid.

36. MacFarland, ed., “SACRAMENTOLOGY,” 452-454.

37. Glaser, *Coming Out as Sacrament*, 8.

38. Espina, “In My Blood.”

39. Ibid.

Considering Glaser's understanding of how coming out functions as a queer sacrament, I would also like to discuss transitioning as a sacrament for transgender, nonbinary, and gender non-conforming individuals. Glaser remarks that coming out, like other sacraments such as baptism and communion, offers a "renewal of life."<sup>40</sup> The same can be said of transitioning. As Jennifer Hasler remarked of transition during her coming out story: "For me, my gender transition was part of God calling me, and throughout the path, God has always walked with me."<sup>41</sup> Transitioning, like coming out, baptism, or any other sacrament, can make one more aware of and more able to experience the presence of God.

Rev. Kalie, intern pastor at First Christian Church of Decatur in Decatur, Georgia, highlights how her transition and coming out transformed her in a spiritual sense and allowed her to further transform the Christian community. She writes:

Before my physicality ever began to change, my transition started with my thoughts and positions of understanding evolving. This caused me to recognize the inconsistencies in my own hermeneutics, especially in reference to the way gender non-conforming people fit into the Creation. When I let the Creation story speak for itself, I was finally able to see my identity as a trans woman, and the identities of every person similar to me: We're expressions of God's creativity and fully embraced in the Creation story.<sup>42</sup>

Not only was her personal understanding of herself transformed by this new understanding of God that transition brought her, but it also transformed how she approached tasks related to her ministry as a pastor, such as her hermeneutics.

Thus, coming out, transitioning, and other potential queer sacraments not explored here demand a response from the community. As Glaser notes, a sacrament is a reciprocal act involving both giving and receiving: the sacred found in the sacrament is given and received among those involved.<sup>43</sup> Thus, just as the individual coming out or transitioning is transformed through the presence of the sacred, so too is the community. When Nikko Espina brought his family to a Lady Gaga concert as a form of indirectly coming out, they experienced the concert and the affirming message delivered by the pop star just as their son did,<sup>44</sup> but they likely would not have received it without him. The importance of community and the individual's role in the community is something shared by both the church and the queer community, and Espina's experience shows a bridge through which these two communities can connect with one another.

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40. Glaser, *Coming Out as Sacrament*, 10.

41. Jennifer Hasler, "A Transgender Meditation on the Beatitudes," *Whosoever*, March 2, 2020.

42. Kalie, "A Transgender Journey Toward Pride: A Creation Theology," *Whosoever*, June 23, 2021.

43. Glaser, *Coming Out as Sacrament*, 10.

44. Espina, "In My Blood."

## **Conclusion**

Through the experiences of queer Christians Connie Tuttle, Nikko Espina, and Rev. Kalie, we see that there is more in common between queer experiences and Christian experiences than there is in conflict. In Galatians 3:28, Paul writes to an unspecified Christian church in Galatia, counseling them that there is no difference in the eyes of God between Jew or gentile, man or woman, enslaved or free person, as each member of the church has been transformed through Christ. The call for a transformation towards inclusivity from queer Christians echoes passages such as this one, reminding the church of the dangers that lie in binaries. The binary between queer and straight, Christian and profane, is slowly broken down with the message that the presence of Christ can dwell anywhere. As testimonies from many queer Christians demonstrate, this call towards inclusivity is not coming from outside. The call is coming from inside the house. This call harkens back and reminds us of past calls for change in the church, from the prophets to the writings of Paul to gender non-conforming saints.<sup>45</sup> And just as sacraments require action from the community,<sup>46</sup> the call for transformation in the church demands response from the church itself. Some congregations move into that call and others reject it, but each response creates a transformation with long-lasting effects for the church that impacts not only the broader community, but individual lives. This queering of the church is not only for abstract theological reasons. Homophobia in the church directly impacted Connie Tuttle's individual seminary experience, and the work by her and others to make her denomination more inclusive changed the landscape for queer Christians not only in the Presbyterian church, but also those wishing to enact change within their own denominations. The call for change has a direct effect on both theological beliefs and the lived-out experiences of those in Christianity.

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45. Knippel "Queer Nuns," 410.

46. Glaser, *Coming Out as Sacrament*, 10.

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# The Creature from the British Isles: The Historical and Contemporary Importance of Thomas Hobbes's Political Philosophy

*Nash Meade*

This piece was originally written in Spring 2021 and has since been revised to reflect more recent developments in responses to COVID-19.

## ABSTRACT

*Political philosophy is of central importance to much of the goings-on of a nation. Even though he is commonly addressed in those works at the forefront of political theory, one man often stands on the outside: Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes is often cited as too pessimistic or too intent on the necessity of authoritarianism. Although neither point is untrue, his work encompasses much more than these two characteristics, often having far more significance than many political theorists are willing to admit. This paper gives an account of Hobbes's historical importance and the reactions that he evoked, specifically in the work of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, before progressing into an examination of his contemporary importance by using his work as a lens through which to analyze the Trump and Biden administrations' respective responses to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Hobbes believed that one of humanity's driving factors is fear and, with the current political and social situations being created by the pandemic, his fear-based political philosophy has become strikingly significant and prevalent once again, which may point to a resurging importance of security—even of the authoritarian kind—in place of freedom when the world is faced with an uncertain future.*



The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries marked an astounding shift in philosophy. Until that point, most philosophy had been commentary on the Greeks, who, in those centuries, were already over two millennia old. In fact, this system was so entrenched that the twentieth century philosopher Alfred Whitehead famously observed that “the safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato” (39). Whether Whitehead’s statement can be considered an accurate description of post-seventeenth century European philosophy is a subject for scholars and historians, but one thing is certain: the seventeenth century saw a dramatic rise in original and diverse thinking.

Among the explosion of newfound thinking in realms such as the philosophy of mind and mathematics was the ever-important development of political philosophy. In the seventeenth century, political philosophy took the form of social contract theory, which was spearheaded by three figures: John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Thomas Hobbes. Like the three Olympian brothers, these three thinkers would form a new foundation of political thought and practice that continues to this day; however, much like those three brothers, two of these figures—Rousseau and Locke—would continue to take precedence over the third, who was relegated to the shadows. Yet, like Hades in the original myth, Hobbes’s importance in the establishment of the de-facto social contract system cannot be overstated, as his work is the origin point for much of the rest of social contract theory even if, by contemporary standards, his pessimism and authoritarian bent leave a bad taste in democratic society’s mouth.

Hobbes’s influence can reasonably be split into two historical sections. The first relates to his influence on social contract theory in the years after the publication of *Leviathan*. As one of the originators of social contract theory and prototypical modern political philosophy, Hobbes’s influence is far-reaching and clear in many of the other works that political theorists hold dear. The second section relates to his modern influence. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic gives us an incredible, present example of Hobbes’s theories in action as governments exert additional authority for the sake of controlling fear, thus affecting notions of liberty and freedom. Unsurprisingly, in times of great turmoil, it is the work of the one who saw fear as a driving factor of humanity that becomes most relevant to the situation. Thus, we will see both the historical and contemporary value of Hobbes’s work, as well as see how, despite the four centuries between its original publication and the present day, *Leviathan* continues to be a work that the majority of the population would prefer to dismiss as pessimistic than to accept as accurate in its description of fear-driven circumstances. Whether or not one agrees with the choices made regarding governance during the pandemic does not detract from the fact that those decisions were clearly influenced by fear, whether that fear be of the loss of political face, economic stability, or more lives than necessary.

## **The Leviathan Spotted**

Thomas Hobbes was born in 1588 to a middle-class family in England (Duncan). He was educated at Oxford before becoming a tutor to the famous Cavendish family, a job he kept for most of his life while he penned his works (Duncan). Although a well-educated man, the majority of his philosophical work was not completed until much later in his life and was most likely prompted by a meeting and subsequent conversations with Galileo (Duncan). Much of his political philosophy was centered around the emerging British Civil War, which began the same year that he published his first work of political philosophy, *De Cive* (1642). Although Hobbes is now famous—or, perhaps, infamous—for his works of political philosophy, the reality is that he was an open thinker who dove into many subjects, including the emerging divide between empiricism and rationalism, the philosophy of language, and (as it would be now termed) the philosophy of mind. His work in these areas laid a foundation for many of the thinkers who would follow him, as they strove alternatively to refute his work or to build upon it.

Although all of Hobbes's work is incredibly important and worth discussing, his political views are the focus of this paper. As stated in the introduction, Hobbes was one of the first truly modern political theorists, and, as such, he influenced nearly every single one of those authors referred to as “social contract theorists.” One of the starkest contrasts between his thought and that of other political theorists was in how he viewed the formation of government. Hobbes viewed government as something built out of fear and yet also inevitable. As he now famously decreed in his magnum opus, *Leviathan*, mankind finds itself, when not functioning in a society, in a state of “every man against every man” (76); that is, an individual's most basic instinct is to believe that everything in the world is out to get them, a belief which found its roots in Hobbes's own materialism. In a world based entirely in matter, the basic instincts of humanity would necessarily be animalistic, and humans would therefore resort to violence to get ahead and perceive everything other than themselves as a potential threat. If everyone is living in constant fear, then everyone wants to get rid of it. The way to get rid of that fear is to create a society bounded by rules that all persons follow; thus, Hobbes believed that civil society—or, rather, a government—is a natural consequence of this basic fear-instinct in man. Within this system, the “bounded by rules” is the most complicated part, as it raises a myriad of questions, such as, Who keeps the rules? Who makes the rules? How do societies agree on the rules? These questions led Hobbes to define two different fundamental structures of society: the contract and the sovereign.

### *The Social Contract*

The social contract is, perhaps, the most important concept in all of Hobbes's work, as it formed the basis of an entire subset of political philosophy. The contract is derived from Hobbes's two fundamental laws of nature. The first law is that described above: the state of persons existing “all against all.” Hobbes himself explains

this law in *Leviathan* as one “by which a man is forbidden to do that which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same, and to omit that by which he thinketh it may be best preserved” (79). In more common language, this is a state of fear, in which every person will not willingly commit actions that are self-harming, yet simultaneously expects the intent to harm from others. Thus, people will act in a way which leads to their self-preservation. The second law of nature defines the contract within the terms of his natural law. As Hobbes writes:

From this fundamental law of nature, by which men are commanded to endeavor peace, is derived this second law: that a man be willing, when others are so too, as far forth as for peace and defense of himself he shall think it necessary, to lay down his right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men as he would allow other men against himself. (80)

Again, in simpler terms, the second law of nature is that people, in seeking a state in which they do not have to be afraid of everything, will attempt to arrive at a mutual agreement regarding what is “rightful” to each person. The contract, then, is whatever is mutually agreed upon to be restricted or granted to the general populace. However, a contract is fundamentally worthless without a type of enforcer, which necessitates the second aspect of government and society: the sovereign.

#### *The Sovereign*

In a radical shift from his contemporaries, Hobbes rejected any notion of “divine right” or patriarchal necessity in government. In Hobbes’s view, the sovereign’s powers are granted completely by the people and by their mutual agreement to the contract. However, Hobbes also recognized that sovereigns will often assume more and more power after their initial power and rights as sovereign are bestowed, becoming, as the name *Leviathan* suggests, a living beast. In his words:

This [the giving up of natural rights in contract] is the generation of that great LEVIATHAN, or rather (to speak more reverently) of that *Mortal God* to which we owe, under the *Immortal God*, our peace and defense. For by his authority, given him by every particular man in the commonwealth, he hath the use of so much power and strength conferred on him that by terror thereof he is enabled to conform the wills of them all to peace at home and mutual aid against their enemies abroad. (109)

The sovereign—the body of government (an idiom that we trace back to Hobbes) and its person-head—is but an artificial being of great power, designated via contract to protect the citizenry through all forms of governmental action.

These two notions—the social contract and the sovereign—that Hobbes describes are the foundation of all other social contract treatises. Every other social contract thinker would either agree with or refute his initial definition of the contract, the laws of nature on which his contract is based, or the sovereign. This has, in turn,

lead to the modern branching concepts of good government that contrast with those theorized by Plato and Aristotle nearly two millennia before, even if some of these forms of government (such as democracy and tyranny) overlap. Although Hobbes delves into much greater detail regarding different modes of contract and the ways in which sovereigns act, this basic overview of the two terms serves as grounding enough for a discussion of how other contract theories differ from his original notions.

### **The Dissenters**

Although Hobbes collected a multitude of dissenters during and after his time, his most important dissenters—within the realm of political philosophy—are other social contract theorists. Similar to how a distaste for Freud’s theories of the unconscious led to much of modern psychology, distaste for Hobbes’s work led to the formulation of a large swathe of modern political philosophy. Perhaps the most famous of Hobbes’s dissenters is John Locke, whose name bears special significance within the conceptions of civil society held in the United States. His impact is such that he is almost directly quoted in the Declaration of Independence, which proclaims that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed with by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Locke himself asserted this idea nearly a century earlier in the second of his *Two Treatises of Government*, stating “...and Reason, which is that law [of Nature], teaches all Mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty, or Possessions” (271). Born forty-four years after Hobbes, Locke also found himself entangled in political turmoil across multiple nations thanks to his justification for the Glorious Revolution in England and the Netherlands (Uzgalis). While Hobbes was dealing with the internal turmoil of Britain and the question of how to prevent other nations from deteriorating into a state of civil war, John Locke was embroiled in the question—and ongoing political squabbles surrounding the question—of what qualified as legitimate government.

Locke’s most distinctive features as a philosopher are also what radically separate him from Hobbes’s work. Principally, Locke viewed authoritarianism with disdain, whereas Hobbes—though he never stated that he was pro-authoritarianism specifically—had fewer problems with authoritarianism as a form of government (Locke 276). Additionally, Locke argued for a fundamentally less centralized government, while Hobbes was in favor of a highly centralized government. These differing views are easily understood when each philosopher’s historical context is recalled. Hobbes watched as a weakened monarch was overthrown during the chaos and destruction of the British Civil War, while Locke spent his years watching despotic kings do damage to England, an experience that led him to participate in working to overthrowing England’s king and having parliament established as England’s primary governing body (“Glorious Revolution”). Given these respective experiences, each man’s perspective is understandable.

In addition to their diverging views on government, Locke was very explicit in his disagreement with Hobbes regarding how the natural world operates. Locke was unwilling to accept that all of nature is particularly violent and instead believed the light of reason was strong enough to prevent such horror. As he phrases it in his *Two Treatises*, “The *State of Nature* has a Law of Nature to govern it, which obliges everyone: And Reason, which is that Law, teaches all Mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty, or Possession” (271). Most importantly, this perspective led Locke to dissent from Hobbes’s view of how government is formed or what its role must be. Unlike Hobbes, Locke believed that the governance is not to be seen as absolute because it is impossible for it to be any less human than the citizenry that grants it its power. Locke explains that “*Absolute monarchs* are but Men, and if Government is to be the Remedy of those Evils [stealing, murder, etc.]. Which necessarily follow from Men being Judges in their own Cases, and the State of Nature is therefore not to be endured, I desire...” (276). Thus, he noted that even centralized government will be fallible and endeavored to prove that, by contrast, a government with less power and more participation from the citizenry is a better safeguard against the dangers of the “State of Nature.” The social contract then, for Locke, is something that is much more participatory and volitional. Hobbes, on the other hand, although believing contract does require some volition, thought that contracts—and the governments that spring from them—will be necessitated by the state of fear endemic to human nature. In other words, Locke sees legitimate government as only coming about by reasoned contractual agreement by all parties, while Hobbes holds that government can come about by necessity.

Hobbes and Locke also held starkly different beliefs regarding what operates as a legitimate government. Specifically, Locke believed in the role of the majority, which is effectively non-existent in Hobbes’s work. Again, Locke predominantly focused on decentralizing government power, while Hobbes was interested in the reverse (Uzgalis). In fact, Hobbes believed that there are situations where the sovereign or government must take additional power for the sake of the society, even if the citizenry has some objections to it (*Leviathan*, 127). Locke would see such assumption of power as a warning bell that the government is falling into despotism or tyranny. The two men do, however, agree that government—and that rational contract through government—is one of the best ways to prevent war.

Another major social contract theorist to distance himself from Hobbes was Jean Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau arguably marks an ideological midway point between Locke and Hobbes. Locke believed in the power of the people and in a limited form of government, while Hobbes attributed less power to the people and saw the sovereign as an acting figure that needed to be powerful. Rousseau threads the needle of this debate, agreeing with Hobbes on the laws of nature but rejecting the sovereign altogether, going

even further than Locke on the issue. Rousseau, like Hobbes, believed that people were naturally free and that this freedom could lead to common dangers, including the danger of giving up such freedom to the wrong ends, such as a despotic government (*The Social Contract*, 64–65). Although he is not nearly as adamant as Hobbes about this freedom leading to a situation of all persons being self-interested and violent, Rousseau does recognize that the freedom—and its attendant possibilities—are there.

Where Rousseau is unique among the contract theorists is in his borderline proto-Marxist conception of the role of government. Rousseau believed that it was of such importance for individuals to be a part of the legislative and executive operations that no sovereign or representative system of government could ever accurately portray the will of the people (Bertram). This directly contradicted Hobbes who was certain that the sovereign was the most important aspect of the social contract. Hobbes saw a contract without a sovereign as void, a state he believed would lead, eventually and inevitably, to the state of all against all once more.

Although both Locke and Rousseau held their own ideas of what the social contract should be, Hobbes's influence in their thought is clear. Hobbes invited thinkers into a full revolution of political and philosophical thought, leading to branches of the social contract theory and eventually the buds of current political theory. Of course, as nations have stabilized in the last couple of centuries and the “democratic peace,” as it is called, has taken shape, the discussion of “fear” and “sovereigns” has fallen out of favor. However, Hobbes's theories, like the great Leviathan after which he named his book, are only resting deep beneath the surface of current discourse. With the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 to the now-slowing Omicron COVID variant of 2022, the Leviathan has awakened once more, and its serpentine body slithers across the entire world in the form of this invisible virus.

### **The Return of the Leviathan**

The years 2020 and 2021 have given much of the world unprecedented experience with many of Hobbes's original political theories. Although not every nation has dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic in the same way or experienced a serious uptick in cases, many countries are continuing to deal with the pandemic on the political level. Everything from travel embargoes to the outright halt of economic trade have been put on the table, to varying degrees of success. What is most important in the context of our discussion, however, is how the actions of these various governments function within the context of Hobbes's theories. Although most of the Western world operates under a democratic system that more closely resembles the ideas of Locke and Rousseau, the growing pandemic caused a rapid, albeit subtle, shift towards a loss of democratic functions for the sake of allowing governments more active and overarching control to quell the virus and the fear associated with it.



As we have previously discussed, Hobbes—unlike his contemporaries—saw fear as the driving force of human action, political or otherwise. Thus, from a Hobbesian perspective, when a pandemic created by a highly infectious novel strain of a virus started to spread quickly, fear became the driving motivation of humanity once again. The push and pull of fear and security can be seen in nearly every societal and governmental response to the pandemic; however, that tug-of-war is particularly clear in the United States for one very important reason: Presidential succession. Unlike most nations during this time, the United States experienced a transition of power during the pandemic, which gave the world a display of two different approaches to the pandemic, approaches that illustrate a range of actions that can be taken in pursuit of balancing fear and security in cases such as these.

Indeed, the approaches of former President Trump and current President Biden create two intriguing responses to the political theories of Hobbes. Before progressing into a comparison of the features of those responses, it must be noted that President Biden has succeeded President Trump, meaning that his office is operating with not only more information concerning the virus but also plans that were set in motion by the previous administration, leading to an even more interesting discussion of the ideas of Hobbes. It is also important to note that this is a discussion purely of the governmental response; the response of the citizenry is a non-factor here.

### **The Trump Administration: The Only Thing to Fear is Fear Itself**

The response of the Trump administration through the majority of 2020 was sporadic and unfocused. This, of course, is to be expected from an initial reaction to an unknown virus. What is most important to our discussion, however, is that the initial response was within the purview of powers of an American Presidential administration. Although a travel embargo was placed on China and a reduction of domestic and international travel was strongly encouraged, the hypotheticals were often downplayed, for better or worse (AJMC). Moving past some of the extreme rhetoric that arose from the political scene, the plan was clear: control the panic. The administration played it “cool,” if you will, neither shifting between different measures each day nor overstating the clearly dangerous aspects of the virus. This strategy only partially worked, but the plan, seemingly, was to take each day at a time and then consider the next steps.

It was not until the two-week national lockdown in March 2020 that the actions of the administration expanded into any additional powers (AJMC; “Federal Response to Covid-19”). At this time, Congress imposed a national lockdown, which, although a reasonable move amid a pandemic, is beyond its purview as a governing body as it is not mentioned within the powers bestowed to it in the United States Constitution (Article 1, Section 8). As Hobbes expected nearly five centuries ago, fear showed itself to be a driving factor of the movement of government, causing it to behave in ways in which it

was not initially intended. The decision for the lockdown was informed predominantly by the perceived fear and danger of the virus, and much of the populace was willing to allow Congress to impose more control for the sake of security at the time.

After the lockdown, the discussion evolved into whether a national mask mandate should be imposed. Although this conversation is still ongoing with the Biden administration, the Trump administration decided not to impose one, instead giving it to the states to mandate (which then went to individual counties in some states). The reasoning was simple: it is not in the authority of the federal government to impose such a mandate. In this case, the administration stood *against* Hobbes, deciding not to take additional centralized power to thwart the threat, *even though* the populace seemed more than ready to agree to such a contract<sup>1</sup>, which is, perhaps, a rare occurrence in the history of politics.

### **The Biden Administration: Walking the Wire**

Since the Biden administration began its work in January 2021, one thing has become abundantly clear: the virus is still a serious threat. Although vaccines have rolled out at a rapid pace and the virus itself seems to be weakening, it is still being regarded as something dangerous and to be feared. Whether such rhetoric is accurate or not, it has ignited conversations on two topics that are relevant to Hobbes's theories: mandatory vaccination and the release of power.

Mandatory vaccination has become a hot topic since the middle of 2021 with the rollout of more readily available vaccines. Like the Trump administration, the Biden administration (along with most major businesses) has recognized that making vaccination mandatory falls outside of its jurisdiction and has relied on "strongly encouraging" individuals to take the vaccine once it is available for their age group. As with a mask mandate, however, this action is entirely rooted in the question of whether individual freedom should be given up for the sake of national security. It may be safer for the entire nation if every individual took the vaccine, but from the standpoint of political theory, we must be concerned with questioning the type of action the government has taken against its people if safety measures are forced upon them in the name of security.

The release of power is, however, the more pressing and relevant question. Among some groups of people in the United States, conversations regarding the "eternal pandemic" have become mainstream (Greshko; Wallace-Wells). A mask mandate that will continue indefinitely, a vaccine that must be regularly reapplied for new strains, and other similar precautions are all slowly being mentioned in newspapers and on news sites

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1. Consolidated research from Pew over the last two years of the pandemic shows that the majority of American were in favor of restrictions and lockdowns (all things imposed by Congress beyond their official authority), which includes mask mandates, during the early months (i.e., Trump administration) of the pandemic (Pew).



(Cline). Although this question does not initially impress as being entirely on the political radar, these thoughts and ideas are among those that Hobbes saw as possible several centuries ago. In situations where a government must take additional control for the sake of security, the promise of it giving back this power is never guaranteed. What will be done in the name of security? What will be done out of fear? These questions have become increasingly relevant as recent moves to crackdown on “vaccine misinformation” has led the government to consider censorship through social media platforms—a move that is, unquestionably, well outside of the federal government’s legislative and executive authority.<sup>2</sup> However, as Hobbes would ask, is it governmental overreach, or a necessary breach of contract for the security of the citizens? Answering such questions as those posed in this paragraph is less important for the purposes of this paper than the single conclusion to which these questions point: Hobbesian philosophy has not lost its relevancy in the twenty-first century and, on the contrary, will continue to increase in relevancy as governmental responses to the pandemic continue.

### **Conclusion**

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted several of the cracks in America’s political philosophy and the dominant democratic philosophies of Locke and Rousseau in more ways than one. From the incredibly slow process of representative government to the ever-increasing political divide between parties and their respective ideologies, the pandemic has made it clear that, as much as we want to consider ourselves as having evolved beyond or above such matters as those of which Hobbes spoke four centuries ago, we have not. As of early 2022, the political philosophy of Hobbes is still strikingly valuable to our discussions of government and its reach in the face of something which instills fear.

Although Hobbes’s is a name that seems rarely to find its way into current conversation, his work is clearly imperative to many modern modes of thought. This paper has solely discussed his influence on political philosophy, but his work in multiple areas, including the philosophy of mind, still finds relevance today. His impact on early modern European thought cannot be overstated, but his current influence, especially during a pandemic, is also important. Even as politicians mull over the many possibilities that are presented to them in the face of this virus, their views, unwittingly, align or disagree with his work. This, perhaps, is the beauty of all philosophy—that one can unwittingly espouse a philosophical work in the name of something else. Every time a politician or pundit employs such catch-all phrasing as “for our safety,” “for the security of the nation,”

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2. Per the 10<sup>th</sup> amendment to the United States Constitution, any authority not explicitly given to Congress is given to the States. National lockdown, even in the case of a public health emergency, is not a power given to Congress, thereby making it beyond their purview as a governing body (The Bill of Rights).

or “to neutralize the threat,” our minds ought to drift towards Hobbes and his great Leviathan coming out of the sea. The social contract theorists of centuries ago considered their words and the words of their sovereigns carefully for the sake of seeing whether the Leviathan was real or simply a Loch Ness monster hiding beneath the waters of political philosophy. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, we ought to consider the work of the social contract theorists and the words of our own governments carefully, lest we fail to see the attempted overreach of governments, leading societies to be carried into the sea in the *Leviathan’s* unyielding, tyrannical tentacles.

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*The Creature from the British Isles: The Historical and Contemporary  
Importance of Thomas Hobbes's Political Philosophy*

# **Mothers, Daughters, and Vampires: The Female Sexual Dilemma in Eighteenth-Century Vampire Poetry**

*Ashley M. Quinn*

## **ABSTRACT**

*Early vampiric poetry often included two female characters: a mother and a daughter. Despite the prevalence of the inclusion of a mother within these poems, scholarship on the literary vampire fails to give that inclusion proper attention. This paper examines how the mother's relationship with her daughter in these poems connects the liminal space of the vampire with a woman's involuntary position in a restrictive place between unrestrained sexual desire and the restrained social codes and conventions of eighteenth-century society, exposing the powerless position women are in when it comes to their identity construction in relation to sexuality. The interactions between the mother, daughter, and vampire in "Der Vampir" (by Heinrich August Ossenfelder) and "The Bride of Corinth" (by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe) highlight how female sexuality is chosen either by a mother for her daughter or by a vampire or vampiric nature. Exploring these poems encourages a conversation about the construction of female sexuality and the forces that exert influence over that development.*

Criticism surrounding vampire literature, specifically vampire poetry, consistently addresses the role given to female characters. In the majority of these poems, the female characters are depicted as the maiden victims of the vampire. However, early vampire poetry features another female character: the maiden victim's mother. Many of the scholarly works surrounding the literary vampire focus on the literary vampires from the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. Little can be found pertaining to the literary vampire from the eighteenth century, and, therefore, little can be found addressing the inclusion of the mother/daughter relationship present in early vampire poetry. The mother/daughter relationship is absent after the nineteenth century (Michelis 16), so to investigate its significance we must look at its inclusion in the poems "Der Vampir" and "The Bride of Corinth," both penned in the eighteenth century. The mother/daughter relationship in "Der Vampir" and "The Bride of Corinth" connects the vampire's occupation of the liminal space between life and death with the female's involuntary position within the liminal space between unrestrained sexual desire and the restraining social codes and conventions of eighteenth-century society, exposing women's powerless position when it comes to their own sexuality. Ultimately, this analysis will demonstrate that female sexuality, as seen in these poems, is developed either by a mother or by a vampire.

### **The Vampire from Myth to Literature**

It is easy to find criticism that mentions or discusses the countless tales about the vampire's ancestry. Indeed, even the word "vampire" has an uncertain origin. In popular culture, it is believed that the vampire itself and its name comes from Hungary or Transylvania. However, etymological and linguistic studies show that the word "vampire" in European languages "refer[s] to the Slavic superstitions," and "the wide dissemination of the term and its extensive use in the vernacular follows the outburst of vampirism in Serbia" (Wilson 583). Despite these studies, critics such as Jan L. Perkowski defend the idea that the vampire's origins (both linguistically and mythologically) cannot be determined. Even the Slavic explanation may have come from older ideas in the Middle East. The origin of the vampire is further complicated because vampire-like-creatures can be found in all cultures. Though it cannot be determined where the vampire originates or where the word "vampire" originates, "the earliest recorded uses of the word appear in French, English, and German literature" (Laycock 1).

The definition of the word "vampire" is also varied. Popular culture has us imagine the fictional Dracula as the outline of a vampire; an evil, sharp-toothed, shape-shifting, undead monster. The popular image of vampires similar to Dracula makes it difficult to imagine vampires that do not originate from the supernatural or

folklore beings; however, Bruce A. McClelland's *Slayers and Their Vampires: A Cultural History of Killing the Dead* argues that the Slavic word "vampir" had altogether different connotations when it was first used. In the eleventh century it was the "label for an individual who either belonged to a specific group or practiced a particular belief or ritual" (31). More specifically, vampir was used for certain people within the Slavic community who continued to practice certain pagan rituals (sacrificial rites and rituals associated with reincarnation) deemed unacceptable to Christians (79). Thus, Early vampires were either pagans or heretics who occupied a lower social position.

Throughout the years this definition of vampirism started to be connected with Satan and evil. Before the fourteenth century, vampirism was associated with real individuals who failed to convert properly to Christianity. The vampire as representative of a real individual started to change into the folkloric monster after the fourteenth century, at which time it began to represent all that was presumed to be unnaturally dangerous or anathematic (80-83). Many stories are told about the history of the vampire, but, as McClelland makes clear, the "true" history of the vampire cannot be attributed to one culture, especially when the definition of a vampire evolved over the years. McClelland does suggest that despite the ambiguity surrounding the history of the vampire, "failure to recognize the politico-religious roots of the term is a serious blind spot" (82), a statement that reveals the vampire's position between heathen religion and Christianity. This religious liminal space is exploited in vampire poetry, making it a vital element in the mother/daughter relationship found within "Der Vampir" and "The Bride of Corinth."

### **Female Sexuality**

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, male sexual desire and activity were seen as natural and innate. By contrast, female sexual desire and pleasure were seen as pathologically deviant, meaning women with a sexual desire and/or women who gained pleasure from sexual activity were believed to have diseased minds and bodies (Drawmer 39). As a result, women were expected to practice chastity, a behavior considered essential and natural to the female sex (Jones 30). Women were not meant to be sexual, but more importantly they also could not *want* to have sex. Instead, they needed to be suspicious and vigilant in maintaining their chastity, which could only be achieved through the avoidance of temptation. Since avoidance of temptation was integral to the practice of inherently feminine chastity, indiscretion was the woman's fault (Chico 178). A woman's sexual status was assigned to her according to her ability to regulate her own sexual desire through reinforcing her wish to remain chaste and compelling sexual restraint in their male suitors.



This obsession with the female sexual reputation led to the development of new social codes and conventions intended to make sexual purity highly visible. These new social codes and conventions pertained to dress, comportment, conversation, and even physical responses such as flushing or blushing (Kittredge 6). Flushing and blushing were often compared to mercury rising in a thermometer, indicating that the woman had fevered spirits, was sexually available, or had overall heightened sensibilities (Castle 26). If a woman dared to break these social codes and conventions, she was exposing herself to humiliation and such epithets as whining spinster, evil murderess, or decaying prostitute (Kittredge 1). While the eighteenth-century social codes and conventions insisted that a woman was supposed to remain chaste, they also insisted she was supposed to attract a male suitor, get married, and produce children. As it is not possible to remain chaste *and* birth children, the social codes and conventions were unattainable. However, conforming to them remained vitally necessary for a woman who did not want to be ostracized from society.

### **Mothers, Daughters, and Vampires**

#### *“The Vampire”*

Heinrich August Ossenfelder (1725-1801) has long been considered the first poet to introduce the vampire to readers of creative literature. Commissioned in 1748 by Christlob Mylius, the editor of the scientific journal *Der Naturforscher* ‘*The Natural Scientist*,’ Ossenfelder wrote a poem with a vampire theme to be published alongside an article being released concerning vampiric reports. Limited critical attention has been given to Ossenfelder and his poem “Der Vampir” (“The Vampire”) aside from a few negative reviews in 1887 and 1900 (Crawford 4). Currently, a few scholarly works exist that address Ossenfelder and his poem within the context of the overall history of the literary vampire. One such text, *The Vampire: A New History* (2018), suggests that “Der Vampir” had only a minuscule effect when it was first received by the literary community; however, it is gaining recognition hundreds of years later because of its unique presence in a scientific journal and its explicit avoidance of “scientific or medical debate and theological or philosophical dilemmas” (Groom 130). That Ossenfelder chose to create this literary figure in a time when its existence was under extreme scrutiny within the scientific, theological, and philosophical communities makes the poem of interest.

Ossenfelder presents the literary vampire in an anacreontic poem, linking the literary vampire with seduction and drinking. From what at first seems an unlikely pair emerges the defining qualities of this creature. One such quality, eroticism, is an element that had not been associated with the vampire of folklore, and Ossenfelder would have been well aware of his change in the mythology. His poem does draw on some influences,

most noticeably “directly from the Arnod Paole case, via the marquis d’Argens’ account of Johann Flückinger’s report, which had just been reprinted in Mylius’ journal” (Groom 130). Flückinger’s report stated that the Serbia Hajduks (peasant-soldiers) were exhuming bodies because they believed the corpses were returning from their graves at night to climb on people and kill them through an unknown twenty-four-hour illness. In order to stop these corpses, the Serbia Hajduks were driving wooden stakes through the bodies and then burning them to ash (Butler 27). Flückinger’s report, and others like it, do not involve any indications of sexual or erotic behavior being exhibited by the undead. By contrast, Ossenfelder creates the literary vampire that is seductive, sexual, and erotic, an image that is still prevalent in contemporary depictions of the literary vampire and deviates significantly from “real” reports of vampirism as seen in Flückinger’s report.

“Der Vampir,” narrated by a male vampire, chronicles a conversation between the vampire and a female victim. The narrator attempts to seduce this young woman through his words and a proposal of rape-like actions. Similar to some eighteenth-century seductive poetry, the female character does not respond to the vampire within the poem. Her response must be read between the lines, as the only information we are given about her is by the narrator. Despite Groom’s assertion that Ossenfelder avoided addressing theological dilemmas in “Der Vampir,” a strong religious presence makes itself known in the poem. This religious presence, combined with the erotic elements, creates a text in which the liminal space between unrestrained sexual desire and eighteenth-century restraints of social codes and conventions can be explored. Most noticeably, the female victim, Christiane, is pulled between unrestrained sexual desire (represented by the vampire) and the restraining social codes and conventions (represented by her mother and Christianity), essentially forcing her into a position in which she is unable to control her own sexuality.

### **The Restraining Social Codes and Conventions**

The poem begins with the vampire speaking about Christiane:

My dear young maiden believeth  
Unbending, fast and firm  
In all the furnished teachings  
Of her ever-pious mother;  
As people along the Tisza  
Believe staunchly and heyduck-like  
In vampires that bring death. (1-7)<sup>1</sup>

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1. The translation used is from Heide Crawford’s essay, “The Cultural-Historical Origins of the Literary Vampire in Germany.”

In these first lines of the poem, the vampire compares the daughter's belief in her mother's teachings to a belief in vampires held by a group of people who live along the Tisza, a river in Hungary. The vampire says the daughter's belief is "unbending, fast and firm" (2), indicating a stubborn temperament. Moreover, she believes in her "ever-pious" (4) mother's "furnished teachings" (3). The vampire's tone suggests that he is frustrated with the daughter's belief and the source of that belief: her mother. As the mother is "ever-pious," it seems appropriate to assume that the mother's teachings are those of religion and morality. It is unknown to the reader how the daughter feels about her mother's teachings, but as a character who is only defined by her religious faith, I would argue that readers are meant to surmise that the daughter adheres to the religious rules set forth by the older generation. The language used in the second line hints at her obedience through the word "unbending," which indicates that the daughter cannot be swayed from her beliefs. Furthermore, the use of the word "pious" to describe the mother forces an association between the daughter and the devoutly religious.

Additionally, through Christiane's religious name as well as the introduction of a metaphor between religious belief and superstitious belief, the narrator exposes his own position towards religion. The connection between the poem's victim and Christianity is strengthened through her name: "Just wait now, dear Christiane" (8). The name "Christiane" is plausibly derived from the Latin *christiana*, "which means 'of a Christian' and from *christiantias*, the Latin word for Christianity" (Crawford 6). Being the daughter of a devoutly religious woman, Christiane is literally from a Christian, and her Christian mother acts as the conduit leading Christiane into Christianity through her teachings. The vampire compares the daughter's strict obedience to and association with Christianity to the Hungarian peoples' belief in vampires. Christiane strongly believes in her mother's Christian moral principles like the Hungarian people "believe staunchly and heyduck-like/In vampires" (6-7). Believing staunchly suggests that the Hungarian people believe in a loyal, committed, and/or strong manner. In her essay, "The Cultural-Historical Origins of the Literary Vampire in Germany," Heide Crawford connects the Hungarian references ("Tisza," "heyduck-like," and "Tockay") to superstition. While this conclusion fits with the German confusion surrounding vampires, it seems strange for the vampire narrator to be referring to a belief in vampires as superstition; however, the belief in vampires was considered a superstition at the time the poem was written. Regardless of the reason that the narrator suggests that vampires are a superstition, the importance of his metaphor is that his comparison reveals his opinion that Christianity is just another superstitious belief. The metaphor also makes it evident that Christiane and the Hungarian people hold strongly to these superstitions and will not easily forsake them.

Christiane's strong connection and dedication to religion set her up to be (like her mother) a representative of the restraining social codes and conventions of society that prohibit unrestrained sexual desire. Therefore, it comes as no surprise when the narrator indicates that Christiane does not want to be involved with him. He tells her, "Just wait now, dear Christiane, / You do not wish to love me" (8-9). The significance of these lines can be found in Christiane's lack of voice and the narrator's familiarity with Christiane. The vampire's words "Just wait now" imply an action or response from Christiane. Considering that he follows the command for her to wait with the declaration that she does not want to love him, it is justifiable to presume that Christiane was either attempting to leave the narrator or she was speaking to him. The narrator's demand for Christiane to wait is the beginning of an interaction that does not allow Christiane to have a voice or to have control over her own body.

Christiane's lack of power is further complicated by the suggestion that the relationship between the narrator and Christiane was initiated prior to the poem. As Crawford notes, the vampire uses the German diminutive form of Christiane's name, *Christianchen* (6). The German diminutive form of a name communicates cuteness, informality, or affection. It is entirely possible that an emotional connection between the narrator and Christiane exists, which, along with Christiane's lack of love, suggests that the narrator is (or was) Christiane's unsuccessful suitor (Crawford 6). We are aware that Christiane is a chaste woman because the narrator refers to her as "my dear young maiden," indicating that Christiane is an unmarried virgin. As we are unable to know for certain why Christiane does not reciprocate the narrator's love, we must draw conclusions from the little we know about her from the poem. While it seems logical to assume that Christiane's decision to reject the narrator is an active choice that she is making, I would argue it is not. Crawford approaches Christiane's rejection as being the result of her religious faith, and, if we see Christiane as a product of her mother's teachings and the restrained social codes and conventions of society, we must also see that her religious chastity will not allow her to have a sexual nature or intent. Even though there is limited evidence to determine whether Christiane's rejection is entirely her own choice, we can conclude that Christiane's sublimation of her sexuality is in part determined by her religious faith and morality, which leaves Christiane denying the desires of the body in order to uplift the soul.

### **Unrestrained Sexual Desire**

If Christiane represents restrictive social codes and conventions, then the vampire represents unrestrained sexual desire. It is quite possible that his unrestrained sexual desire is the result of being an undead creature missing a soul. The suggestion that

a vampire is a creature without a soul is not a fresh concept. They have almost always been considered reanimated corpses (Fleischhack 63); therefore, writers and scholars have surmised that, when the body is reanimated after death, it is missing an essential element: the soul. Evidence within “Der Vampir” that suggests the soullessness of the vampire is sparse; however, the narrator’s proposed actions make it quite obvious that he has an overpowering and dangerous sexual desire for Christiane. The lust the narrator has for Christiane and his opinion that her religious beliefs are a superstition strongly suggest his position as a body without a soul; he can only think of and desire things of the flesh: Christiane, blood, and sex. Christiane’s rejection, prompted by her religious ideals and sexuality, anger the narrator, an anger that surfaces through rape-like actions the narrator plots to direct towards Christiane. The narrator tells Christiane,

On you I take revenge  
And in Tockay today  
Will drink you into a vampire.  
And when softly you are sleeping  
From your rosy cheeks  
Will I the color suck.  
Then will you be startled  
When I kiss you thus  
And as a vampire kiss:  
When you start to tremble  
And weakly, like one dying,  
Sink down into my arms... (10-21)

Christiane’s lack of romantic attention for the vampire leads him to “take revenge” on her, and his revenge is steeped in sexual language that implies rape and murder. It is clear that the narrator intends to turn Christiane into a vampire because he tells her that he “will drink [her] into a vampire” and suck the color from her cheeks. Unlike the folkloric vampire’s unerotic and animalistic feeding and/or creation of another vampire, the narrator’s feeding and creation is a sexual experience. Christiane will be sleeping during the initiation of this encounter, unquestionably unable to give consent. When Christiane awakens she will be startled; however, the narrator suggests that she will tremble and sink into his arms when he kisses her, indicating—to him—sexual enjoyment.<sup>2</sup>

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2. The narrator is ignoring the double meaning of Christiane’s trembling and sinking. Her weakened state could be the result of his vampiric attack rather than a sexual response.

While it is unsettling to contemplate Christiane enjoying a nonconsensual experience that stems from rejection, the poem does not display what is happening or what has happened. The poem is what the vampire tells Christiane *will* happen if she continues to reject his advances. We do not know whether or not Christiane will enjoy the erotic encounter with the vampire, but the narrator believes she will. Crawford argues that the narrator believes he will bring Christiane to orgasm (6). While Crawford's conclusion is only one possibility that can be drawn from the text, most critics agree that the narrator is not simply satisfying his own sexual desire, but rather, he is severing the chaste and pious relationship Christiane has with her mother and Christianity, forcing Christiane away from the unrestrained social codes and conventions by which she lives. The narrator believes that with his own erotic and sexual nature he will be able to make Christiane "resemble the man whose lust is so strong that it dehumanizes him and makes him act like a body without a soul" (Butler 64). Essentially, Christiane is being pulled from her pure chastity into unrestrained sexuality, going from one extreme to the other, an action that reveals the moral dilemma for all eighteenth-century women. In a society that upholds prohibited female sexuality, women can either abide by the societal codes and conventions or become ostracized women. Anything that falls outside of the social codes and conventions would be considered to be "unrestrained sexuality," thus women have no middle ground on which to stand.

### **Putting the Pieces Together**

The most interesting lines of "Der Vampir" are the last three because the narrator is still speaking in the future tense, but he exposes a dilemma that Christiane is already part of pertaining to her sexuality. After their sexual and lethal exchange, the narrator will "pose [his] question, / Are not [his] teachings better / Than those of [Christiane's] good mother?" (22-24). It is clear that the mother's teachings are those of Christianity and society, but what are the narrator's teachings? Crawford, who analyzes the poem through a cultural-historical lens, argues that the narrator represents destruction and death. He is a hostile threat to Christianity and the restrained social codes and conventions of society, and he intends to destroy or corrupt the Christian faith through seduction and draining its spirit. Crawford regards this poem as a juxtaposition of the "strict moral values of society, represented by the religious values of the mother and the daughter with the possibility of a destructive hedonistic lifestyle, represented by the vampire figure's planned seduction" (7). Thus, the vampire's teachings are those of hedonism. While I agree with Crawford's analysis, I want to take it a step further. The poem is not simply an interplay between religion and hedonism. Yes, religion and hedonism are present in the poem, but they are part of the umbrella or overarching themes. Hidden beneath the conflict between religion and hedonism is the battle over female sexuality.

Part of the mother's Christian teachings would naturally involve how a pious Christian woman should behave in relation to sexuality. As readers of the poem, we have many gaps in knowledge surrounding Christiane and her mother. We do not know how old Christiane is or whether or not she has other suitors. What we do know is that the narrator is or was a suitor and that Christiane is an unmarried virgin who has rejected the narrator. Her rejection might stem from a dislike of the narrator or from her sights being set on another suitor, but it is also possible that, as an unmarried virgin, Christiane was taught chastity or female virtue by her mother and society. Chastity or female virtue would lead Christiane to reject a suitor's advances, especially if those advances were sexual and not a simple courtship that would lead to marriage and only then procreative sexual intercourse. The narrator's strong emphasis on Christiane's religion and his desire to engage in a sexual relationship, despite being unmarried, suggests a conflict between Christiane's sexual teachings from her mother and the narrator's sexual desire. Christiane's mother taught her chastity, and the narrator will (or wants to) teach her carnality.

The last lines of the poem specifically ask Christiane how her mother's teachings compare to the narrator's teachings. The narrator's question pits unrestrained sexuality and the restrained social codes and conventions of society against one another. However, despite the narrator asking Christiane the question, she is not the one who gets to choose. Her mother chose Christianity for her and Christianity, along with the restrained societal codes and conventions of society, choose the sexuality she must follow (chastity and denying the flesh). The narrator apparently will also choose Christiane's sexuality for her. The narrator forces her to acknowledge and participate in erotic sexuality that will compel Christiane to embrace the desires of the flesh, consequently denouncing Christianity and societal codes and conventions. The unanswered question at the end of the poem is indicative of Christiane's position within the liminal space between unrestrained sexual desire and the restrained social codes and conventions of society, a space that women were inevitably forced into.

Similar to Christiane, women that lived in the eighteenth century who decided to marry and birth children were unable to stay chaste. However, they were also unable to express or seek out erotic sexuality. The only way for a woman to stay chaste would be for her to be unmarried, an "option" that again forces the woman into a sexuality that she may not want or choose for herself. As Barkhoff notes, "in the ascetic, anti-sensual, and misogynist world of Christendom independent female desire is not allowed to flourish, but is equally unable to die" (140). Women are stuck in a position where they are unable to choose their sexuality for themselves, but they are also somehow supposed to embody both chastity and unrestrained sexual desire.



*“The Bride of Corinth”*

Written by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in 1797 and published in 1798, “The Bride of Corinth”—or “Die Braut von Korinth”—is also a vampiric poem in which a mother stands as a barrier to a young couple’s sexual union. Critics have referred to “The Bride of Corinth” as a pagan vampire poem that is based on the Greek myth of Philinnion. The myth of Philinnion involves a she-demon lover who returns from the dead to woo the young man Makhartes. The act of returning from the dead results in the she-demon’s death through immolation by the townspeople (Groom 132). While the myth does not refer to the she-demon as a vampire, Goethe’s revisioning of the myth in “The Bride of Corinth” is about a young woman who is turned into a vampire by her own mother. When the vampire daughter attempts to spend a night with her betrothed, the mother comes between them, denying her daughter for a second time. Like “Der Vampir,” “The Bride of Corinth” explores the space between unrestrained sexuality and absolute chastity. However, unlike Christiane, the daughter in “The Bride of Corinth” is forced by the mother, and only the mother, into sexuality. Once again, a daughter is unable to choose her own sexuality.

**The Death of a Daughter**

Goethe’s ballad starts with a young man traveling to Corinth to meet and marry the bride who has been promised to him since childhood. Both the “youth from Athens” (1) and his “plighted spouse” (7) have been promised to each other at the behest of their fathers. The young man arrives at midnight when the “Father and daughters [are] all at rest” (17); therefore, the mother—who cannot sleep—“rises to receive the [youth]” (19). At the very beginning of the poem, the mother plays a large part in the action. It is not explained why the mother cannot sleep, but further in the poem, it becomes clear that the mother was involved in the daughter’s death, as indicated by the line, “thou didst doom thy child to die!” (169), suggesting that the mother might not be able to sleep as a result of her guilty conscience. It is clear by line 169 that the mother caused her daughter’s death, but the way in which this happened is unclear.

Jürgen Barkhoff, in his essay “Female Vampires, Victimhood, and Vengeance in German Literature around 1800,” suggests that “the mother, out of gratitude to God for her recovery from an illness, had pledged her daughter to become a virginal bride of Jesus, a nun” (138). However, Barkhoff fails to include textual evidence for this interpretation. I would argue instead that the text suggests that the mother unknowingly made a pagan pledge to have her daughter take her place in death. Other theorists have perceived the theme of paganism within this poem, with Butler referring to “The Bride of Corinth” as a poem confronting pagan sexuality (64), and Groom calling the poem a pagan vampire



poem (132). It is important to note that the difference between Barkhoff's interpretation and my own is most likely due to a difference in English translations of the German poem. Though the difference in interpretation may be due to issues of translation, it is a significant difference that begs to be explored. As vampirism has close ties to paganism, the juxtaposition between paganism and Christianity in the poem is key to the argument that the daughter is being pulled between two extremes.

The first evidence for my interpretation of the text is found in stanza 8. The mother has led the young man to a chamber and given him food and drink. After the mother leaves, the daughter to whom the young man is betrothed comes into the room. Not expecting to see someone in the chamber, the daughter is frightened and decides to leave. The young man, however, pleads with her to stay. When the young man tries to get nearer to the daughter she tells him,

Away—young man—stand far away,  
What pleasure is, I feel not now—  
Joy hath forever fled from me,  
Scar'd by a mother's gloomy vow:  
She fear'd to die,—my youthful bloom,  
My hopes of love—her stern decree  
Hath destin'd to a living tomb! (50-56)

Not only is this stanza the first clue to the daughter's position between life and death, but it is also the first indication of what transpired between the mother and the daughter. The daughter tells the young man that she is scarred by a vow that her mother made, a vow prompted by the mother's fear of dying. Her mother's vow—or stern decree—has destined her youthful bloom and hopes of love to a living tomb. Later in the poem, the daughter asks her mother, "And is it not enough that I / For thee in funeral pall should lie? / For thee in youth should fade and die?" (155-157). The daughter elaborates on the initial statement that the mother destined the daughter's youth and hopes of love to a tomb to reveal that she, in fact, took the mother's place in the funeral pall—or coffin. Essentially, the mother traded her daughter's life for her own.

The daughter continues with a statement about her condition:

Our ancient gods no longer deign  
In this dull mansion to reside—  
But one who dwells in heaven unseen,  
And one, upon the cross who died,  
Are worship'd with sad rite severe:  
No offering falls of lamb or steer;  
But human victims suffer here! (57-63)

She is telling the young man that the ancient—or pagan—gods are no longer worshiped in “this dull mansion”; instead, God and Jesus are being worshiped (57-58). It seems like Barkhoff’s assertion that the daughter has been promised to the church and sent to a convent relies on the interpretation that the dull mansion being spoken of is a Christian church or place of worship where the daughter would have resided after her mother’s vow. However, the daughter refers to the dull mansion as *this* dull mansion, meaning that the daughter and the young man are in the dull mansion the daughter is talking about; thus, the dull mansion is the home in which she lives/lived. Despite the daughter not actually being placed in a church or convent, her family has converted to Christianity. Therefore, the daughter would have been required to live by Christian morals and worship God.

The conflict between Christianity and Paganism is further complicated as the daughter continues to explain what her mother has done to her. The daughter judges her mother’s actions and suggests the incorporation of pagan aspects in the mother’s vow:

Me from my narrow silent bed,  
Hither a wondrous doom hath driven:  
Your priests their mummary-song have said,  
But, oh! it hath no weight in heaven!  
In vain your mystic spells ye prove! (158-162)

The daughter has come from her grave with a “wondrous doom”—or extraordinary judgment; this judgment declares that despite her mother having priests conduct a ceremony, their mummary-song (which the daughter is referring to as a ridiculous, hypocritical or pretentious ceremony) has no weight or importance in heaven. The reason the mother’s Christian religious actions have no weight in heaven can be explained within the daughter’s accusation on the last line of the 23rd stanza. The daughter says, “In vain your mystic spells ye prove!” (162). Breaking down the meaning of this line is not simple, and there can be multiple interpretations; however, I am interpreting the line to mean that in vain—or in a blasphemous manner—the mother conducted a mystic spell (some sort of petition to live), and this spell reveals the kind of person the mother truly is.

Despite the mother’s outward cloak of Christianity, she appealed to a different power in an attempt to live. This is further corroborated by the next stanza:

I was his doom’d and destin’d bride  
In days while Venus’ fane still stood,  
But ye your former vows belied,  
And seal’d your late learn’d creed in blood.  
Alas! No heavenly power stood by,  
When thou didst doom thy child to die! (164-169)

The daughter tells the mother that in days while Venus's temple still stood, the daughter and the young man were destined, by their fathers, to be married. Then the mother belied—or misrepresented her former vows and sealed a new creed in blood, meaning she broke the promise that had been made by the fathers and created a new commitment for the daughter. The element of the daughter's explanation that strongly connects the mother's actions to pagan ritual is the fact that no heavenly power stood by as the mother sealed this new creed in blood. And as already stated, this creed sealed in blood led to the daughter's death. Thus, the textual evidence suggests that the mother conducted a pagan blood ritual for life, in the guise of Christianity, and in doing so she doomed her daughter to die in her place. The mother also doomed her daughter to be a maiden forever, considering that the daughter has died before marriage and any sexual experience. By using a pagan ritual disguised as a Christian one to sustain her own life, the mother unintentionally established her daughter's status as a vampire who exhibits and exercises unrestrained sexuality.

### **The Daughter as the Vampire**

Unlike "Der Vampir," "The Bride of Corinth" features the male suitor as the victim and the female daughter as the vampire and also a victim. It is not obvious that the daughter is a vampire, and we do not explicitly find out the daughter's condition until stanza 25 when she actually calls herself a vampire. After the daughter reveals the circumstances surrounding her death, she explains her seemingly living appearance:

And hither from the grave I roam  
To seek the joys denied in life:  
Hither, to seek my spouse I come,  
To drain his veins—a vampyre wife! (170-173)

In her attempt to stay in the living realm, the mother killed her daughter and doomed her to a life as a vampire: a creature living between life and death, never quite existing in either realm. Therefore, the mother's pagan ritual for life led to the daughter becoming a vampire. This correlation between polytheism and the vampire derives from a theory (as proposed by McClelland) that postulates that the original vampires were people who did not conform to Christian theology and a Christian way of life.

In *Slayers and Their Vampires: A Cultural History of Killing the Dead*, McClelland discusses the origin and evolution of the vampire, emphasizing the fact that "the word vampir emerged in a context of religious conflict in the Balkans" (79).<sup>3</sup> The religious

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3. The Balkans refers to a geographical area usually characterized as comprising Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia.

conflict centered around Orthodox Christians and pagans who would not abandon their beliefs and rituals. McClelland goes so far as to suggest that the rituals the pagans would not relinquish were associated with a belief in reincarnation. From this conflict between Christians and pagans arose the “essential behavioral qualification of the first vampires,” which was unacceptable ritual practice (McClelland 79). Therefore, the mother’s pagan blood ritual to save herself and sacrifice her daughter automatically associates the mother and daughter to vampirism. However, the poem takes the folklore and history of the vampire and further complicates the struggles between polytheism and Christianity. The mother’s sacrifice of her daughter is a perversion of God’s sacrifice of Jesus. Where Jesus was sacrificed to save humanity, the daughter is sacrificed to save the mother. The sacrifice in the poem comes from a place of selfishness and fear of death. The daughter’s existence as a vampire after death is, once again, not a choice that she has made.

Being a vampire, the daughter in “The Bride of Corinth” is a perfect reflection of a woman’s forced position in the liminal space between unrestrained sexual desire and the restrained social codes and conventions of the eighteenth century. As a vampire, she “represents the ambiguous status of a woman who is neither quite human nor inhuman, neither mistress of her life nor slave of her master, who is both victim and victimizer” (Metzger 88). The vampire, being undead, has always existed as a creature that “appear[s] in...zones of liminality” (Barkhoff 139). In the role of a vampire, the daughter can now represent many in-betweens. Being stuck in these transitional spaces can create a sense of alienation and marginalization, especially when the liminal space was forced, not chosen. The daughter embodies this alienation and marginalization when it becomes apparent that she is an unwelcome insider.

The young man from Athens, despite his political and religious disparity with the daughter’s family, is given an honored place in the house. He is a welcome outsider, while the daughter is a displaced person. Upon finding the young man in the chamber she “exclaims, ‘Then I am nothing here! / Guests come and go and none tells me!’” (37-38). It seems as if the daughter does not exist in her own home. She is not told when guests are arriving, and she is considered to be nothing. Despite her status as an outsider, the vampire daughter is able to experience the young man’s love for her. The romantic exchange between the vampire and her betrothed seems to suggest a turn of events for the daughter, but once again she is not making her own choices.

The couple is not married, and we find out halfway through the poem “[the vampire’s] sister is [the young man’s] destin’d bride” (72). The daughter, as a vampire, now has an unrestrained sexual desire that she intends to fill with her former betrothed. The young vampire has a virginal appearance, but that appearance masks her true nature as a

lascivious vampire (Metzger 88). She tells the young man, “But in her arms, ah! think of me, / Who in my cell will think of thee: / Who pine and die with love of thee” (73-75), and he responds by telling her, “Be mine, my love, be mine to night” (82). The poem goes on to discreetly hint at a sexual relationship between the couple:

He speaks to her with words of love—  
On love, on love alone, he thinks.  
.....  
In tears upon the bed he sinks!  
.....  
He strains her in his closing arm  
With strength that youth and passion gave;  
.....  
With frenzied clasp of wild desire  
He strains her to his breast of fire. (99-100, 104, 110-111, 114-115)

The vampire’s mother chose for the daughter to die in chastity and miss out on the sexual pleasures of the world. Therefore, it comes as no surprise when the mother comes between the daughter and the young man.

The mother listens outside the chamber door to hear “voices like lovers’, low and light” (128), and a declaration that “to-morrow night thou wilt be mine” (135). Angered by what she hears, the mother bursts in to see “her own—her daughter” (143). Even though the mother comes in, she is not able to stop the daughter from determining to become a victimizer and turn the young man into a vampire, like herself. Her plans are “to drain his veins” (173). It might seem like the daughter will finally be able to make a choice that is her own, but she is only being persuaded by her vampiric nature; a nature that she had no choice in electing. As Butler notes, “the destruction [the vampire daughter] will wreak...stems not from her own wishes, but from the mortifying prohibitions imposed on the young by an older generation that has lived only to die in an odor of false sanctity” (65). The daughter is essentially both a victim (being killed and turned by her mother) and a victimizer (turning the young man).

### **Death as the Only Choice**

Similar to Christiane, the vampire daughter is exposed to unrestrained sexuality because she is a vampire and exposed to the restrictive social codes and conventions through her mother. Both women are stuck in a place where their choices are limited, but their choices are not their own. Unlike Christiane, though, the vampire daughter does voice the way out of her predicament, a way that will take her out of all zones of liminality. Her last request of her mother is to have her mother

build high...a funeral pile:  
...from that narrow cell releas'd,  
[Where the daughter's] spirit shall rejoicing smile;  
And when the embers fall way,  
And when the funeral flames arise,  
[The daughter and the young man will] journey to a home of rest. (182-187)

The only way for the daughter as a vampire to escape her dungeon of liminality, as Fleischhack suggests, is through a stake in the heart, beheading, and/or cremation (64). The daughter's only escape from the liminal space between unrestrained sexual desire and restrain social codes and conventions of society is through absolute death.

### **Conclusion**

"Der Vampir" and "The Bride of Corinth" depict women stuck in the liminal space between unrestrained sexual desire and restraining social codes and conventions of eighteenth-century society. Both Ossenfelder and Goethe explore this liminal space through poetry that complicates the relationship between a mother and daughter through the inclusion of vampiric characters. Their depictions, however, differ in their renderings of those characters. Ossenfelder presents a vampire who defies the mother by forcefully seducing the daughter into an act of unrestrained sexuality, while in Goethe's poem the daughter herself transforms into a vampire through the mother's false Christian ritual. Despite these differences, both authors uncovered the female lack of choice in sexuality. In the eighteenth century, women were expected to be pure and chaste, while also being sexual to attract a male suitor. Both "Der Vampir" and "The Bride of Corinth" expose this impossible situation that women face in terms of their sexuality by dramatizing this struggle through the metaphor of the vampire.

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# Being and Emptiness: Sartre meets Śāntideva

*Nich Krause*

## ABSTRACT

*Jean-Paul Sartre was a mid-twentieth century French intellectual known for his radical politics and prolific (often opaque) philosophical musings on the human condition. At first blush, this Parisian existentialist might not seem to have a lot in common with a recondite eighth-century Mādhyamaka monk named Śāntideva. My essay encourages a second or third blush. In it, I bridge the work of Sartre with the Buddhist philosopher Śāntideva by looking at their respective conceptions of freedom and moral responsibility. I provide a brief characterization of each thinker's ideas while going over some basic terrain of the modern free will debate, which includes essential definitions for terms such as "free will," "determinism," "libertarianism," and "compatibilism." I argue that Sartre and Śāntideva have a unique approach to freedom and moral responsibility that, on the one hand, fails to conform to the standard categories of the current academic free will debate and, on the other hand, moves the conversation forward in important ways.*



I feel no anger towards bile and the like, even though  
they cause intense suffering. Why am I angry with  
the sentient? They too have causes for their anger.  
—Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*

I am condemned to exist forever beyond my  
essence, beyond the causes and motives of my act.  
I am condemned to be free.  
—Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*

## **Introduction**

I remember sitting down and making the conscious choice to write an essay exploring existentialist and Buddhist conceptions of freedom. Or, at least it very much *felt* as though I made this choice. There are various schools of thought that would say I did not make anything worth calling a choice at all. Indeed, I may have never made a legitimate free choice (as in a choice that I can be held fully responsible for making) in my entire existence. This is exactly what *hard determinists* would argue. This is a major position in the modern free will debate, and, unsurprisingly, it comes with its fair share of critics. There is, for instance, the worry that this type of hard determinism would render meaningless any sort of philosophical school of thought that aims at significant psychological change or social emancipation. One example of this kind of emancipatory philosophy would be Buddhism, since it is written into the very bones of Buddhism to strive for human awakening, i.e., the altering of consciousness to be in touch with the present moment and ultimately release oneself from the cycle of rebirth. What happens, then, when Buddhism meets hard determinism? How can we square a philosophy that advocates for change but at the same time says that we are not able to make any sort of free choice? This is exactly what I intend to explore here, using the ancient thinker Śāntideva as my representative Buddhist determinist and Jean-Paul Sartre as my representative existentialist who can help lead us out of this metaphysical morass. I will, in short, argue that Sartre's phenomenological conception of freedom can aid us in understanding how a philosophical school of thought (and specifically Śāntideva's path to awakening) can be both hard determinist *and* emancipatory.

## **Determining Śāntideva's Determinism**

Reading ancient texts and trying to frame them in the terms of modern discourse is no easy task. How does one justify arguing that, e.g., Socrates was a deontologist rather than a consequentialist? How do we pull off a Hegelian reading of Heraclitus or a Marxist reading of Sun Tzu? These are inherently problematic goals since these ancient thinkers were simply not familiar or equipped with the same conceptual tools. This has not, of course, prevented scholars from attempting to throw ancient

thought and thinkers into the ring of modern debate. Nonetheless, there are better and worse ways of going about this. It is important, for instance, to keep in mind that these thinkers will not fit neatly into the categories constructed by the modern discourse. One can reinforce arguments as to why one thinker or school of thought is well-suited for another, or why they are not, but, ultimately, these distinctions are blurry. To be clear, I am not arguing that such readings and interpretations should be avoided. Rather, I am stating what should be obvious: we must take these interpretations with a margarita's worth of salt. With that in mind, it can be an illuminating and important project to interpret ancient thought in the light of modernity, so long as the appropriate caveats are employed.

Śāntideva was a Buddhist monk who lived in India sometime between 685 and 763 CE.<sup>1</sup> He was a practitioner of a form of Buddhism called Mahāyāna and is best known for writing a meditation manual known as the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, translated "An Introduction to the Conduct which leads to Enlightenment."<sup>2</sup> In the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Śāntideva provides guidance for awakening, which includes various stances on ethics, identity, ontology, and many other philosophical mainstays. Accordingly, there is much to mine in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* regarding the modern free will debate. Indeed, many scholars have attempted to do exactly this, and the whole gamut of interpretations has been applied to Buddhist thought.

Take hard determinism for example, which is the stance that (1) all events are the direct result of past circumstances combined with the laws of nature and (2) this fact renders robust moral responsibility irrational and indefensible. Note that this is the rejection of *robust* moral responsibility, i.e., praising, blaming, or punishing someone exclusively because they deserve it. Hard determinism has been applied to Buddhism by thinkers such as Charles Goodman and Galen Strawson.<sup>3</sup> According to these types of hard determinist readings, Buddhist ontology and ethics leaves little room for free will (or consequent blame, praise, or punishment). Galen Strawson, for instance, argues that "at least certain schools of Buddhist thought" are committed to the non-existence of free will and the incoherence of moral responsibility.<sup>4</sup> Goodman defends a similar stance, arguing that a variety of Buddhist philosophers not only reject free will and moral responsibility, but that doing so "will actually help people to achieve the compassion, generosity, and

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1. Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, trans. Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), viii.

2. Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, viii.

3. Charles Goodman, "Resentment and Reality: Buddhism on Moral Responsibility," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (2002): 359; Galen Strawson, *Freedom and Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

4. Strawson, *Freedom and Belief*, 117.

forbearance needed to make themselves, and others, happy.”<sup>5</sup> Goodman argues that Buddhist philosophers can be read as defenders of a position that simultaneously rejects moral responsibility and at the same time embraces the human capacity for moral progress. “This view of free will,” argues Goodman, “receives support from a variety of different Buddhist texts, and therefore has some claim to represent the tradition generally.”<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, philosophers such as Mark Siderits, have argued that Buddhism, with its focus on awakening and moral progress, ought to be read in more compatibilist terms.<sup>7</sup> Compatibilism is the stance that there is room for both determinism and some conception of free will that allows for robust moral responsibility. Paul Griffiths, conversely, argues that Buddhism’s focus on change and progress toward awakening means that libertarianism, i.e., the belief in both unencumbered free choice and full moral responsibility, is only appropriate.<sup>8</sup> There are many schools of Buddhist thought, and there is not a concrete answer as to which of these interpretations is the correct one. For this paper, however, I will be aligning myself with the likes of Goodman and Strawson in arguing for a hard determinist reading of Śāntideva.

In pursuing such a reading, it is important to appeal to the original text for justification. As mentioned above, determinism can be defined as the view that every event, including all human actions, is the necessary result of the past combined with the laws of nature and that this entails a rejection of robust moral responsibility; or, as Strawson puts it, “everything that happens in the universe is necessitated by what has already gone before, in such a way that nothing can happen otherwise than it does.”<sup>9</sup> If determinism were true, it would seem that a variety of emotional reactions, even ones that are extremely commonplace, would fail to be morally or rationally justified. If, for instance, a murderer did not have choice but to be a murderer, then what sense would it make to punish them for punishment’s sake?<sup>10</sup> Or on the flip side, what sense would it make for us to feel intense pride over our achievements? Aren’t these matters of pure

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5. Goodman, “Resentment and Reality,” 369.

6. Ibid.

7. Mark Siderits, “Beyond Compatibilism: A Buddhist Approach to Freedom and Determinism,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (1987): 149–59.

8. Paul J. Griffiths, “Notes Towards a Critique of Buddhist Karmic Theory,” *Religious Studies* 18, no. 3 (1982): 277–91.

9. Galen Strawson, “Luck Swallows Everything,” *Naturalism*. Accessed 6 Dec. 2021.

10. “For punishment’s sake” is an important qualification because a hard determinist could appeal to reasons for punishment that are beyond its own sake. On this account, punishment could be justified, for instance, because it deters crime or because it is the only route to reformed behaviors. Notice, though, that these are not appeals to punishment *simply because someone deserves it*.

luck? As comedian George Carlin once said, “Pride should be reserved for something you achieve or obtain on your own, not something that happens by accident of birth. Being Irish isn’t a skill, it’s a genetic accident. You wouldn’t say I’m proud to be 5’11”, I’m proud to have a predisposition for colon cancer.”<sup>11</sup> But in a hard determinist universe, *everything* is unearned, no more achieved “on our own” than our height or eye color.

A glance at the primary texts reveals that Śāntideva would seem to be in agreement with Carlin on this matter. Śāntideva writes in his chapter on perfecting patience in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*:

(vi.25) Whatever transgressions and evil deeds of various kinds there are, all arise through the power of conditioning factors, while there is nothing that arises independently.<sup>12</sup>

There are two key phrases here: one, that all deeds arise through “conditioning factors” and two, that *nothing* arises independently. In one short sentence, Śāntideva establishes rather concretely that he is arguing for a universe in which *everything* is causally contingent—that the world, including humans and their inner lives, exists only through factors over which they utterly lack control. In the next verse, Śāntideva writes,

(vi.26) Neither does the assemblage of conditioning factors have the thought, “I shall produce”; nor does what is produced have the thought, “I am produced”.<sup>13</sup>

And later:

(vi.31) In this way everything is dependent upon something else. Even that thing upon which each is dependent is not independent. Since, like a magical display, phenomena do not initiate activity, at what does one get angry like this?<sup>14</sup>

Śāntideva explicitly takes care to establish that he is advocating for a purely deterministic universe where nothing has the choice to exist free from environmental and historical constraints. It seems that a pure libertarian reading of Śāntideva would be off the table at this point. Śāntideva makes it quite explicit that human choices are contingent and constrained. But even if that is true, it is still not clear that Śāntideva is arguing that humans have *no* capacity for choice and thus lack moral responsibility. There is still a case to be made that Śāntideva is arguing for a type of compatibilism, since compatibilists do not necessarily take issue with determinism. As briefly mentioned earlier, a compatibilist may accept a deterministic ontology; however, they would argue that this alone is not enough to justify the rejection of robust moral responsibility. A compatibilist could argue

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11. George Carlin, “George Carlin – Pride,” *YouTube*, Feb 2, 2010, video, 4:29.

12. Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 52.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

that a deterministic universe is beside the point; there remain compelling reasons to hold people *fully* responsible for their actions. It may indeed be the case that a person's moral character is the result of conditions out of their control, but only "literal compulsion, panic, or uncontrollable impulse" really removes their freedom to choose.<sup>15</sup> So long as other factors are at play (for instance, the metacognitive ability to endorse one's own decisions, the ability to have done otherwise, or the ability to be responsive to reasoning),<sup>16</sup> then one can still be fully justified in blaming and punishing someone solely for the sake of blame or punishment.

Is there reason to believe that Śāntideva could be an advocate of this type of compatibilism? Is there textual evidence that he thinks one should still be held fully responsible for their actions regardless of being determined by factors outside their control? The answers to these questions are not as clear-cut as the above question of Śāntideva's determinism, as there appears to be more room for interpretation. Nevertheless, there are some verses that strongly indicate that Śāntideva is arguing against the type of robust moral responsibility that justifies praising or blaming someone as if they were the sole authors of their actions. Take the following verse:

(vi.22) I feel no anger towards bile and the like, even  
though they cause intense suffering. Why am I angry with  
the sentient? They too have causes for their anger.<sup>17</sup>

These lines are of particular interest, as it seems as though Śāntideva is drawing a direct analogue between bodily irritants and sentient beings. If it makes no sense to feel anger toward zits and snot and boogers and bile, says Śāntideva, then it makes no sense to be angry at people. This is a pretty radical claim. But what makes bile and humans analogous for Śāntideva is not just that they are both causally determined. Śāntideva goes one step further by extending the analogy to justify certain moral and emotional responses. He is, in other words, not simply drawing a deterministic or causal analogy between humans and bile—he is making an argument for what types of psychological and moral attitudes we ought to have in response to their negative effects. Śāntideva is making a direct appeal to mitigate the emotional weight of expectations of justice or vengeance or moral responsibility. We should get no angrier at humans than bile, as neither asked to be what they are and do what they do. Indeed, in the verse I quoted at the end of the last paragraph, Śāntideva states that "Since, like a magical display, phenomena do not initiate activity, at what does one get angry like this?"<sup>18</sup> This is more of the same: anger does not

15. Strawson, "Luck Swallows Everything."

16. Michael McKenna and D. Justin Coates, "Compatibilism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last updated Nov. 26, 2019.

17. Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 52; vi.22.

18. *Ibid.*

seem like a rational or appropriate reaction to people (or possibly things in general) since nothing *chose* to cause that anger, nothing *chose* to be or to exist in the first place. In what seems to be Śāntideva's most explicit statement of this sort, he writes,

(vi.33) Therefore, even if one sees a friend or an enemy behaving badly, one can reflect that there are specific conditioning factors that determine this, and thereby remain happy.<sup>19</sup>

These verses appear rather incompatible with compatibilism since Śāntideva demonstrates time and time again not only that people are determined beings, but also that their emotional responses (including their attitudes about moral responsibility) should respond to this determinism. There is little room for robust responsibility here.

In sum, I have argued for a hard determinist reading of Śāntideva. This means that Śāntideva is stating not only that humans live in a deterministic universe where all actions are the consequence of factors outside of their control, but, further, that it makes little sense to hold anyone fully responsible for their actions. Thus, many emotional reactions, such as anger, hatred, a desire for vengeance, punishment, and ultimate moral responsibility, are all rationally and morally unjustified. With this reading in mind, though, it might be natural to wonder how this can be harmonious with Śāntideva's overall project of helping sentient beings reach enlightenment. It might seem as though the ability to choose and the ability to hold others responsible for their choices would be requisite for creatures fully to awaken and release themselves from the cycle of suffering. The *Bodhicaryāvatāra* does not explicitly address how to make sense of this tension. Śāntideva makes a case for what kinds of moral attitudes are justified in a deterministic cosmos. At the same time, he does not argue for *how* one is justified in embracing an emancipatory philosophy in the face of an ontology that rejects holding anyone fully responsible for their actions. This does not appear to be a major worry for many hard determinist Buddhists, since, as Goodman points out, "The confidence that Buddhists have in the power of their meditative practices leads them to be very optimistic about the practical possibility of such a transformation, despite the obvious difficulty of the task."<sup>20</sup> Despite some potential incompatibility, Śāntideva (and many other Buddhist thinkers) take for granted that one, all human behaviors are causally determined; two, this justifies a rejection of robust moral responsibility; and three, the transformative goals of Buddhism are still possible and worth pursuing. It is this tension to which I think Sartre's existentialism may be able to offer some relief. And it is to this I turn now.

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19. *Ibid.*, 53

20. Goodman "Resentment and Reality," 370.

## The Inescapability of Freedom

Jean-Paul Sartre was a prolific and renowned thinker in the mid-twentieth century, known for his political activism, his fictional works, and, most notably, being the father of modern existentialism. Existentialism is a school of thought that is notoriously difficult to characterize. Some trace its roots back to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, although nuggets of its core ideas can be found in antiquity as well. I do not intend to provide a sweeping characterization of existentialism, as it might be impossible to do so (although there have been many attempts),<sup>21</sup> and it is not entirely relevant to the topic at hand. What is important for now is that Sartre's existentialism was largely and explicitly concerned with *freedom*. In his magnum opus *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre sets out to explain exactly what he means when he speaks of freedom. In this tome, he dedicates roughly 700 pages to the project of defining freedom (a reviewer once described it as “a first draft for a good book of 300 pages”).<sup>22</sup> In it, Sartre uses such provocative phrases as “I am condemned to be free” and “to be is to *choose oneself*.”<sup>23</sup> So what is Sartre claiming about the nature of freedom with these statements? And where does he fall in the free will debate? In light of these phrases, it would certainly appear as though he was a type of libertarian. Sartre, however, refused to engage with the metaphysical/ontological debate of free will. To him, it was obvious, indeed *necessary*, that everything in the universe was causally determined, for if this were not the case then humans would be incapable of making anything recognizable as a meaningful choice. For Sartre, “a human being is not

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21. Sarah Bakewell, *At the Existentialist Cafe* (New York: Other Press, 2016),

34. Bakewell provides the following helpful, tentative multi-part definition of existentialism: “Existentialists concern themselves with *individual, concrete human existence*; They consider human existence different from the kind of being other things have. Other entities are what they are, but as a human I am whatever I choose to make of myself at every moment. I am *free*—; and therefore I'm *responsible* for everything I do, a dizzying fact which causes; an *anxiety* inseparable from human existence itself; On the other hand, I am only free within *situations*, which can include factors in my own biology and psychology as well as physical, historical and social variables of the world into which I have been thrown; Despite the limitations, I always want more: I am passionately involved in personal *projects* of all kinds; Human existence is thus *ambiguous*: at once boxed in by borders and yet transcendent and exhilarating; an existentialist who is also *phenomenological* provides no easy rules for dealing with this condition, but instead concentrates on *describing* lived experience as it presents itself; by describing experience well, he or she hopes to understand this existence and awaken us to ways of living more *authentic* lives.”

22. Bakewell, *Existentialist Cafe*, 152.

23. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, transl. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1943/1956), 129.



separable from the human condition. A person divorced from the totality of their situations is an intellectual abstraction that can only be partly achieved. I am what I am only in relation to my situations.”<sup>24</sup> But Sartre argued that determinists were getting ahead of themselves as well. In *Being and Nothingness*, he wrote the following:

[A]t the outset we can see what is lacking in those tedious discussions between determinists and the proponents of free will. The latter are concerned to find cases of decision for which there exists no prior cause . . . To which the determinists may easily reply that there is no action without a *cause* and that the most insignificant gesture (raising the right hand rather than the left hand, etc.) refers to causes and motives which confer its meaning upon it . . . To speak of an act without a cause is to speak of an act which would lack the intentional structure of every act; and the proponents of free will by searching for it on the level of the act which is in the process of being performed can only end up by rendering the act absurd. But the determinists in turn are weighting the scale by stopping their investigation with the mere designation of the cause and motive.<sup>25</sup>

It is clear that Sartre rejected metaphysical free will or pure libertarianism. It is also clear that Sartre did not think that hard determinists were seeing the whole picture. Both the determinists and the libertarians were looking in all the wrong places for finding anything worth calling freedom. Sartre therefore argued that true freedom, *radical freedom*, would not come from metaphysics or science. Freedom was, rather, a phenomenological experience, a way of *being in the world*. To understand what this means, it is important to explore two important distinctions for Sartre. The first is the *pour-soi* (for-itself) and the *en-soi* (in-itself); the second is power and freedom.<sup>26</sup>

For Sartre, the in-itself describes all things that lack consciousness: atoms, rocks, forks, toilet paper. The for-itself is that which is conscious—it is us. Sartre argued that the for-itself is the negation of the in-itself.<sup>27</sup> Everything in the universe has a being, a way of existing, that just *happens* to it; the in-itself simply is and continues to be. The picture changes when the in-itself becomes the for-itself. It appears there is something categorically different from conscious beings and non-conscious beings. For Sartre, there

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24. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Jean-Paul Sartre: Basic Writings*, ed. Stephen Priest (New York: Routledge, 2001), 177.

25. Sartre, *Basic Writings*, 177.

26. These concepts are addressed throughout *Part 2: Being-for-Itself* in *Being and Nothingness* (1956) and specifically his section on “Immediate Structures of the For-Itself” (73-105).

27. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 97.



is indeed a categorical difference—viz., *freedom*. The emergence of the for-itself from the in-itself results in a total annihilation of something merely existing<sup>28</sup>; the for-itself is what arises from this annihilation—it is now a lack, a nothingness, faced with unavoidable options of ways to exist in any given moment.<sup>29</sup> Our consciousness is nothing but a tendency to reach out and point to things in the world, and thus must navigate and traverse existence. “If I look into myself and seem to see a mass of solidified qualities, of personality traits, tendencies, limitations, relics of past hurts and so on,” writes Bakewell, “all pinning me down to an identity, I am forgetting that none of these things can define me at all. In a reversal of Descartes’s ‘I think, therefore I am,’ Sartre argues, in effect, ‘I am nothing, therefore I am free.’”<sup>30</sup> The unconscious in-itself, on the other hand, is not intentional in the sense of reaching into the world: it just *is*.

But, again, if we *are* freedom by merit of how consciousness exists in the world, then how is Sartre’s view distinct from libertarianism? How is it, in other words, that Sartre is not simply advocating for a pure freedom independent of the chains of causation? It is here that Sartre’s division between freedom and power comes into play. As mentioned above, Sartre takes it as a given that everything we are and everything we do is causally contingent on past circumstances. Sartre identifies the unique contingencies that have resulted in who we are today as our “situation.”<sup>31</sup> We are all situated in the world based on things outside our control, and it is our situations that determine how much *power* we have in any given moment.<sup>32</sup> This is an important distinction for Sartre because it seems rather obvious that people can be more or less restricted given their circumstances.<sup>33</sup> To say that there is no difference between an overprivileged white male in an upper-class U.S. suburb compared to a prisoner of war would strike most as an absurdity. Indeed, it would have for Sartre as well. He would argue that the former has much more power over his situation than does the latter. Interestingly though, for Sartre, *neither person is limited in their freedom*.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, sometimes people who are most constrained are those who are able most clearly to recognize their freedom. Sentience or

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28. *Ibid.*, 16-21.

29. In *Existentialist Café*, 154, Bakewell writes about an old joke regarding the something-ness of nothingness in Sartre’s philosophy: “Sartre walks into a café, and the waiter asks what he’d like to order. Sartre replies, ‘I’d like a cup of coffee with sugar, but no cream.’ The waiter goes off, but comes back apologizing. ‘I’m sorry, Monsieur Sartre, we are all out of cream. How about with no milk?’”

30. *Ibid.*

31. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 79.

32. *Ibid.*, 97-98.

33. Sartre, *Basic Writings*, 177.

34. *Ibid.*

consciousness *is* freedom, and so long as a being is conscious, it is free, regardless of any external constraints. Because of this, “only death brings an end to freedom.”<sup>35</sup> This might seem paradoxical on the face of it, as many people’s intuitions would say that a prisoner of war does not have any type of freedom, or at least not any type of freedom worth having. Not so for Sartre. Existentialist freedom is not meant to be comforting; it is not the freedom magically to choose different situations or to cure ourselves of our ailments. Rather, freedom is a dizzyingly, nauseatingly, overwhelming responsibility that requires us to acknowledge how many potential options we have in any given moment—even when those options are awful or painful or deadly. The prisoner of war is free to choose a bullet to the head, for instance. Just because his power is constrained does not mean that he is not free; freedom cannot be escaped.<sup>36</sup>

It is the gravity of this responsibility, according to Sartre, that drives each of us to deny the totality of our freedom. We are all psychologically predisposed to reject how free we actually are. Our chains give us comfort. The world is a much more soothing place if we are each born with a purpose, with an essence, that is chosen for us. I can sleep at night knowing that my decisions will amount to something important or that nothing *that* bad can occur because of what I do. Sartre says that our tendency to take refuge in such delusions results in “bad faith.”<sup>37</sup> To live in bad faith is to live as though we are not free; it is to shirk our responsibility and hoist it onto the shoulders of others. Sartre sees it as a matter of fact that most of us, most of the time, live in a state of bad faith, and this is not necessarily a bad thing.<sup>38</sup> Our brains are not equipped always to handle the intensity of our freedom. Nevertheless, it is our responsibility, when we can handle it, to acknowledge all the potential things we could do. By doing this, we are able to increase our power, to enrich our lives with a more authentic purpose.

We, humans *qua* humans, consciousness *qua* consciousness, are, through our nothingness, our elimination of *en-soi*, rendered radically, inescapably free; we do not possess freedom, we *are* freedom. We are not metaphysically free because we are never able to make choices free of our necessary situation. But we do not lack any sort of freedom either, as we are categorically different from inert, unconscious middle-sized dry goods, even in light of the fact that both are causally determined. Compatibilism does not quite work here either, as compatibilists would argue that people are free to choose so long as they are meet certain conditions of freedom, such as not being unreasonably

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35. *Ibid.*, 181

36. As Stephen Priest puts it, “Freedom, for Sartre, is not comfortable. It is a capacity to choose that never leaves us so long as we exist” (*Basic Writings* 2001, 177).

37. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 47–48.

38. *Ibid.*, 49.

constrained or being able to respond to reason. Sartre would say that unreasonable constraints do not lessen our freedom at all, and it may in fact make our freedom all the more palpable.<sup>39</sup> Thus, Sartre does not fit neatly into the language of the modern free will debate. Sartre is concerned with how we exist in the world, how we experience freedom, and what that means for each individual person. In recognizing both our constraints and our freedom, we should, it is hoped, own up to the responsibility of defining ourselves for ourselves, thus increasing our power.

### **An Existentialist Path to Awakening**

With a basic analysis of each model of freedom in hand, we are now in a position to look at how Sartre's existentialism can aid Śāntideva's project of leading people to awakening, despite his arguments for a deterministic universe. The question of how people can motivate others and strive for progress and change if determinism is true has been well-explored. Some thinkers think that determinism provides a substantial obstruction to motivating change, maybe even rendering it hopeless or absurd, while others have argued that the truth of determinism makes no difference on this matter. Some have attempted to take on this challenge in a specifically Buddhist context. Riccardo Repetti, for instance, argues that Buddhists such as Śāntideva can strive toward awakening, and motivate others to do the same, because humans possess "metavolitions," or "volitions about volitions." This is a type of compatibilism that allows for Śāntideva to work toward enlightenment while maintaining his deterministic views. "[V]olitional actions are free if the agent approves of them," argues Repetti. "For Buddhists . . . one has mental freedom if one is able to control one's mental states, and to the extent one has mental freedom when choosing, one has free will."<sup>40</sup> Repetti's goal of discovering how Buddhists can choose to go on a path toward awakening is aligned with my argument. However, for reasons explored at the outset, compatibilism will not work for Śāntideva because he rejects full moral responsibility. I want to look, therefore, at how Sartre might be able to handle this quandary.

Śāntideva provides many passages that appear to reinforce his belief that all human actions, just like all of nature, are sculpted by circumstance and thus fully determined. He argues that, consequently, certain reactions are morally and rationally unjustified. Śāntideva is not only making claims about how the universe is, but also about how best to internalize and utilize these facts to make us live better lives, i.e., lives that

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39. Stephen Priest recalls a notorious example of this: "After the war [World War II] Sartre caused outrage by saying that the French people had never been so free as during the Nazi occupation" (*Basic Writings*, 177).

40. Riccardo Repetti, "Meditation and Mental Freedom: A Buddhist Theory of Free Will," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 17 (2010): 166.

put us on a path toward awakening. It is this focus on lacking moral responsibility that makes Śāntideva incompatible with compatibilism. But Sartre's existentialism seems to require each of us to take full responsibility for who we are and what we do. Does this not make existentialism incompatible with Śāntideva in the same fashion as compatibilism? This seems unlikely to be the case because, for one, Sartre's conception of responsibility is different from the moral responsibility that Śāntideva rejects. Sartre is not in line with the compatibilists and libertarians regarding their flavor of moral responsibility. Their type of moral responsibility seems to hinge on people making unconstrained choices, meaning that someone is fully responsible for their circumstance, including the situation in which they reside.

Sartre, on the other hand, recognizes the fact that we do not, in any way, choose our situations. Rather, we are thrown into the world, and it is within our situations that we find ourselves. This means that we are at any given moment responsible for *seizing* our responsibility, for recognizing our situation and owning it. That does not mean that we are subject to the type of buck-stopping moral responsibility demanded by the libertarian. What it means is that if our situation allows for it, we may be lucky enough to be able to recognize our "thrownness," and thus our all-encompassing freedom.<sup>41</sup>

Our ability to recognize our situation and thus challenge our inertial states of bad faith is, too, a matter of luck. But there are nevertheless individuals who will never recognize that they exist in perpetual bad faith. They are still free, *utterly free*, but they do not have the power to recognize their freedom and thus have not taken on the weight of responsibility. An implication of this is that we should be sympathetic to and concerned with the well-being of those less lucky than ourselves. Sartre was a big advocate of this type of thinking, as much of his philosophy was targeted at helping the oppressed. Sartre's existentialism was thus dialectical in the sense that we must face the responsibility of choosing who we are to become, acknowledge that most people will not recognize and realize this responsibility, and therefore extend understanding and compassion. Only a small number of people can ever live authentically, i.e., with a full recognition of freedom, and it is the job of those authentically living to stand up for the oppressed. Because of this, Sartre and Śāntideva would be aligned both in their admittance of determinism, and of the potential practical benefits of understanding others' denial of responsibility.

Śāntideva and Sartre are both, nevertheless, striving intently to better themselves and to hold themselves responsible for what they do, not because they chose to be who and where they are, but because they *are* who and where they are. The recognition of this

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41. Sartre, *Basic Writings*, 191-195

fact, for both men, means that they must work with what they have and own up to that responsibility. Śāntideva uses his hard determinism to be more forgiving and understanding of others and to motivate mindset changes that will aid in his awakening. What he does not do is use his determinism to let himself off the hook, to shrug his shoulders as if he has no power to change, to accept some sort of imagined “fate” over which humans have no influence. Similarly, Sartre’s freedom demands those who are able to recognize it, to do exactly that—recognize their freedom—and accept the entailed responsibility.

Sartre’s existentialism is also allied with Śāntideva’s Buddhism in that both views focus on nothingness or emptiness and the denial of a reified “self.” It is commonly accepted in Buddhist thought that there is not a true self or ego, that we are constantly in flux and, ultimately, empty. Śāntideva uses these beliefs to reinforce some of the abovementioned arguments for how to live well. The lack of self and the lack of moral responsibility go hand in hand for Śāntideva. There is a distinction in Buddhism between “ultimate” and “conventional” reality, the latter being pure emptiness (at least in some schools of thought) and the former the realm in which humans perceive and navigate. In regard to sense of self, Buddhists would argue that we may perceive a type of psychological continuity, for instance, which may constitute a sense of self, but this self only exists conventionally; ultimately, there is no self at all, only emptiness. Similarly, Sartre argues that we do not have a static self. The only ‘self’ worth having is the one we create, and even that one is impermanent. A rallying cry of sorts for existential thought is “existence precedes essence.” This is meant not only to illustrate the anti-essentialist attitude of existentialism, but also to show that we must choose who we truly want to be. Further, human awareness is no more than the negation of the in-itself, meaning that there is only nothingness when we look deep inside of ourselves. This is not to say that there are not important differences between the ontologies and / or ethics of existentialists and Buddhists, as there surely are important differences. After all, Buddhism is an ancient and incredibly diverse spiritual system that has changed and branched in innumerable ways over a millennium. Existentialism, too, has very diverse and even conflicting branches. For Sartre and Śāntideva, however, it is in their overlap that what is important comes to light.

### **Conclusion**

Ultimately, Śāntideva and Sartre are both determinists, in that they believe that everything that exists is contingent or dependent on other factors. They both deny the existence of a permanent self or essence; they both agree that nothingness or emptiness is what underlies each of us; and they both agree that it is a moral and practical duty to

help those who are suffering.<sup>42</sup> Existentialism offers a way for Śāntideva to maintain his determinism but still adhere to the *Bodhisattva* path and to train others in its pursuit. Existentialism admits that we are determined, but that this doesn't limit our freedom. It does limit a specific type of freedom—viz., metaphysical freedom—but Sartre argues that this is an absurd position in any case. Simply by merit of being a being “for-itself,” we are immersed in freedom, confronted with choices at every step of our existence. This freedom is not comforting, but it is there nonetheless, and once we recognize it, we are responsible for choosing what we do and who we become. With this in mind, Śāntideva can maintain his ontological and ethical commitments and then use existential freedom to justify holding himself responsible for his actions and for motivating change in others. It is in this way that existentialism carves pathways toward awakening.

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42. *N.B.* There is no necessary connection between the denial of robust moral responsibility and the advocacy of moral duty. One can deny the existence of moral responsibility while at the same time arguing that we still have duties to try to make the world a better place; however, a skeptic of moral responsibility would not be justified in, for instance, claiming that someone *deserves* to be blamed (or punished or praised for that matter) for failing to adhere to a moral duty.

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# **Do I Have a Choice?: Amy Tan and Lee Smith on Marriage and Courtship Customs**

*Aubrey Elaine Keller*

## **ABSTRACT**

*For members of a folk community, the choices of who to marry and court, when and if to reproduce in the context of those relationships, and whether to divorce or separate are largely not up to the individual. Rather, community members often prominently influence relationships to which they are external, resulting in serious consequences for both married and courting people and the community as a whole. Through the lens of folkloric analysis, this paper juxtaposes Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* with Lee Smith's *Oral History*, focusing on the degree of marital and courtship choice enjoyed by characters Lindo Jong and Dory Cantrell respectively. Both authors, I conclude, use marriage and courtship customs to demonstrate that relationships are significantly manipulated by folk community members. In examining how revoked choice in marriage and courtship impacts these characters, their children, and their world, I hope to demonstrate that folkloric literature illustrates the risks of curtailing the agency of real people in relationships.*



Marriage and courtship relationships are not only unions between two individuals. Folkloric criticism investigates elements of culture from a framework of not-only-ness, first recognizing categorizable aspects of life within a folk community,<sup>1</sup> then expanding the conversation to consider what those aspects say about society. A normative relationship typically looks like two people partnering; however, the marriage and courtship customs at play in a folk group constitute an influence beyond the individuals in the relationship. Through these customs, a given folk community both transforms the people in the relationships and perpetuates circumstances within their community. By investigating literary examples of community influence on marriage and courtship, scholars can approach a better understanding of limitations on choice experienced by real people in relationships.

One illuminating example comes from Amy Tan, who incorporates Chinese marriage customs into *The Joy Luck Club* through Lindo Jong's experiences with and responses to those customs. Betrothed to another infant named Tyan-yu Huang at the age of two, Lindo is a Chinese woman born in the 1910s who navigates her way out of the marriage, remarries another Chinese immigrant in the United States, and narrates her story to her American-born Chinese daughter. Similar to Tan, Lee Smith incorporates Appalachian courtship customs into *Oral History* through Dory Cantrell's understanding of and struggle within the framework of those customs. Born in 1902, Dory is a young woman of the holler<sup>2</sup> who courts outsider Richard Burlage, becomes the single mother of their twin daughters once he leaves, remarries an Appalachian man, and dies an either accidental or self-inflicted death when her children are young. Both authors present their characters with the marriage and courtship customs of their respective communities and, in doing so, effectively convey that, as a member of a folk community, to court and to marry is to experience not an individualistic love story in isolation but a journey paved by external influence.

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1. With a conventional folkloric disciplinary understanding of the term "folk culture" as a set of elements including but not limited to values, traditions, customs, and art, I use the term "folk community" to mean a group of people who share a folk culture. Jan Harold Brunvand's *The Study of American Folklore* uses "folk group" instead of "folk community" in reference to sets of people who "may be identified for folklore purposes first by their distinctive fold speech and other traditions— the lingo and lore which set one group apart from others" (21). While I am writing about the same concept Brunvand calls "folk groups," I instead use the term "folk community" to emphasize that the people I am speaking about share a space.

2. The novel takes place in the fictional Hoot Owl Holler. Also called a "hollow," in the slang of the American South, especially Appalachia, a "holler" refers to a valley. The term also suggests that the area being described is particularly isolated ("hollow").

Marriage, courtship, and customs are definable terms useful in understanding Lindo's and Dory's interactions with traditional marriage. The American Psychological Association considers a marriage traditional "according to the historical norms of a given society, usually for the primary purpose of establishing a family," but "prenuptial customs vary in different cultures." While the use of words like "usually" and "primary" temper the definition as common rather than universal, those words also suggest a prescription of how the situation generally looks. Also, by this definition, marriage customs are "historical," meaning dictated by the generations who lived before, and their exigency is "establishing a family," in other words, the grouping into units of individuals who might parent more individuals who will also be easily recognizable as members of that unit. The term "marriage," used by Lindo herself, is the best descriptor for her relationship with Tyan-yu (Tan 51). Courtship constitutes a period leading up to the decision to marry and is a fitting term for Dory's relationship with Richard Burlage. Folkloric customs are practices for which there is "no questioning of why they were passed down, because that is disrespectful" and, in terms of adherence to those customs, there is "no rubric, but you better know the rules" (Gaitely). Tan and Smith use marriage, courtship, and customs as defined above to demonstrate that partnerships are often communally rather than individually orchestrated, assessed, and terminated.

Both authors' presentations of their character indicates a situation where the relationship poses a challenge to the individual's will. Tan affords Lindo a voice through the first-person point of view, and Lindo uses her first words to introduce her marriage as the time "I once sacrificed my life to keep my parents' promise" (49). The strong verb of "sacrificed" in active voice paired with the first of many uses of the pronoun "I" in a chapter unified by the analogy that links Lindo's capacity to control others to "the power of the wind" seems to indicate Lindo's agency (58). However, this agency comes not from the marriage, but from Lindo's behaviors in spite of the marriage. She not only has to erase herself by accepting the invisibility of the wind, but also has to redefine the tangible objects that serve as metonyms for marriage. Her community dresses her in wedding clothes to celebrate marriage, "but what [Lindo] saw was even more valuable"; Lindo "draped the large embroidered scarf over [her] face" and turned the garment into a tool that "covered [her self-celebrating] thoughts up. But underneath the scarf [she] still knew who [she] was" (58). The contradicting conjunction "but" punctuates Lindo's narrative as she redefines cultural items by offering opposition to their customary meaning. Tan emphasizes that marriage is not a conduit to Lindo's agency but an obstacle to it by creating a clear dichotomy between culturally-defined symbols of marriage and what Lindo uses them to accomplish, between garments and "what was inside me" (59). Lindo

is presented in the novel in a manner that captures the question of her agency in the face of community intervention and orients her as an individual in opposition to the conventions of Chinese marriage.

Smith gives a much different window into Dory's courtship experience by characterizing her not from her own point of view, but from the points of view of community members. The structure of the novel ensures that readers get others' accounts of Dory's words, actions, and identity, but never learn how she perceives her own life. Eleven of the novel's chapters are named after characters, nine of them narrated by the named character from the first-person point of view, and the other two, the chapters named after Dory's parents, are narrated by a third-person limited narrator. Despite being mentioned in every one of these chapters, Dory does not have a named chapter. What results is other characters depicting Dory as if she is a power source within the community, while the narrative structure itself gives her no voice. For example, Sally, Dory's daughter, compares their family to a kaleidoscope "with Mama at the center, not doing anything particular but not having to either, and all the rest of us falling in place around" (Smith 238). Sally goes as far as to say it is not only the family that is enraptured by Dory, but that "the whole world just gets in line to help [her] out" (239) also. However, Sally's explanation betrays the pattern of paradoxically attributing power to Dory and making her the object of external influence. She describes how Dory often was "caught up in a waiting dream," the passive voice and idea of both waiting and dreaming suggesting factors beyond Dory's control influencing her behavior (239). Smith presents her audience with Dory, this character that intrigues the other characters, and in this presentation demonstrates the absurdity of attributing mysterious power to community members while simultaneously excluding their voices.

As for exclusionary orchestration of marriage, Tan creates a cultural context where people outside of the relationship impose marriage. She demonstrates this through word choice that emphasizes Lindo's disenfranchisement in the decision of her own marriage. Lindo calls Tyan-yu "the boy I would be forced to marry" and remembers that whenever she would cry over the arrangement, her mother would remind her "it's no use" because "we have made a contract" (50, 52). The word "forced" emphasizes Lindo's lack of choice, the finality of "it's no use" in response to Lindo's crying expresses that even her retroactive opposition to the arrangement will have no effect. The ambiguous "we" further begs the question of whether the mother is referring to herself and the other adults responsible for the arrangement or indicating that the decision was made by the familial unit as a whole regardless of having excluded Lindo's input. Tan crafts the clearest picture of how her character's experience fits within the novel's cultural context when Lindo explains the

marriage practices of her city, Taiyuan. She supports her assertion that “I had no choice, now or later” with the explanation that Taiyuan was “always the last to give up stupid old-fashioned customs,” while “in other cities, already, a man could choose his own wife” (51). Tan’s fictional cultural context seems representative of the actual cultural context of China, whose marriage reforms in the 1950s recognized a previously excessive external influence at play in the context of marriage. Lawmakers reformed the institution of marriage in China into a “voluntary contract grounded in free choice and the individual’s emotional fulfillment,” and the nation later “further privatized” marriage with reforms regarding individual property rights in the case of divorce (Yeung & Hu 448). The real-world China that followed what would have been Lindo’s generation, then, seems to be moving toward greater choice and individualism in terms of marriage, at least in the legal context.

Dory, on the other hand, lives in a community trending in the opposite direction of the real-world China of the early-to-mid twentieth century; in Smith’s Appalachia, the decision of whether or not to legally marry is traditionally the choice of the courting individuals, but community members begin challenging that tradition. Granny Younger, a respected elder within the community, explains that “young folks just gets them a roof and moves under it and when the circuit rider comes around he makes it legal by saying the words, or they don’t fool with it one way or another. It’s nothing but words, what I say” (62). By delivering these lines through a character representative of the traditional wisdom of the folk community and having her equate legal marriage to “words” that can be “fool[ed]” with or not, Smith suggests that the Appalachian community is traditionally hands-off in terms of marriage. However, Granny’s account of the marriage between Dory’s father and mother, Almarine and Pricey Jane, is a mockery of outside imposition of marriage turned eerie in the context of the novel as a whole. Miss Lucille Aston, a townsperson and outsider in that she “would up and die rather set foot in the hollers,” insists that the couple “come right along with me” before declaring to her brother, a judge “I want you to marry them” (61-3). The scene’s tone is comical, with Almarine “a-waving to folks along the way like he’s one big parade” and the judge lying in bed in a dark room (62). However, the event takes on a dark cast when Granny reveals that although “ain’t nobody heard of him marrying folks before,” the reason the judge officiated the marriage was because “he’s scared of his sister” (63). Dory is born from parents who were coerced into marriage on the basis of the “want” and fear of two people outside of their relationship, the forced marriage easily serving as a metaphor for the Appalachian community itself that will by the end of the novel be turned into a theme park called “Ghostland” by a descendant whose desire for profit finds opportunity in a common fear that the holler is haunted (285).

Whether a relationship ends, in Tan's and Smith's worlds, is also primarily influenced by community members. Specifically, the in-laws are the primary reason both relationships must be dissolved. Huang Taitai, Lindo's mother-in-law, is the antagonist in the chapter of the novel that is concerned with Lindo's arranged marriage.<sup>3</sup> At the initial matchmaking session, when Huang Taitai expresses concern that the two-year-old Lindo "had an unusually bad temper," the matchmaker reassured Huang Taitai that Lindo "will grow up to be a hard worker who serves you well in your old age" (50). The matchmaker, the mouthpiece for marriage customs in Tan's cultural context, addresses not how Lindo's personality will impact the man she is marrying, but the in-law whose family she is marrying into. The marriage ultimately hinges upon this issue of serving Huang Taitai; when Lindo fails to bear grandchildren for the mother-in-law, Huang Taitai "flew into another kind of rage" and "became a little crazy," at which point Lindo begins planning her exit from the marriage (62). Lindo's feelings about and compatibility with her husband are secondary to her usefulness to this person who is external to the marital relationship.

In Dory's case, Richard recounts two conversations with individuals external to the relationship suggesting that the courtship relationship must end on the account of in-laws regardless of his or Dory's feelings. First, after Richard confides in Reverend Aldous Rife about his courtship with Dory, Aldous proclaims to Richard that because of the family Dory belongs to, "you have no choice" but to end the relationship (134). The inclusion of the word "choice" paired with the urgent and imperative statements "you must forget her" and "you must break this attachment, Richard, and break it at once" suggest that Aldous, someone external to the relationship, has the authority and insight to demand it be ended (134). Claiming that Dory's "father is a dangerous man, a criminal" for moonshining during the Prohibition era, Aldous appeals to the impact of familism on individuals (Smith 134).

In a study about Appalachia, Hal Seth Baron argues that Appalachians emerged from other Americans as a distinct folk community during "the period of isolation" spanning from 1840 to 1900 (210). A major feature that distinguished Appalachians as a folk community, he adds, is familism, which he defines as an economic structure divided equally between neighboring families with each family financially supporting its own members whenever necessary but discouraging individuals from prospering at the community's expense. By pointing to Dory's father's occupation as a reason Richard should not be involved with her, Aldous is making an appeal to familism. The second interaction is with Ora Mae, Dory's older sister, who admits later in the novel to having not given Dory the letter from Richard inviting her to return with him to his hometown

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3. This is the third chapter of *The Joy Luck Club*, titled "The Red Candle."

(Smith 216). Immediately after Richard internally monologs “Oh, how I wanted Dory!” Ora Mae informs him “she ain’t comin’ now, and she ain’t comin’ later, and she ain’t never comin’” (165). One could argue in Ora’s favor, that she was right to have called off the relationship given that, in this scene, she has just walked in on Richard preparing to have sex with another woman. However, that argument erroneously places the responsibility for ending a relationship in the hands of people external to the relationship. Although unlike Lindo’s situation in that the disruptive behavior of the inlaws is in opposition rather than in support of the relationship, Dory’s situation similarly presents an instance where inlaws make it difficult for the individuals to want to remain in the relationship.

Another area in which both authors depict community intervention in unions between two people is over the issue of conception. Tan juxtaposes Lindo’s character, who has not conceived within a forced marriage, with the character of an unnamed servant, who has conceived within an unsanctioned courtship. Her juxtaposition appears most clearly through the words she uses to describe these two characters’ bodies and the actions the characters take in response to their conception circumstance. Ignorant of the reason that the couple have not conceived—Tyan-yu has never consented to have sex with Lindo—Huang Taitai expresses anger that Lindo’s “stomach and breasts remained small and flat” (62). This physical description is nearly the opposite of that of the servant girl when Lindo observes “her eyes grow bigger and her teasing voice become smaller whenever the handsome delivery man arrive[s]” while “her stomach grow[s] rounder and her face become[s] longer with fear and worry” (65). Tan uses these opposite physical descriptions to set up Lindo’s solution to the issue, which she devises not for herself, but to “escape this marriage without breaking [her] promise to [her] family” (63). Once Lindo convinces the family that the servant is Tyan-yu’s true match, the servant is “so struck with this miracle of marrying Tyan-yu” that she arranges for her ancestors’ graves to be swept “not just once a year, but once a day,” an exaggerated practice of custom (65). External intervention determines the light in which these women’s bodies are cast, and each responds by turning to the generation that came before them. Tan’s depiction of these two characters suggests that, within the cultural context she constructs in the novel, when language prizes or belittles bodies based on pregnancy and relationship status, that language not only harms the people described, but also complicates their relationship with foregoing generations.

Dory is no stranger to belittling words in reference to conception. While Lindo was shamed for having not conceived while partnered, Dory is shamed for having conceived and being unpartnered. After Richard leaves town at the behest of Aldous and Ora Mae, Dory is apparently pregnant, and the community responds with language

that regards her pregnancy as a shameful joke. Little Luther Wade, the man who will eventually marry Dory, expresses anger at his mother calling Dory “ruint” a dialect form of the passive verb “ruined” that objectifies Dory as something changed for the worse by conception (171). Luther adds that another community member commented that “he wouldn’t take no man’s leftovers,” language that reduces Dory to a consumable (171). Ora Mae blames Dory for the pregnancy and equates her babies, too, to consumables, arguing that Dory engaged in courtship “and I said not to, and look where it got her. Two loaves of bread in the oven, I said, and the cook is out to lunch. Ha!” (211). This backhanded joke reveals both the extent to which Ora Mae believes that her external influence should have altered Dory’s choice to engage in a courtship relationship and a dehumanization of the resulting unborn children. In both circumstances, the community discounts the woman’s own feelings about conception while amplifying an external social pressure.

Tan and Smith also situate both women in a cultural context where marriage is a given after an initial failed marriage or courtship. On the basis of choice, Lindo contrasts her marriage to Tyan-yu to her remarriage to Tin Jong, the father of her American-born Chinese children, including her daughter Waverly. Addressing Waverly in the narrative, she explains that her marriage to Tin Jong “was not like my first marriage, where everything was arranged. I had a choice. I could choose to marry your father, or I could choose not to marry him and go back to China” (Tan 262-3). Her verbally ironic tone highlights that while yes, she could choose not to remarry, the circumstances surrounding her membership in her folk community of Chinese immigrants in America meant that choice would have sent her back to the country from where she had fled. Dory, like Lindo, does not remain single after the departure of Richard, recoupling with Luther, whom the community allows to extend symbolic paternity to her out-of-wedlock babies. In the family tree that lists Dory and Richard’s twin daughters, Richard is not named in the diagram, the twins instead listed under Luther’s name (231). Richard’s paternity is further erased when he returns to the holler ten years after his departure, and a community member tells him “she’s a wife now, with a husband better than most, and children” (221). As a result of the conversation, when Richard eventually sees the twins, he does not know they are his. Both Lindo and Dory remarry without fanfare in a recoupling that serves as somewhat of a social replacement of the previous marriage.

A history of external pressure to remarry in the folk communities Tan and Smith depict in their novels, first published in 1989 and 1983 respectively, is supported by sociological scholarship on real-world China and Appalachia. In the twenty-first century, long-term singleness after a marriage or courtship situation is becoming less stigmatized in Chinese and Appalachian folk communities. Social pressure is a factor that has



traditionally pushed Chinese women to marry in the first place and remarry if divorced, but Chinese gender discourse is beginning to push back. Hannah Feldshuh deconstructs the term 剩女, romanized as shèngnǚ, which translates to “leftover girl” and pejoratively refers to educated single women over the age of twenty-seven (39). She argues that this term points not to a concerning or humorous demographic, but to a societal shaming of women outside of the structure of marriage that does not consider the women’s own sense of success and fulfillment. Her deconstruction pushes against the pressure to remarry and the belittling language suffered by the fictional Lindo. Finding a similar disconnect as Feldshuh between stigma and reality, after interviewing divorced Chinese women between 1998 to 2018, Suet Lin Hung shares that although “dominant Chinese cultural discourse” privileges the married over the single lifestyle for women, plenty of divorcees share a vision of post-divorce femininity characterized by strength and independence that deters them from remarrying (10). Such a vision is not expressed by twentieth-century Lindo, whose previously-explored comment about having a choice to marry or return to China connects the idea of marital status to maintaining a standard of living rather than to femininity or self-image.

A similar trend as recognized by Feldshuh and Hung of questioning stigmatizing language about marriage has emerged within Appalachian culture. In 2010, Janis Evelyn Rezek interviewed eight West Virginian adolescent moms. Perhaps suggestive of social pressures within their folk community to be married as a mother, only one participant was single. Still, Rezek’s research resulted in findings indicative of a movement in literature towards condemning those who call adolescent motherhood a “social problem” in order to implement “social control” that often comes in the form of imposing marriage (131, 16). Members are growing more tolerant towards young, unmarried mothers in the community described by Rezek than Dory’s community where a young pregnant woman is “ruined” until marriage. Conducted twenty-to-thirty years after the novels, all three of these studies offer useful perspectives on how remarriage customs are developing during the twenty-first century in folk communities similar to those portrayed in Tan’s and Smith’s fictional worlds. A cultural shift towards destigmatizing singleness, while positive for both Chinese and Appalachian women, further exemplifies that whether an individual is shamed or respected for their marital status is a community issue.

The consequences of external interference extend to each woman’s daughter, who recount the resulting intergenerational trauma from their own points of view. As soon as Lindo’s family arranged her betrothal, her mother “began treating [her] as if [she] belonged to somebody else,” calling her “Huang Taitai’s daughter” (Tan 51). As a result, once Lindo has a daughter, Waverly, she “would proudly walk with [her],” telling



“whoever looked her way” that “this is my daughter Wave-ly Jong” (99). Waverly feels embarrassed by her mother frequently claiming her, and when she tells her mother “I wish you wouldn’t do that, telling everybody I’m your daughter,” she awakens her mother’s woundedness at being disowned by her own mother (99). Dory’s daughter, Sally, experiences a similar trauma passed down from her mother’s negative experiences with courtship. Starting over her storytelling several times as she struggles with the subject matter, Sally recounts the evening when her mother left and was found decapitated by a train. She explains that her mother frequently wandered off to the train tracks, the greater context of the novel establishing the implication that she returns to that location since those are the tracks that brought Richard out of the holler. After Dory’s death, “folks came from all around to stare at [the family] house, and the family was “a tourist attraction” (Smith 245). Through their intervention with the courtship situation, the community is complicit in Dory’s death before proceeding to treat the family in a manner that traumatizes Dory’s children. Tan and Smith both present contexts where people outside of relationships treat individuals differently as a consequence of the relationship, and the resulting harm extends to still other people outside of the relationship.

Studying marriage and courtship within Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club* and Lee Smith’s *Oral History* through a folkloric lens illuminates how there is much beyond the individual that is responsible for the quality of and potential fallout from relationships. In both novels, particularly in their discussion of courtship and marriage, a theme recurs of the people in relationships being led to believe by their folk community’s members or circumstances that they have no choice. With this understanding, people can proceed with caution when navigating both literary and actual cultural contexts and check themselves when tempted to hypocritically support external encroachment on relationships while placing all blame on people in relationships. Considering the ways in which marriage and courtship customs are not only practiced by individuals in relationships, but often heavily influenced by community members, the folkloric orientation of not-only-ness serves to depict more fairly the institution of marriage in general.

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