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Crisis: Predicament and Potential

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Editorial

Crisis: Predicament and Potential

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We could not, in the relative innocence of April, 2019, have predicted exactly how oracular it would be to theme issue 8 of *Aigne* "Crisis: Predicament and Potential". Nor could we, or our contributors, have predicted how the writing and assembling of this journal would be affected. I will, therefore, open *Aigne*'s eighth issue with a thanks to our editors, contributors, peer-reviewers and advisors, who, in the midst of a global pandemic, gave startling energy and time to bring this journal to fruition.

The crises responded to in this journal existed before the viral spillover of Sars-Cov-2. While the crisis into which this journal is being released postdates the crises it covers, the pandemic certainly inflected the last few months of *Aigne*'s assembly, and will no doubt be visible to readers through the language which crept in through the edits, tweaks and changes added during that time.

A particular feature of the current pandemic is that it has, in its urgency, the power to obscure pre-existing crises, but also the potential to expose them. In the early days of the Covid-19 crisis, it appeared that the first of these options would be more widespread. There was a sense that environmental, cultural and political concerns needed, for a time, to be put on hold: the virus itself, said the platitudes, did not discriminate, so this must be a time of unity.

Of course, the virus does discriminate, and the loci of its discrimination are situated at the nodes of pre-existing crises, many of which are incisively analysed by our contributors. Racial, political and economic injustices have been exacerbated by a virus whose strain on attention and resources has been significant, and has, therefore, taken the most from communities that have the least.

The crisis of underfunded or exclusivised healthcare services has, in particular, multiplied the consequences felt by various communities around the globe. From indigenous communities, which may exist further from centralized medical systems, to the medical communities, working

at these systems' very core, the resources required to mitigate the virus's impact have not been evenly distributed. The global #BLACKLIVESMATTER movement has elevated the voices of oppressed peoples, who have testified to both the uniqueness of their oppression and the shared structures that allow it to take place. In Ireland, as we isolated in our homes, the plight of those denied a home has become even more urgent. In particular, the scandal of Direct Provision's continued existence has taken a shameful centre stage.

What this crisis has therefore highlighted is the interconnectedness of crises, a reality which this journal has also attempted to illuminate. The crisis of a moment may be singular: an oncoming train or a cut brake-line. Crises which occur on community, national or even global levels tend to be multiple, and rooted in previously unsolved or unconfronted crises. These connections bring us to our first article, by Colum Finnegan, who opens *Aigne*'s eighth issue with an analysis of crisis rhetoric itself.

Finnegan's article, titled "Reframing Our World: Examining the Crisis of Crises", gives nuance to the wider journal through its deconstruction of crisis rhetoric, and the effects of its constancy on our ability to rationally understand and respond to crisis. Finnegan opens with an examination of the 'fight or flight' response, which serves as the foundation for his argument that contemporary news media 'hijacks' our cognitive crisis response mechanisms, which results in a lessening of our ability to rationally solve 'slow' crises such as climate change.

Corinne Mitsuye Sugino, in our second article, likewise queries the idea of an age of crisis, positing that the neoliberal market sells both crisis and its cure through its appropriation of Eastern meditation practices. Her article, "Palliative Buddhism: Corporate Exoticization and Appropriation of Mindfulness Under Neoliberal Crisis", uses three cases studies—the interruption of the 2014 *Wisdom 2.0* conference by protesters, and the meditation apps *Buddhify* and *Headspace*—to argue that some Westernised approaches to meditation are orientated toward allowing the individual to bear the stress of life under neoliberalism, but in a manner that distracts from the actual causes of these stresses.

We shift, then, to explorations of crisis through literature and literary lives. Whereas Finnegan and Sugino illustrate the potential of crisis to prolong itself into mundanity, Elysia Balavage, in our third article, focuses on the apocalyptic, yet generative, side of crisis. In "'Surely Some Revelation is at Hand': Yeats, Disaster, and the Generative Void", Balavage connects William

Butler Yeats's treatment of crisis and catastrophe to the generative nihilism espoused by philosophers such as Spinoza, Kant and Hegel. Balavage argues that Yeats's treatment of apocalypse must be understood in relation to this ideological context. Her juxtaposition of this context, along with Yeats's comments on the same, to poems from *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, *The Tower*, and *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* proves, itself, to be generative, expanding our potential perspectives on the Irish poet.

The apocalypse, and its generative potential, is likewise illuminated by Stefan Veleski in "Crisis and Transformation: The Aftermath of First Contact in Three Mid-20th Century Science Fiction Novels". Veleski nuances a traditional close reading through digital methods. His use of a novel 'sentiment analysis', enabled by Matthew Jocker's 'syuzhet' package, allows Veleski to plot the emotional valence of Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End*, Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* and Isaac Asimov's *The Gods Themselves*. So armed, Veleski endows his close reading of the novels with a new understanding of both the affective potential of their imagined apocalypses, and their authors' views of the same.

In "Writing *Saudade*: Navigating Home, Homeland, and Sexuality in the Work of Gabriela Mistral and Elizabeth Bishop", Corey Clawson centers crises both personal and societal around the Portuguese word *saudade*, a concept whose difficulty of translation helped render it a poetic centerpiece in the works of both Bishop and Mistral. Clawson renders the word as a combination of solitude, nostalgia and yearning, the mercuriality of which is explored, though not always through the word itself, by Bishop, writing in English, and Mistral, writing in Spanish. Clawson connects *saudade*, foreign to both writers, to their position as 'sexiles', individuals in some form of exile due to their sexuality. Through this link, Clawson illustrates the evolution of *saudade*, and how it is possible to feel *saudade* for a life denied not only by spatial and temporal distance, but by the social distance engendered by queerness.

Rounding out issue 8's articles is Kevin J. Greene's "Moonlight in Miami: The Split Sociopolitical Reality of South Florida As Told By Barry Jenkins". Greene similarly explores both the predicament and potential offered by a crisis through his exploration of Barry Jenkins's 2016 film *Moonlight*, focusing on the intersection of blackness and queerness against the particular cultural and geographical backdrop of Miami. Utilizing sociological studies of Miami, as well as popular depictions of the city, Greene argues that Miami, as a city of contraries based on both

wealth and race, forms a crucial cultural context for understanding *Moonlight*. In particular, Greene shows how the macrocosm of the city and the microcosm of the film both reflect on and encompass each other, most visibly in Chiron's navigation of blackness, queerness and masculinity.

Each of the articles engages with crisis in both its localized form through that article's subject matter and its global form through its connection to a delineated theme. We hope that both the insight and incisiveness of each article is multiplied by its connections with the others, and that the interested reader will gain much in their understanding of crisis: both its particularity and its interconnectedness.

Book Reviews

In approaching the theme of crisis, *Aigne*'s book review editors, Juan Carlos Ladines Azalia and Carolyn Howle Outlaw, sought out recently published work which dealt with some aspect of crisis. Our thanks to the publishers for providing the reviewed works.

- Sarah McCreedy of University College Cork reviews *Cormac McCarthy's Violent Destinies: The Poetics of Determinism and Fatalism* (2017), a collection edited by Brad Bannon and John Vanderheide and published by the University of Tennessee Press.
- Punyashree Panda of the Indian Institute of Technology, Bhubaneswar, reviews *The Discourse of Environmental Collapse: Imagining The End* (2020), a collection edited by Alison E. Vogellar, Brack W. Hale and Alexandra Peat and published by Routledge.
- Chandni Girija of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, reviews Simon Chauchard's *Why Representation Matters: The Meaning of Ethnic Quotas in Rural India* (2017), published by Cambridge University Press.
- Brian de Ruiter, of Brock University, St. Catherines, reviews Erika Guttmann-Bond's *How Archaeology Can Save the Planet* (2018), published by Oxbow Books.

Event Reports

For the event reports section, editors Sarah McCreedy and Conor Cashman sought out scholars

who had attended conferences which reflected, in some manner, on the theme of crisis.

Éadaoin Reagan, of University College Cork, reflects upon the 2019 meeting of the *Women and the Family in Ireland, 1550-1950* symposium, held in the University of Hertfordshire. Regan notes that crisis, if defined as a time of intense difficulty or danger, could rightly be applied to the experience of women in Ireland, a position reinforced in the report by Regan's accounts of her and her fellows' research findings.

Carolyn Howle Outlaw, also of University College Cork, reports on the *40th Association for Environmental Archaeology* conference, held in the University of Sheffield. The theme of the 2019 conference, "Living through change: the archaeology of human-environment interactions", was particularly pertinent to this issue's present theme. Howle Outlaw, underscoring the environmental archaeologist's view of the climate crisis, reiterates a theme that reoccurs consistently within this issue: that crisis is permanent state of being for humanity, and that we can stand to learn from the means by which our ancestors dealt with the same.

Creative

In a tradition started in our previous issue, *Aigne* sought creative submissions oriented around the journal's theme, with a particular interest in authors whose creative work intersects with or complements their academic work. Creative editors Robert Feeney and Matty Adams carefully considered the many submissions received by *Aigne*, judging them on both literary merit and their ability to further illustrate the theme of crisis. Their final choices for inclusion, Gráinne O'Hare's short story "Same Time Next Tuesday" and Michael Kurian's poem "Into the Kalari", are ably introduced by them in their creative editorial (p. 124).

Reframing Our World: Examining the Crisis of Crises

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Abstract

A perceived crisis demands immediate attention. The fight or flight response, hardwired into human cognition, directs attention and seeks to urgently resolve potential threats. This response has, over time, come to be exploited by news publishers to attract an audience. However, this instrumentalisation of crisis rhetoric is not merely a benign symptom of a competitive media landscape—it is also a cause of significant and problematic outcomes. Specifically, crisis rhetoric hijacks cognition, foreclosing the potential for detached rational appraisal of the relevant data. It engages cognitive tools that are ill-suited to the complexity inherent in many of the most pressing problems facing humanity. I call this the 'crisis of crises': the overuse of crisis rhetoric undermines our ability to effectively engage with actual crises, leading the public to either ignore or misframe many states of affairs. Using the system 1/system 2 model of cognition as a framework, this paper will examine the 'crisis of crises', its origins, outcomes and potential remedies.

Section 1—Introduction

We live in an era of perpetual crisis. The migrant crisis, climate crisis, democratic crisis, healthcare crisis, pandemic crisis and the crisis of higher education confront us daily. We anticipate some vague AI related crisis in the near future, if the imminent crises of automation or filter bubbles do not destroy society first. The various media that structure everyday life—print, social, television—speak in the rhetoric of crisis. Yet this rhetoric, though often tied to real issues, does not always generate the mass panic or sustained engagement which we associate with genuine crises. Instead, research has indicated that recent years have seen a general decline in public attention to serious issues such as the environment (Mccallum and Bury, 2013) and politics (Couldry, Livingstone and Markham, 2016. pp.16-20). What effect then does this rhetoric have? Why is it deployed? Should we interpret this trend as a benign symptom of the media's attention-seeking *modus operandi*, or an accurate and necessary, if somewhat glib, portrayal of serious events?

I will argue that the above illustrated dialectic is not the whole story, and that the pervasive overuse of the rhetoric of crisis is not only a symptom of the media's drive to capture attention, but is, itself, a cause of significant and pernicious outcomes. If we understand the media as playing a significant role in structuring our world, our interactions with it and our sense of its possibilities and limits, then the manner in which the media represents this world is significant (Couldry and Hepp, p.2018). This mediating role means that the pervasive overuse of crisis rhetoric directly affects how humans relate to the many and varied problems they are confronted with. Moreover, the overuse of crisis rhetoric affects our collective problem-solving capabilities—by shaping our perceptions of crisis itself, leading to short term, non-systemic conceptualisations of the data the news represents. I call this the 'crisis of crises': the overuse of crisis rhetoric undermines our ability to effectively engage with actual crises, leading us to either ignore or misframe many serious issues.

This paper aims to contribute to social constructivist literature, which examines "the consequences of the social world being mediated, that is, constructed from, and through, media…" (Couldry and Hepp 2018, p.213). Using this definition as a starting point, this paper examines how one feature of the media landscape, the rhetoric of crisis, affects the social world and, in particular, our collective decision-making processes. Though the conclusions drawn in the paper are widely applicable due to the international penetration of contemporary media technology, the main focus of the present study is the developed world.

I propose that crisis rhetoric triggers a 'fight or flight' response, prioritising intuitive and quick decision-making in the face of potential danger. This response has served valuable evolutionary functions—such as enabling us to escape predators—but in contemporary life such a response is often inappropriate. The core problem with crisis rhetoric is due to this causal chain: initiating a fight or flight response encourages intuitive, quick, and unmethodical decision-making which is unsuited to the sort of 'crises' such rhetoric describes. The migrant, climate, and democratic crises, for example, are all extremely complex issues with stark and immediate world-changing outcomes, ones that require deliberate and systematic reasoning for their resolution. Yet, when consistently framed in terms of 'crises', the wrong sort of cognitive routines are engaged, whereby immediate and simple solutions are presupposed, expected, and sought. Other outcomes discussed in the literature may also be related to crisis rhetoric. For example, compassion fatigue, whereby the proliferation of empathy-triggering news leads to disengagement due to overloading an

individual's capacity to feel compassion, can also be prompted by an excessive use of crisis rhetoric (see Moeller (2002) for an overview). However, the focus of this article is to examine the effect that crisis rhetoric has on how we process the information it intends to convey.

When the complexity of the issue being presented has no simple solution, agents primed by crisis rhetoric become vulnerable to at least two problematic outcomes: either disengaging with the data or becoming susceptible to manipulation. The fight or flight response—when agents under stress respond by fleeing or attacking—can be used to understand the processes that crisis rhetoric triggers. In the context of media consumption, 'flight', when the agent tries to escape the cause of the stress, leads agents to misframe and disengage from the data. Alternatively the 'fight' response evokes an urgent desire to resolve the situation via direct action, leading agents to favour simple and intuitive solutions to often highly complex problems. This can open a window of opportunity for the manipulation of otherwise rational agents: by supplying simplistic solutions, would-be manipulators can capitalise on the overuse of crisis rhetoric to build support for their cause. In the recent wave of far-right populist political upheavals, for example, simplistic solutions that mirror the tone of crisis rhetoric are used to attract and coordinate agents around irrational goals.

The paper will unfold as follows: section one outlines the deep evolutionary roots of our crisis response mechanisms and explores how and why these mechanisms are exploited by the media. Section two shows how this exploitation affects the manner in which agents conceptualise the data presented by the media, drawing on the system 1/system 2 model of cognition (Kahneman, 2011). Section three draws out the implications of this shift in cognition, examining how it leads us to misframe problems and oversimplify complex issues to the detriment of their resolution and to the benefit of those offering solutions that mirror this problematic framing. Section three uses the discourse surrounding climate change and emerging technology as case studies in order to highlight some concrete effects of the overuse of crisis rhetoric. I argue that these fields are in danger of taking the rhetoric of crisis at face value and further perpetuating it by engaging in their own form of crisis framing. The final section alludes to the potential for empirical study of crisis rhetoric and then examines tentative solutions to the crisis of crises, suggesting that there is no clear exit strategy given the contemporary media landscape and the hardwired nature of system 1 responses.

Section 2—Stress, Attention and the News Media

2.1—Stress

To explain how a perceived crisis affects human cognition, it is necessary to first examine the origins and implementation of stress coping mechanisms. An organism experiences stress when its internal stable environment is under threat from an external source (Knight, 2014). In other words, stress is generated when an organism is forced to restore its internal state of stable equilibrium, also known as its homeostasis. Reactions to stress and attempts to re-establish and support homeostasis are observed across the entire spectrum of life, from the cellular level to large mammals. Stress and stressors, as opposed to competition alone as emphasised by Darwin, are increasingly thought to play a pivotal role in the processes of natural selection (Bijlsma and Loeschcke, 2005). The core functional components that underpin mechanisms for dealing with stress are similar across all vertebrate groups, attesting to their primitive origins (Monaghan, 2014). In the case of mammals, stress activates a set of overlapping areas in the limbic forebrain, hypothalamus and brainstem (Ulrich-Lai and Herman, 2009). These modules mediate the reaction to a stressful situation in accordance with its severity and impact.

The so called 'fight or flight' response is the paradigmatic mammalian stress response behaviour generated by these mechanisms. Though initially used as a literal description of behaviour, i.e. the organism must decide to fight or escape, the term has evolved to refer to a bundle of behaviours engaged in by mammals when confronted with a potential or actual disruption to their homeostasis (Bracha, et al., 2004; Roelofs, 2017). Through experimental work examining stress reactions in primates, the fight or flight response is now understood to follow a specific pattern: first freeze, then observe, flee if possible and, if not, then fight (Gray, 1988). This instinctual set of behaviours has its roots in ancient cognitive mechanisms that are engaged when mammals are confronted with real or perceived threats. Crucially, prior to attempting to flee or attack, the agent first observes the stressor to determine the most suitable response. This automatic pattern of behaviour has, as we will see, been put to unexpected uses in the cultural sphere. In particular, the attention directing response that lies at the heart of the fight or flight mechanism is being increasingly exploited to capture audiences.

2.2—Crisis and the News

As the media industry has increasingly come to rely on the capture of attention to secure revenue (Wu, 2017; Hendricks and Vestergaard, 2018, p.xii), it has adapted to exploit the evolved stress coping mechanisms described above. These mechanisms provide a stable and low cost means to capture attention. Due to market saturation, both in terms of publishers and the means of publishing, attention capture has become increasingly difficult (Sridhar and Sriram, 2015; Webster, 2014). As most news media is funded via advertising revenue, and revenue streams are typically tied to audience size, publishers aim to capture the attention of the largest possible number of readers. A crisis, or a situation presented in the form of a crisis, is by definition a stressful situation, representing a potential threat to an agent's homeostasis. Thus, a perceived crisis engages a powerful attention directing mechanism with deep cognitive roots. In other words, by framing various states of affairs as a crisis, a news outlet has a highly reliable means to secure attention.

This use of evolved cognitive mechanisms to secure revenue streams has been termed 'limbic capitalism' and increasingly plays a key part in contemporary business models (Courtwright, 2019). The arrival of the digital era has served to exacerbate this exploitation: as the media landscape has become increasingly diffuse and pervasive, forms of rhetoric that tap into primal response mechanisms have become essential tools in the battle to secure an audience. The deployment of crisis rhetoric in the online sphere generates a 'race to the bottom' scenario. As competing news outlets vie for audience share, formerly reputable sources are forced to utilise the rhetoric of crisis to maintain their readership (Andersson, 2013).

The rhetoric of crisis has been instrumentalised by media outlets in order to reliably capture attention. Yet this explanation alone is not sufficient to explain the scale of the crisis of crises. To account for this, we must recognise that media consumers themselves often *seek out* information framed in terms of crisis. The widespread usage of crisis rhetoric reflects not only supply driven growth but also demand led pressure. The concept of 'deep mediatisation' can be of use here: as media consumers are exposed to crisis rhetoric, they are shaped to conceive of the world in terms of such a rhetoric. In the words of Couldry & Hepp:

> the role of 'media' in the social construction of reality becomes not just partial, or even pervasive, but 'deep': that is, crucial to the elements and processes out of which the social world and its everyday reality is formed and sustained. (2018, p.213)

As the media presents reality in terms of crisis, news consumers begin to understand the world, or

at least the world of the news, through a prism of crisis. Agents embedded within this social world begin to assimilate this as the default mode of presentation, seeking out further examples as crisis rhetoric becomes the model form of social discourse. This means that the rhetoric of crisis has effects beyond merely capturing attention. Its overuse shapes contemporary discourse—it affects how agents represent their world. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the crisis of crises applies primarily to the sphere of media. In the case of actual crises faced by individuals, such as an avalanche or car crash, the crisis response is not deficient, and indeed can be optimal. The target of criticism in this paper is the incorrect initiation of a crisis response in reaction to states of affairs that are not imminent crises in the sense of manifesting an immediate and personal danger. Though, from the perspective of 'deep mediatisation', the effect of constant exposure to crisis rhetoric will likely have effects on how individuals conceptualise more quotidian information.

Utilising crisis rhetoric to engage cognitive routines rooted in the mammalian stress response gives the news media a reliable means to capture attention. The pervasive use of such rhetoric then shapes audiences to seek out further examples of crisis rhetoric. This combination of supply and demand driven growth has led to a situation whereby public discourse is saturated with various supposed crises. Crisis rhetoric is, however, more than merely a benign symptom: it, itself, has undesirable outcomes. In particular, it may cause its audience to inaccurately conceptualise the information presented.

Section 3—Crisis and Cognition

In order to understand how such misconceptualistions occur, we can turn to recent work that explores the mechanisms of human cognition. This work, summarised by Daniel Kahneman, in *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2011), suggests that human cognition is characterised by two distinct states. Kahneman presents a model of human cognition that seeks to move beyond the conception of humans as solely rational animals. Instead, human cognition takes two distinct forms, termed system 1 and system 2, which are roughly analogous to a distinction between intuitive and deliberate cognition. System 1, intuitive or 'fast' thinking, characterises the bulk of human cognition, guiding quotidian actions and thoughts. It relies upon a mixture of evolved competencies and learned heuristics and enables us to rapidly react in various situations. Feelings are examples of system 1 cognition: they emerge unbidden and often determine our actions.

Associative memory lies at the core of system 1 cognition—it constructs a model of the world based on previous experiences and attempts to extrapolate outcomes based on this model. For example, intuition is the recognition of patterns that emerge from analysing previous experience. As a result, it is poor at dealing with novel information—it cannot process information that does not fit into pre-existing patterns. When the incoming data does not fit an existing system 1 model, system 2 cognition is engaged to rectify this dissonance.

System 2, then, refers to slow and methodical reasoning carried out deliberately when we are confronted with novel problems. It is this kind of thinking that is commonly characterised as rational. The intuitive heuristics that emerge from system 1 cognition act to streamline and simplify interaction with the world, whereas system 2 cognition is costly in terms of cognitive load and, as a result, is relatively slow. Furthermore, system 1 cognition can be said to partially determine the content of system 2. To understand how this can be the case, one can imagine a scientist following a hunch generated by system 1 in order to design an experiment using system 2 deliberation. Conversely, it is notoriously difficult to dismiss emotions emerging from system 1, even when it is clear that they are irrational from a system 2 perspective. As a result of this hierarchy, system 1 can be said to be the default mode of human cognition, with system 2 building on and refining its outputs.

Kahneman developed the dual model view of cognition to explain the various biases that research has shown emerge from intuitive thinking. Instead of seeing irrational choices as the result of poor cognition, he proposed that they are instead due to the design of the machinery of cognition itself. In other words, what appears as a poor decision in the light of objective facts is actually the correct decision for our intuitive cognitive machinery, which is ill designed, in some cases, for the task of navigating the type of complexity presented by contemporary life. This mismatch, between intuitive thinking and the correct response to complexity, is what underpins the problematic relationship between crisis rhetoric and public discourse. The type of crises that humans have evolved to respond intuitively to must be resolved quickly, lest we get eaten by a tiger. Because system 2 is, by its nature, both slow and resource hungry, it is system 1 that, for better or worse, guides action in a crisis. Responses such as fight or flight are paradigmatic examples of intuitive, system 1 driven action.

The use of crisis rhetoric, by generating a sense of immediate crisis thus favours a system 1

driven response. Instead of the information being processed by using system 2, crisis rhetoric forces the system 1 processes to dominate. Effectively, the use of crisis rhetoric hijacks the agent's thought processes, prompting a stress mitigation response and thereby diverting the agent from engaging in a more nuanced, system 2 driven interaction with the facts. An intuitive, visceral reaction is not the best response to many of the states of affairs presented using the rhetoric of crisis. The complexity of real-world problems is effaced as agents seek to escape or attack the apparent cause of the disbalance. In the case of crisis rhetoric, however, the cause is the information itself. Thus, after initially directing their attention towards the information, agents then either disengage or respond with an intuitive reaction, thereby relying on an overly simplistic framing of the state of affairs and potential reactions.

This problematic hijacking of thought processes is further reinforced by a specific cognitive bias known as the availability heuristic. This is a system 1 pattern recognition shortcut that uses past exposure to experiences as a guide to likely future outcomes (Tversky and Kahneman, 1973). When confronted with a new problem, question or situation, the availability heuristic leads humans to rely on easily recalled examples as a guide for action. The more often something has occurred, or the more dramatic and easily recalled the previous examples are, the more likely it is deemed to occur again. In the context of the crisis of crises, the availability heuristic has two effects: first, it causes agents to expect information to be framed in terms of crisis, further driving the general demand for crisis type framing; second, it lessens the power of crisis rhetoric to motivate action. This second effect emerges when crisis coping mechanisms are initiated in situations that are not a real crisis, creating a pattern in which these types of 'crises' do not require serious action. That the availability heuristic leads to this effect has been demonstrated via a study of its operation in relation to risk represented in the media. This work has shown that exposure to risk via the media has a negligible effect on subjects' perception of risk overall (Pachur, Hertwig and Steinmann, 2012). This suggests that crisis rhetoric does not lead to serious engagement, and indeed causes agents to dismiss out of hand the importance of the information conveyed.

The interaction of these cognitive systems explains how we can experience crisis as an arresting of attention without any actual effects on the real world. This can be attributed to the overuse of crisis rhetoric leading to system 1 cognition, which leads its audience to 'take flight' from the information, dismissing or ignoring it out of hand, or to attempting to 'fight' the data with intuitive, simplistic responses. The overuse of crisis rhetoric alters how information is received and acted

upon, leading those exposed to engage suboptimal cognitive routines. The repeated engagement of stress coping mechanisms in incorrect settings has a detrimental effect on the general public's capability to engage with what are pressing, serious and often life changing issues.

Section 4—Crisis Rhetoric and Public Discourse

The overuse of crisis rhetoric causes the cognitive misframing of serious states of affairs. It generates several problematic outcomes: disengagement with the data presented; an effacement of the relative importance and systemic nature of urgent issues; and the perpetuation of false solutions that mirror the rhetoric of crisis. Rather than an exhaustive list, these represent the most visible outcomes emerging from the overuse of crisis framing.

Crisis rhetoric directs an agent's attention and leads them to attempt to solve problems using intuitive system 1 response: fight or flight. However, an intuitive response is often both inappropriate and ineffective when the problems are complex and spatially or temporally diffuse. This mismatch can lead to premature disengagement with the data being presented. Once the system 1 cognitive routine runs its course and the ostensible crisis has been dismissed, the problem seems solved; the 'crisis' is averted. The availability heuristic compounds this effect: repeated exposure creates a pattern in which issues incorrectly framed as crises are resolved in a superficial manner. As a result, disengagement with states of affairs described in the rhetoric of crisis emerges as one problematic outcome of the crisis of crises. This disengagement has serious effects for public discourse, driving both disengagement with the data and consequently with the means of resolving actual crises. In particular, crisis rhetoric is changing how democracy is perceived, and thus altering the means via which structural problems are resolved, or not.

Many urgent issues—for instance climate change, or income inequality—require profound reshaping of society for their resolution. It is difficult to quantify a general decline in engagement with resolving serious issues of this sort, but studies of participation in democratic politics can partly serve as a proxy. This is because democratic decision-making is the primary mechanism by which stakeholders in the wealthy, established democracies, have traditionally resolved serious crises. Therefore, less political engagement indicates declining interest in the large-scale structural issues of the sort that require political action for their resolution. Various studies indicate that democratic participation has been falling across the developed world (Grasso, 2016; Mair, 2013).

Additionally, a rejection of democratic institutions, referred to as a 'democratic disconnect', has been diagnosed, where citizens are increasingly unhappy with democracy in general (Foa and Mounk, 2016). For many democratic political action is thus no longer seen as a legitimate route to tackle societal ills.

Many factors play a role in generating this sense of disconnect, but the overuse of crisis rhetoric plays a key part. By presenting the many urgent issues facing contemporary society as crises, favouring system 1 cognition, and incorrect conception of such issues is encouraged, making them appear as if they require, and are amenable to, immediate resolution. This then generates the sense that, right or wrong, our traditional political institutions struggle to resolve these crises. Indeed, due the reactive and inherently cautious nature of good governance, established democracies can often appear to exacerbate crises in the moment due to apparent inaction. The effectiveness of a government is often judged by how well it appears to respond to a crisis—regardless as to whether is it real or manufactured by the media to capture attention or by malicious actors to gather support for their simplistic and *prima facie* effective solutions. This metric of success both incorrectly incentivises governments to implement short-sighted, 'quick fix' solutions and perpetually sets them up to fail in the eyes of the public. The disengagement encouraged by the overuse of crisis rhetoric compounds this perception by encouraging a superficial understanding of the states of affairs, a system 1 driven conception, whereby complexity is largely dismissed.

The 'deep mediatisation' perspective mentioned above is relevant here: as crisis rhetoric becomes more prevalent, the world is increasingly viewed through a prism of crises needing urgent action and the simplistic solutionism this engenders. As citizens are given the impression of a government struggling to resolve overwhelming crises, they begin to reject the political system that has generated this state of affairs (Foa and Mounk, 2016). However, because the political arena is the primary domain wherein individual citizens can effectively engage with large scale structural problems, this rejection is also necessarily a partial disengagement with these types of problems. Democratic politics is the primary means available to enact real change in the world. Thus, the overuse of crisis rhetoric, by causing the public to disengage with the complex nature of contemporary urgent states of affairs, drives a disengagement with the types of structural issues that political systems are designed to solve and a rejection of those means as legitimate.

A second problematic outcome of the proliferation of crisis rhetoric is the effect of making

hierarchically structured and interwoven sets of causes and outcomes appear as equivalent. By presenting many different and incommensurable events and processes in the same register, the importance of some issues over others is masked. The consistent use of crisis rhetoric obscures the relative importance of each instance. This effect has been termed informational pollution; the glut of information and the overuse of a highly emotive register leads to the devaluation of what are true crises (Vaidhyanathan, 2018). As a result, even if the engagement of system 1 cognitive routines caused by crisis style conceptualisations could be overcome, the loss of a hierarchical ordering of the relative importance of the various states of affairs would still hinder adequate engagement. This commensuralisation also perpetuates non-systemic understandings of the various issues facing humanity. Many of the most urgent issues are intertwined; for example, research has shown that the migrant crisis is driven in part by the climate crisis which has caused widespread drought in the Middle East and North Africa (Abel, et al., 2019). Furthermore, the climate crisis is, itself, partly a product of a crisis of democracy, insofar as our political institutions are disincentivised to tackle the problem due to their structurally enforced short-term outlook (itself, in part, a result of the crisis of crises). Yet, by presenting all urgent states of affairs as individual, equally urgent crises, they appear as one-off unrelated phenomena. And as crisis prompts an immediate response, each individual instance must be dealt with in the moment, precluding effective engagement with the interwoven nature of many of the most pressing issues.

Broad public disengagement, the commensuralisation of states of affairs and the concealment of their systemic nature are the most widespread effects of the crisis of crises. However, the prevalence of crisis rhetoric is also at the root of another undesirable outcome: the rise of right-wing populist political actors. It is important to note that, although it superficially represents an increased political focus on the urgent states of affairs that face humanity, the rise of populist politics is not a welcome form of scrutiny as it feeds upon and exacerbates the type of simplistic framing inherent to crisis rhetoric. Recent research in political science has identified perceived crisis states as central to both enabling the rise of populism and its maintenance of power (Moffitt, 2016; Müller, 2017, pp.42-43). In fact, rather than merely thriving in apparent states of crisis, populists actively seek to manufacture them, explicitly using the rhetoric of crisis (Moffitt, 2016). In Moffitt's words,

> crises are never ‘neutral’ phenomena, but must be mediated and ‘performed’ by certain actors, setting the stage for populist success…populist actors actively participate in this ‘spectacularisation of failure’

> that underlies crisis…[they] radically simplify the terms and terrain of political debate; and advocate strong leadership and quick political action to stave off or solve the impending crisis (p.109).

This performance of crisis as a means to both seize and maintain power has been a central element of the many recent examples of populist political success: Trump's border crisis, with the wall as its simple, intuitive solution; the Brexiteer's crisis of identity, in which an extremely complex state of affairs is reduced to the simple question of sovereignty or servitude; the European migrant crisis, as weaponised by Orbán, Salvini and Le Pen, is reduced to a simple call to keep the 'other' out of Europe, ignoring the complex intersection of climate change, political instability and global power imbalances at its source. These states of affairs are not true crises (and, in the case of the first two, are arguably not even states of affairs), but are framed using crisis rhetoric, capturing attention and engaging system 1 cognition which favours action over deliberation. This rhetoric has the effect of distracting its audience from the reality of the situations described and encouraging immediate action. Effectively, populist political actors mirror back to their audience the already perceived sense of crisis and provide solutions that satisfy system 1 driven cognition. By representing complex states of affairs as simple, existential threats, populist actors satisfy the simplistic decision logic that is prompted by crisis rhetoric. If you can frame a state of affairs as a crisis then a simple, quick and emotive solution like 'build the wall' or 'Brexit means Brexit' can gather support. Thus, paradoxically, populist actors often utilise crisis rhetoric to reanimate an apathetic and disengaged polity, except it is political discourse reborn in the image of system 1 cognition.

4.1—Crisis Rhetoric in Action

The preceding discussion has primarily been theoretical in content; the paper now examines how these effects emerge in the context of actual states of affairs, specifically in relation to the climate crisis and reactions to emerging technology.

Humanity is in the midst of an unprecedented period of anthropogenic climate change. World temperatures are expected, under the best-case scenario, to rise by 1.5 degrees Celsius by the end of the century (I.P.C.C., 2018). An increase of this magnitude will cause widespread extinctions, extreme weather events and a fundamental shift in human life-ways. The catastrophic and imminent nature of these changes is routinely communicated to the public, but, for the most part,

this information does not prompt urgent action. Worldwide engagement with climate change has increased incrementally, but, considering the magnitude and scale of the danger, the response is disproportionate. According to a recent report, "public engagement with the issue of climate change is low and too few people are adopting mitigating actions" (Jones, Hine, and Marks, 2017). Yet, this is not a problem caused by lack of information. Media coverage of climate change is widespread: as various temperature records are passed, they are reported; natural disasters make headlines; it is newsworthy when world leaders fail to reach agreement in climate negotiations. All this reportage, however, has not increased public engagement (Leiserowitz, Maibach, Roser-Renouf, Feinberg, and Howe, 2013). Instead, because the tone of this coverage typically conceptualises the climate emergency as an immediate crisis to be resolved, it engages the mechanisms outlined above. Thus, what is undoubtedly an urgent situation is presented in a form that causes its audience to disengage. Because there is nothing that can be done by a lone agent to combat climate change in a meaningful way, no immediate, intuitive, reaction can have any effect. By engaging a crisis response, the media ensures that the information is attended to, but, at the same time, causes the audience to misframe it in a manner that is detrimental to effective deliberation. The continued lack of widespread public and political response to climate change is driven by many disparate elements, but the framing of this state of affairs in the rhetoric of crisis is one core cause. The commensuralisation problem that emerges from the overuse of crisis rhetoric is also especially damaging for an issue like climate change. Climate change is not one more crisis among many, it is the most pressing crisis yet faced by humanity. Sadly, the means and methods of public discourse as they stand are for now inadequate to tackle a problem of its scale.

A further area in which alarmist discourse has had a detrimental effect is on the study of emerging technology. Much recent work examining society and technology in the same frame takes the media's alarmist discourse as its starting point (though the chain of causation is bidirectional). Thus, we have warnings about an imminent singularity when humanity and computers will merge (Kurzweil, 2005), an impending AI apocalypse (Bostrom, 2017), and the end of work for vast swathes of the world population (Bastani, 2019). Regarding the contemporary world, we apparently live under a pernicious regime of 'surveillance capitalism' wherein our desires and intentions are moulded by technology companies for profit (Zuboff, 2019), while at the same time "relentless advances in science technology are set to transform the way we live

together, with consequences for politics that are profound and frightening in equal measure" (Susskind, 2018, p.i). From this cross section we can see that the rhetoric of crisis has infiltrated scholarship dealing with the effects of technology.

These claims are united by their use of crisis rhetoric of the sort that characterises much contemporary media and reportage. Each of these claims may come true, but various other less dramatic outcomes and diagnoses are just as likely. Nevertheless, these scholars centre their work around hypotheses that predict or describe serious negative (or positive) outcomes for humanity, deploying alarmist rhetoric and mirroring and reinforcing the highly charged and imbued-with-crisis methods of the media. The ubiquity of crisis rhetoric in general discourse creates the impression that such extreme outcomes are likely and thus require sustained study. This approach skews the authors' thinking in the direction of sensationalist conclusions. Instead, such alarmist outcomes are often merely reflections of the manufactured and instrumentalised sense of crisis that pervades public discourse. By taking such a world view as a valid starting point, scholars beg the question as to whether such a world is likely. This is not to say that the potentially catastrophic effects of technology do not merit study, but rather that the treatment of such possible effects should be carried out in a less sensationalist manner.

In general, the discourse surrounding emerging technology reflects a broader trend towards presentism in social discourse. This occurs when the present is conceptualised as radically different and significantly more likely to tend towards catastrophic outcomes than the past. This lack of historicity is, itself, driven by the crisis mentality—if we are confronted with endless new and unforeseen crises then there is little value in looking back: they must be solved here and now. Correctly historicising the present can perhaps, then, serve as a corrective for the overuse of crisis rhetoric. By situating our current era upon a trajectory that reveals its sameness as opposed to its apparent newness, we can begin to properly assess those states of affairs that are actual instances of crisis and those that are merely instrumentalised uses of an empty rhetoric. Yet, this type of theoretical approach already requires the ability to see the crisis of crises for what it is and wriggle free of its pernicious grip. In order to do this, we will need to take concrete steps: first, to empirically identify the effects of crisis rhetoric; second, to investigate the extent of its effects and mechanisms; and third, to implement practical measures aimed to limit its effects. It is to this task that we now turn.

Section 5—Confronting the Crisis of Crises

The crisis of crises represents a serious challenge for public discourse. Various platforms, from print journalism to social media, rely on crisis rhetoric to capture attention—attention required to generate revenue. The internet, by removing traditional gatekeepers and intensifying the competition for attention, has pushed the use of crisis rhetoric into overdrive. As a result, the public misconceptualises the nature of the urgent states of affairs they are confronted with: their relative importance is effaced and their systemic nature is concealed. Even more pressing is the exploitation of crisis rhetoric by duplicitous political actors to capitalise on the emotive nature of system 1 cognition in order to mislead the public. Given these effects it seems imperative that steps be taken to identify, operationalise and attempt to combat the proliferation of crisis rhetoric.

The primary aim of this paper has been to engage in the first of these tasks—identification—by drawing attention to the proliferation of crisis rhetoric, exploring its potential mechanism of action and examining its outcomes. However, in order to make this work more concrete, it will be essential to engage in further empirical investigation. This is beyond the scope of this article. What follows is merely a rough idea of what such an investigation would entail. The central claim of this paper is that exposure to information presented using the rhetoric of crisis has effects on how that information is processed. This claim can be tested by taking two groups of subjects and exposing them to the same information describing a fictional event. One group is given the information in a dispassionate and balanced manner; the other group is presented the same information using crisis rhetoric. The two groups can then be asked to fill out a questionnaire about the information. The questions can be coded on a scale of intuitive/rational or system 1/system 2. This basic experiment can be used to investigate what effect crisis rhetoric has on how individuals conceptualise the information presented. This outline serves merely to show that the speculative claims presented in the paper are amenable to empirical investigation. The final sections of this paper deal with the third pressing task: attempting to mitigate the proliferation and effects of crisis rhetoric.

Due to its effective and central role in the media economy, it seems unlikely that the use of crisis rhetoric will diminish organically. In the contemporary, saturated media landscape, no one outlet is incentivised to abandon this problematic but effective framing device. State or platform-

wide regulation would be required to coerce publishers to reduce their reliance on this problematic framing device. Yet any potential state or corporate regulation implemented to curb the use of crisis rhetoric faces serious hurdles. In part, this is because crisis rhetoric is, itself, a vague, 'family resemblance' type concept: specific instances are alike in that they generate a sense of crisis, but the individual features of each instance differ. This makes it extremely difficult to police effectively. Furthermore, top down measures, specifically that give governments the power to define what may or may not be published, violate the central free speech tenets of liberal democracy. Thus, approaches utilising specifically state enforced regulatory measures are difficult to implement, and fundamentally problematic.

Another potential way to limit the use of crisis rhetoric is via consumer pressure on media companies or platforms to limit its use. For example, clickbait is an example of one type of crisis rhetoric that has received pushback from media consumers. The use of clickbait is on the rise across all media types, and it demonstrably increases user engagement and attention capture (Rony, Hassan and Yousuf, 2017; Blom and Hansen, 2015). Yet despite, or perhaps because of, its effectiveness, there is evidence that internet users are aware of clickbait and are unhappy with its use. For example, Facebook has taken steps to reduce its prevalence in response to user complaints (Facebook, 2016). However, clickbait is unlike other uses of crisis rhetoric insofar as it relies on a false sense of crisis that is quickly revealed to be contrived, unlike the various real and urgent states of affairs to which much crisis rhetoric refers. Thus, clickbait is perhaps seen as an illegitimate, or unfulfilling use of the rhetoric of crisis, whereas actual urgent states of affairs are not. Additionally, the demand led element of crisis rhetoric, which similarly underpins the effectiveness of clickbait, means that even if a subset of consumers reject crisis rhetoric, the majority will continue to expect and seek out information so conceptualised. As a result, it is unlikely that crisis rhetoric *in general* will becomes the focus of a similar user-driven pushback campaign.

Despite the grim outlook for state regulation and consumer driven reform, one promising avenue by which to mitigate the effects of the crisis of crises is that of educating media consumers to be aware of crisis rhetoric, its uses and effects. By explicitly naming crisis rhetoric as a cynical and effective tool designed to capture attention, we can empower media consumers to reconceptualise the information communicated, defuse the sense of pervasive crisis and avoid the type of cognition it encourages. For example, in relation to fake news, under pressure from various

governments and advocacy groups, Facebook has begun to educate users about its dangers and uses (Facebook, n.d.). If such an initiative were also utilised to educate news consumers to spot the instrumentalised use of crisis rhetoric, it could potentially help alleviate the demand for, or effectiveness of, such conceptualisations.

However, even if education about crisis rhetoric becomes widespread, potentially being included in a childhood media literacy class, the phenomena would still continue to have effects. This is due to the hard-wired motivating effects of crisis rhetoric coupled with its reference to actual states of affairs. Even if one is forewarned about the use of crisis rhetoric, it is extremely difficult to switch off an automatic system 1 reaction, especially one that is linked to actual events in the world, such as immigration or climate change. Because system 1 cognitive responses are the default form of human cognition, merely educating users about the prevalence and use of crisis rhetoric will not be sufficient to reshape cognitive engagement. Indeed, given the hierarchy inherent in system 1/system 2 processes, whereby system 1 takes priority, once a stress mitigation routine is initiated, system 2 is largely unable to intervene, at least in the moment. Nevertheless, education, specifically early education about the methods used by the media to exploit cognitive biases, is one concrete step that can draw attention to crisis rhetoric. This should aim to provide guidance on why such rhetoric is effective and how its use does not necessarily relate the reality of the states of affairs it describes. Additionally, the empirical work alluded to above can provide concrete data about how such rhetoric influences thought processes and can inform the content of the educational material.

As we have seen, the crisis of crises can perhaps be mitigated by the development of targeted critical thinking skills using education. This can be made possible by establishing a set of criteria with which to identify, analyse and dismantle or argue against crisis rhetoric (the history of rhetoric can provide a useful starting point for this endeavour). One highly specific area where spreading awareness of the effects of crisis rhetoric is both straightforward and potentially highly effective is in the context of academic research. By popularising the concept of the crisis of crises and its effects on research and public discourse, as this paper sets out to do, editors, publishers and journal referees can incorporate standards to mitigate its effects into their general gatekeeping. We can encourage editors and referees to be vigilant and to take necessary action to address those who appear to be utilising this problematic mode of expression.

Until a problem is identified, it is impossible to resolve. Thus, my aim here has been to name crisis rhetoric and examine its effects. It has serious effects on public discourse, causing audiences to engage in, and seek out, simplistic framing of what are highly complex issues and to ignore the systemic nature and relative importance of such issues. As a result, investigating and mitigating the effects that crisis rhetoric has on public discourse is of urgent importance.

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Palliative Buddhism: Corporate Exoticization and Appropriation of Mindfulness Under Neoliberal Crisis

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Abstract

In 2014 at the annual Wisdom 2.0 *Conference in San Francisco, several people interrupted a panel hosted by Google on mindfulness and technology in order to protest economic inequality and displacement in the area. After the protesters were forced to leave, the panelists instructed their audience to utilize mindfulness techniques in order to move past the distraction and return to productive discussion. This moment encapsulates the interaction between the growth of corporate mindfulness and the ongoing crisis of neoliberal exploitation, in that the panelists sought to deploy mindfulness as a strategy for smoothing over the contradictions of capitalism. This paper analyzes the turn by an increasing number of people and corporations in the West to corporate mindfulness as a method for coping with uncertainty, stress, and anxiety associated with neoliberal crisis. I analyze the 2014 incident at the* Wisdom 2.0 *conference, as well as two guided mindfulness programs:* Headspace *and* Buddhify. *In particular, I argue that these corporate mindfulness programs are characterized by the appropriation, exoticization and whitewashing of Asian Buddhist practices that serve as a crisis management strategy in the contemporary neoliberal era.*

In 2014 at the annual Wisdom 2.0 Conference in San Francisco, a panel hosted by Google titled "3 Steps to Build Corporate Mindfulness the Google Way" sought to discuss how integrating mindfulness into company life might enhance gratefulness, compassion and wisdom at the corporation. However, several people interrupted the panel to protest economic inequality and displacement in the area, chanting "Wisdom Means Stop Displacement; Wisdom Means Stop Surveillance; San Francisco: Not for Sale!" while unfurling a banner that read "Eviction Free San Francisco" (Heart of the City, 2014; Wisdom 2.0, 2014). After a few moments, security forced the protesters to leave. One of the panelists then instructed the audience through a few moments of guided meditation, asking them not to judge the situation as good or bad, but to sit with it in order to move past the distraction and return to productive discussion. Throughout the rest of the

presentation, they explained how engaging in mindfulness at Google executive meetings had benefitted them. What this incident at the Wisdom 2.0 conference so paradigmatically captures is the way in which mindfulness is yoked from its original Buddhist context and placed in service of a secular, whitewashed, palliative strategy for helping a corporation to run more smoothly. Put differently, this incident encapsulates the interaction between corporate mindfulness and the ongoing crises of neoliberalism, in that the panelists deployed mindfulness as a strategy for smoothing over capitalist violence.

This incident at the Wisdom 2.0 conference is just one example of a broader phenomenon of Western adoption and appropriation of mindfulness practices. One of the most popular examples can be gleaned in Jon Kabat-Zinn's ideas about "Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MSBR)," in which Kabat-Zinn claims to draw from Buddhist practice but simultaneously articulates MSBR as a secular practice of simply paying attention to the present moment without judgment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). While Kabat-Zinn's MSBR program initially began by offering eight-week courses for stressed out Americans, it soon developed into an internationally marketed curriculum sold to corporations, schools, government and military institutions. Interest in mindfulness has exploded throughout the West, including a panoply of mindfulness programs in corporate spaces designed to increase productivity and decrease stress. Even the U.S. Army has integrated mindfulness practices in an attempt to foster mental resilience in their soldiers both during combat and after deployment (Myers, 2015). In Western countries outside of the U.S., mindfulness programs and interest in them have grown exponentially as well. For example, one study on the growing phenomenon of mindfulness in Aarhus, Denmark noted a 74% increase over just four years (Borup, 2016). Finally, in many ways this trend has resulted in scholars taking up mindfulness in similar ways. While Janine Schipper (2012) argues mindfulness can encourage sociologists to turn inward and question how their own illusions cloud research practices, Matthew Immergut and Peter Kaufman (2014) suggest Buddhist notions of an interdependent self can advance sociological inquiries into symbolic interactionism.

As examples of this larger trend, I examine corporate mindfulness training programs and mindfulness apps marketed for stress reduction and productivity. Scholars have criticized these practices for commodifying and appropriating a historically Buddhist practice, with some even referring to the process as "McMindfulness" (Purser and Loy, 2013; Healey, 2015; Toledo, 2016; Hyland, 2017; Purser, 2018; Purser, 2019). As Ronald Purser (2019) points out, Kabat-Zinn's

mindfulness empire and other programs like it exemplify the corporate co-option of Buddhist principles and the development of a dangerous capitalist spirituality. For him, these mindfulness programs are stripped of their ethical practices and made subservient to the demands of the marketplace, reframing social injustice and capitalist exploitation as individualistic problems of the mind that can be overcome through meditation (Purser, 2019). Here, mindfulness is yoked from the Buddhist emphasis on interconnectedness and social transformation of suffering and used to emphasize neoliberal values of individualism, productivity and consumerism. Moreover, many programs de-link their practices from Buddhism, touting a secular mindfulness that is inspired by Buddhist practices but adapted for a general audience and stripped of religious connotations. As Funie Hsu (2016) notes, this promotes an "ideology of white conquest" that invisibilizes Asian and Asian American Buddhists and their role in the legacy of mindfulness practices.

Scholars contending with neoliberal crisis provide avenues for considering the way in which corporate mindfulness acts as a strategy for expanding neoliberal value systems and co-opting Buddhist discourses of interconnectedness to serve the ends of the market. The contemporary era remains increasingly characterized by social fragmentation, individualism, the expansion of social inequality and existential threats. This crisis and its concomitant management process is an essential strategy in maintaining neoliberalism, as it relies on cycles of destruction and crisis to justify reconstruction (Harvey, 2007). As Wendy Chun (2016) argues, neoliberalism increasingly works through privatization, producing a plural "you" as opposed to a communal "we," in which consumer products claim to be specifically marketed to each individual. For Chun, contemporary capitalism requires consistent "updates" to deal with its contradictions, producing reoccurring crises that require correction (Chun, 2016). While her focus remains on the way in which new media technologies in particular portends to resolve ongoing issues, we might consider more broadly the ways in which contemporary society increasingly seeks to "update" itself to attend to crisis without confronting the structural and sociopolitical roots of that crisis. Corporate mindfulness programs present one such form of said "update," as a strategy that co-opts Buddhist belief systems in order to figure market forces, productivity and neoliberal self-help as solutions to crisis. As Lauren Berlant (2011 pp. 10, 81-82) has highlighted, the historical present is increasingly structured through "crisis ordinariness," a term she uses to refer to the way in which moments of change unfold in larger contexts of precipitating conditions. In other words, "crises" are not isolated events but occur as the result of systemically embedded social conditions, and are

often experienced as ongoing as opposed to instantaneous.

Building on this existing scholarly conversation, I consider the way corporate mindfulness programs are framed as solutions to ongoing feelings of stress, fragmentation and disillusionment with everyday life as a strategy of neoliberal crisis-management. Methodologically, I investigate how corporate mindfulness programs justify their products and attempt to persuade publics of the need for them. In doing so, I seek to identify the rhetorical strategies that they rely on to frame mindfulness as a solution to stress, fragmentation and crisis. For the purposes of scope, I limit this analysis to Wisdom 2.0 and two mindfulness apps: *Buddhify* and *Headspace.* In exploring Wisdom 2.0*,* I analyze the statements released by Wisdom 2.0 and the protesters in order to understand their perspectives on the incident, as well as to consider how mindfulness programs like Wisdom 2.0 respond when faced with the violence of corporate capitalism. At the same time, I consider how Wisdom 2.0 presents itself on its website in order to investigate what discursive appeals it relies on to sell mindfulness as a product to corporations and individuals. Similarly, in analyzing *Buddhify* and *Headspace,* I look at the rhetorical strategies employed on their websites to understand how they market and frame the products, as well as works published by their founders to gain insight into how they conceptualized mindfulness for these products. Ultimately, I argue that these corporate mindfulness programs are characterized by the appropriation, exoticization and whitewashing of Asian Buddhist practices that serve as a crisis management strategy in the contemporary neoliberal era.

In what follows, I briefly explicate the context of mindfulness and its emergence as a Buddhist practice. Then, I examine the incident at Wisdom 2.0 and its relationship to neoliberal crisis. Next, I consider the development of *Headspace* and *Buddhify* as corporations that produce mindfulness practice as a consumer good for dealing with stress, lack of productivity and unhappiness. Finally, I conclude by arguing that scholars ought to further consider the role between Western appropriations of mindfulness practices and attempts to produce palliative strategies to cope with ongoing crisis.

Crisis and the Appropriation of Buddhist Mindfulness Practices

As a religion over 2,500 years old, Buddhism encompasses several divergent traditions that are not a monolith but contain innumerable nuances, internal debates and interpretations that go

beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, at the heart of these Buddhist traditions lies the idea of *anatman,* or "no-self," which denotes the illusory notion of an independent or inherent selfhood. Instead, all phenomena are interconnected with other phenomena, and do not contain their own self-isolated existence (Keown, 2000). Within this larger tradition, mindfulness practices are often derived from the *Satipatthāna Sutta* of the Pāli Canon of Theravada Buddhism. This text is considered to be a direct instruction on mindfulness practice, with the word *satipatthāna* roughly translating to "presence of mindfulness" (Anālayo, 2003, p. 29). The text begins with the claim that the sutra points to the direct path to the realization of *nibbana* (or *nirvana* in Sanskrit), a word commonly translated in the West to mean "enlightenment" but which actually means "blown out" (Anālayo, 2003; Keown, 2000, p. 52). *Nirvana/nibbana* thus signals a "blowing out" of the self as the path to spiritual awakening. The *Satipatthāna Sutta* divides its instruction for the attainment of this awakening into four sections; mindfulness of the body (*kāyā*), feelings (*vedanā*), mind (*citta*), and mind-objects (*dhammas*) (Purser and Millilo, 2015). It proceeds with instruction on meditation practice, connecting its instruction to Buddhist beliefs (Anālayo, 2003).

A brief explication of these concepts may help to clarify the religious background from which mindfulness practices are drawn. Related to the notion of no-self is that of dependent origination or dependent co-arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda* in Pali, *prātityasamudpāda* in Sanskrit), which describes the interdependent nature of all phenomena and thus the impossibility they have an unchanging, inherent essence. Also related is the impermanent nature of all phenomena as a result of this interdependence and lack of inherent essence (Keown, 2000). Thus, mindfulness is situated within a wider religious context that seeks to end unwholesome attachments to greed, illusory notions of the self, and other delusions. Even from this brief explication, it is easy to see how many contemporary Western appropriations of mindfulness, which are increasingly focused on discourses of self-help and individualism, are situated in opposition to Buddhist notions of no-self and interdependence. Moreover, as the self-help industry is increasingly dominated by white men, it is worth considering whether these discourses are accessible models for alleviating suffering since the ability to overcome barriers to success without confronting structural issues is a luxury seldom afforded to marginalized people.

Bill Duane, one of the presenters at the Wisdom 2.0 panel interrupted by protesters, sought to demonstrate the value of mindfulness by using it as a strategy for approaching the interruption through value neutrality. I use the term 'value neutrality' to designate an amoral position whereby

one refuses to take an ethical stance for or against a given action or statement. As the Wisdom 2.0 blog states in its report on the incident, after the interruption Duane asked the audience "to embrace this moment, without judging it good or bad…what had felt like an emotionally jarring interruption was transformed into a moment of awareness and peace" (Wisdom 2.0, 2014). In this regard, mindfulness is converted from a practice designed to alleviate suffering to a practice oriented toward pacifying resistance to that suffering by refusing to judge the incident "good or bad." The protesters were attempting to draw attention to an ethical question of how the presence of Google and other tech companies has led to increasing gentrification and evictions, thus harming local residents and evincing "the company's own hypocrisy in purporting to be 'mindful'" (Heart of the City, 2014). That Duane asked his audience not to judge the situation implies neutrality in its refusal to render a value judgment on the situation and its ethicality. Instead, Duane calls for simple awareness of the incident, implying any decision to proclaim the protesters right or wrong would interrupt that awareness. Mindfulness here becomes not a strategy to alleviate suffering but an exercise in complacency, of turning away from the ethical questions the protesters posed in the face of capitalist violence by refusing to take a stance on it.

Moreover, Duane's use of mindfulness selectively interprets the practice as simple awareness of a moment. However, as Ronald Purser and Joseph Millilo highlight,

> Canonical descriptions differentiate between two types of *sati,* "right" (*sammā*) and "wrong" (*micchā*). . . . Thus, mindfulness is not merely a passive and nonjudgmental attentiveness to the present moment exclusively but an actively engaged and discerning awareness. (2015, p. 5)

Contrary to the practices led by Bill Duane, then, Buddhist conceptions of mindfulness are based in a process of discerning right from wrong and cannot simply be reduced to awareness in a moment.[1] Such a practice thus not only appropriates mindfulness from its historical basis but does so in service of ignoring attempts to alleviate suffering, essentially guiding the audience to be at 'peace' with Google's role in ongoing violence under the guise of tolerance and mindful awareness. This represents an example of what Berlant refers to as "cruel optimism," or an investment in something that actually impedes one's wellbeing or flourishing (2011, p. 1). Duane reduces mindfulness to simple awareness of the moment, promoting a neoliberal amorality that fails to respond to ethical questions in favor of being

[1] It is important to note that ideas of "direct perception" were emphasized in some later Buddhist schools of thought. Robert Sharf (2015) locates examples of this notion in certain Zen schools and the Tibetan Dzogchen school. Some might argue, then, that corporate mindfulness programs have a basis in Buddhism. However, it would seem that this notion involves more a rejection of the "discriminating" mind insofar as conceptual thought is often clouded by delusion, not the claim that we ought not distinguish ethically right from wrong. Even if so, as Sharf details, Soto Zen practitioners engaged in "Critical Buddhism" in the 1990s criticized this model of direct apprehension for helping to justify Japanese militarism, revealing that criticism of the idea of direct apprehension has been scrutinized from within Buddhist traditions themselves.

nonjudgmental. This approach works to smooth over the symptoms of an underlying problem instead of confronting it: in this case, gentrification and displacement.

It is worth considering the ways in which the conference is embedded in a system of whitewashing, appropriation and neoliberal crisis management. Jeff Wilson (2009, p. 19-20) differentiates "Buddhist appropriators" from Buddhist practitioners, sympathizers, or opponents, as individuals who use Buddhism for their own purposes, rather than the purposes of genuinely engaging the religion. I agree with Wilson that the appropriation of Buddhism, particularly in the West, is often implemented for the purposes of promoting a product or personal ideology that is unrelated to Buddhism, and that this appropriation is frequently (though not always) carried out by non-Buddhists. The Wisdom 2.0 conference illustrates precisely this phenomenon, in which mindfulness is adopted for corporate efficiency without any attempt to engage its Buddhist roots. Moreover, following Joseph Cheah (2011), I maintain that the Western appropriation of Buddhism occurs within a larger context of white supremacy and orientalism, and as a result rearticulates Buddhist ideas in ways that reinforce racial hierarchy.

Additionally, if capitalism exists as a system that constantly recuperates itself through crisis and recapitulation, we might situate the corporate co-option of Buddhism as part and parcel to a larger series of neoliberal strategies that absorb difference and resistance to sustain its perpetuity. In the contemporary multicultural era, for instance, Jodi Melamed (2011) identifies the way in which capitalism co-opts questions of racial justice and reformulates them as aesthetic cultural production. This enables neoliberal forms of representation that do not meaningfully transform conditions of violence. Indeed, capitalism functions to encourage the production and celebration of differing identities, capitalizing on difference in order to produce the next hottest niche market for profit. We might thus understand the corporate appropriation and commodification of mindfulness as an extension of this logic insofar as corporate entities like Wisdom 2.0 can capitalize on mindfulness as an exotic form of difference and repackage it as the latest self-care strategy for improving productivity and coping with stress.

In addition to hosting its annual conference in San Francisco each year, the Wisdom 2.0 conference sponsors retreats around the globe (costing thousands of dollars to attend and thus only accessible to affluent communities) and "summits" in different states across the U.S. The "About" page on their website describes Wisdom 2.0 as positioned to address "the great challenge of our age: to not only live connected to one another through technology, but to do so in ways that are

beneficial to our own well-being, effective in our work, and useful to the world" (Wisdom 2.0, n.d.). Yet contemporary capitalism increasingly works not only through fragmentation and individualism but through connectivism; or the desire to integrate diverse parts of the globe and social life into a global network of consumerism (Culp, 2016). Put differently, connectivism attempts to extend capitalism's reach to every individual and person on the globe. This desire to integrate everyone into a larger connected network of people and goods is not an attempt to dissolve unwholesome attachments but to produce attachments to capitalism by individually catering to niche identities and differences.

The opening statement above valorizes connection through technology and mindfulness insofar as it is utilised to demonstrate how they might be *useful* to the world and make their work more effective, and thus primarily centres on how to best integrate people productively into a diverse global economy. It is thus not surprising that the conference primarily names its audience as technology staff from corporations like Apple and Microsoft, venture capitalists and entrepreneurs (Wisdom 2.0, n.d.). Notable here is not only that the conference uses mindfulness as a means to an end for achieving global integration into capitalist productivity, but also the lack of any attempt to include Buddhist history or contributions. In doing so, they mimic the phenomenon noted by Hsu (2016) in her analysis of secular, neoliberal mindfulness programs in education, by invisibilizing a legacy of Asian Buddhists in developing mindfulness practices and remaining primarily focused on increasing productivity and coping with stress produced by neoliberalism instead of confronting neoliberalism itself. Therefore, Buddhist mindfulness practices are both decontextualized from those Asian Buddhists who developed them and exported in the West as a crisis management strategy to support integration into a system of capitalist productivity and utility.

Wisdom 2.0 is part of a broader phenomenon of Western corporate adoption of mindfulness strategies that not only includes companies like Google and Microsoft incorporating mindfulness into their boardrooms, but also extends to the development of new niche markets for mindfulness programs. I analyze *Buddhify* and *Headspace,* two companies with corresponding apps that are marketed to people with increasingly busy, demanding and diverse lifestyles. *Headspace* was cofounded by Andy Puddicombe, who trained as a monk but left monastic practice, and Rich Pierson, now the former head of business development for a creative advertising agency. Their aim was to bring mindfulness practice to as many people as possible and to help deal with

increasing stress in daily life (Wisdom 2.0, n.d.). *Buddhify* was founded by Rohan Gunatillake, who took interest in meditation during college and decided to combine it with the "fast-paced, digital, urban life he was living" while working at a large technology company (*Buddhify,* n.d.). The demand for mindfulness programs like these likely resulted both from the pressure and instability produced by neoliberalism as well as the opportunity for corporations to capitalize on every aspect of consumer life—turning even moments of down time into productive, efficient self-help.

It is worthwhile to pause here in order to consider the fact that Puddicombe was once a monk and did practice mindfulness in Buddhist settings at one point. My intention in this paper is not to claim there is a 'pure' or singular core to Buddhism, or to stake a claim to what real, 'authentic' Buddhism is, as such claims can be problematic at worst and at the very least are beyond the scope of this paper. However, I am in agreement with Healey, who contends that corporate mindfulness programs nevertheless destroy the integrity of mindfulness in the sense that they decontextualize, compartmentalize and cherry pick aspects of mindfulness as instruments for achieving desired ends, such as workplace productivity, while largely ignoring its broader cultural context (Healey, 2015). As such, we should not simply consider Puddicombe's role as a former monk as legitimating his use and adaption of mindfulness practices if the way he does so works to distort them, or otherwise repurpose them for capitalist productivity.

Furthermore, it is useful to consider the role that Buddhism itself can play in perpetuating violence—such as its involvement in authorizing Japanese imperialism and colonialism—as evidence that even if Puddicombe and others did 'authentically' utilize Buddhist practices, it does not excuse their larger role in violence (Sharf, 1993; Victoria, 1997). Although there is scholarly debate beyond the scope of this essay about whether Japanese Zen Buddhism - enlisted in service of supporting empire and colonial violence - strayed from its fidelity to Buddhist ideals and betrayed Buddhism's teachings, it is nevertheless important to recognize that Buddhism is not beyond reproach for its historical role in violence and the assumption that Buddhism is inherently peaceful is misguided. At the same time, this is not to suggest that all forms of Buddhism inherently lend themselves to violence. In fact, a number of Buddhist practitioners have drawn on the religion as a resource for combatting war, inequality, ecological crisis and racism, including resistance by some Japanese Buddhists to its application during the Japanese empire and the emergence of "Socially Engaged Buddhism," or Buddhist liberation movements across Asia and the West, which

draw on the dharma in order to challenge social oppression (Queen, 1996; Victoria, 1997; Shields, 2016; Williams et al, 2016).

Before delineating the specifics of *Headspace* and *Buddhify*, it is worth asking what makes these apps so attractive to new users. What both the founders of *Headspace* and *Buddhify* identified was that their apps could help users deal with stress, improve sleep, improve one's focus as well as reduce job strain and burnout (Headspace, n.d.; Buddhify n.d.). These intended effects therefore point to the companies' targeting of users who have a sense of disequilibrium and are seeking to better their outlook, their emotional state, and/or their focus. *Headspace* co-founder Puddicombe (2016) describes this feeling in his book:

> The more I spoke to people about the benefits of meditation, the more I found that many desperately wanted to find a way to relax, but were uncomfortable with the religious element that robes automatically imply. They simply wanted to find a way to cope with life, to deal with stress—in their work, their personal life, and in their own minds. . .They weren't looking for spiritual enlightenment, nor were they needing therapy. They just wanted to know how to "switch off" when they got home from work, how to fall asleep at night, how to improve their relationships. . . But most of all they wanted to know how to deal with that nagging feeling that all was not quite as it should be. (pp. 6-7)

As this quote illustrates, Puddicombe was inspired to produce a mindfulness program that did not have the same religious connotations as its Buddhist counterparts, and did not seek spiritual transformation but simply sought to provide strategies that allow users to "cope with life" and "switch off" after a long day. Here, mindfulness is characterized not as a strategy for transforming suffering but for coping with it, not for confronting the stress in one's life but being able to "switch off" from it (only to return again, presumably, the next day). In this regard, mindfulness works not to heighten one's awareness of a crisis they are enmeshed in, but to dull the edges in order to make it more tolerable. As a result, this form of mindfulness not only responds to a sense of neoliberal crisis and exhaustion but arguably capitalizes on and perpetuates it further by simply producing more resilient subjects that can tolerate it.

The "nagging feeling that all was not quite as it should be," as described by Puddicombe, finds resonance with what Lauren Berlant describes as an "impasse" (2011, p. 4). Berlant (2011, pp. 3-4, 65) works to apprehend a "historical sensorium" of the unfolding present, referring to the ways in which affective attachments create "structures of feeling" or collective experiences that are not reduced to an individual's feeling but is often shared and informed by the past. She explains that while impasse typically signifies a blockage that halts forward movement, she uses the term to

instead describe:

> A stretch of time in which one moves around with a sense that the world is at once intensely present and enigmatic, such that the activity of living demands both a wandering absorptive awareness and a hypervigilance that collects material that might help to clarify things, maintain one's sea legs, and coordinate the standard melodramatic crisis with those processes that have not yet found their genre of event. (2011, p. 4)

An impasse is thus not a wall so much as it is suspension. Searching for material that may help to "maintain one's sea legs" implies the feeling of struggling to sustain one's balance on unstable ground or trying to stay afloat in an endless sea without the ability to get to shore. Indeed, as Puddicombe points to, many of those he spoke to felt a present and enigmatic sense that something was "not as it should be," yet that something remained elusive.

In addition, Puddicombe describes a feeling of uncertainty rather than panic, of low-level anxiety, or in Berlant's words, "melodramatic crisis." In this sense impasse is felt as "crisis ordinariness," which she uses to describe the way in which "the extraordinary always turns out to be an amplification of something in the works, a labile boundary at best, not a slammed-door departure" (2011, p. 10). In other words, for Berlant, crisis emerges as a result of precipitating conditions, something systemic that has always been just below the surface or present in the air, perhaps unclear but not out of the ordinary. While neoliberalism may paint competition as natural and ordinary, it creates conditions upon which a sense of crisis is built, where something feels "not as it should be," yet remains masked through normalization. Puddicombe makes an important observation; a general feeling of uneasiness on the part of his product's target consumers. This feeling highlights the way in which those who seek out these apps are responding to a sense of crisis, albeit one embedded in the ordinary. However, despite this observation, *Headspace* and *Buddhify* seek to address that crisis through incorporating Buddhism as a palliative coping mechanism, something that works to manage the crisis instead of confronting the underlying causes of suffering. We may thus understand this sense of *impasse* as an element of ongoing crisis that maintains its gnawing feeling on everyday people who seek out mindfulness programs as a result. We might also consider feelings of crisis ordinariness on the part of executives who desire their employees or boardrooms to adopt mindfulness practices, feeling as if they need a strategy to prevent burnout and maintain a productive work environment. While these instances present attempts to navigate the impasse of a demanding, fast-paced, neoliberal era, they do so through a containment strategy that manages the worst effects of systemic crisis instead of attempting to

eliminate its causes.

Headspace and *Buddhify* utilize simultaneous rhetorical strategies of whitewashing and exoticization in the promotion of their mindfulness apps. *Buddhify,* despite its name which clearly plays on "Buddha" and "Buddhism," contains no reference to Buddhism or the historical Buddha on its website (Buddhify, n.d.). Instead, the page's description of the app, manifesto, "why we are different" tab, and every other foregrounded page contains only vague references to "guided meditation." Of course, the juxtaposition between *Buddhify's* obvious titular reference to Buddhism and the religion's simultaneous invisibility reveal that while *Buddhify* may draw its inspiration from Buddhism, it has no intention to represent that connection to the religion, thereby whitewashing mindfulness of its connotations with Asian Buddhists.

At the same time, *Buddhify* relies on the very incorporation of Asian Buddhism as an exotic other—not in any genuine form, but as a mystic, aesthetic presentation that makes the app more attractive to its users. Indeed, what is lost in current accounts of corporate mindfulness programs are the way in which they not only rely on otherizing Asian Buddhism but on a desire for incorporating aspects of Asian Buddhism that are exotic and alluring. *Buddhify's* website is replete with subtle references to Asian culture and Buddhism (Buddhify, n.d.). The app presents different guided meditation exercises on a customizable 'wheel'—something that is reminiscent of the Buddhist Wheel of Dharma, or Dharma Chakra, meant to represent the Buddha's teachings and cosmic order. In describing the different, preset curated wheels that users might select, the app has options such as "Tough Times," and "Mindful Ninja," the latter explicitly playing on the figure of the Japanese ninja, which operates in the American cultural imaginary as a stereotypical symbol of adept martial arts skill, mysticism, and exotic cultural wisdom associated with isolationism (Buddhify, n.d.). Anne Cheng (2018) describes the process by which Asiatic femininity and personhood is figured through aestheticized, ornamental gestures that are adopted and appropriated in the West as a transferable style. A related dynamic might be said to be at play here, in which corporate mindfulness adopts the figure of Asian Buddhism as an image of exotic otherness in order to make a Western consumer product more attractive. In this way, *Buddhify* and corporate mindfulness operate as a crisis management strategy through the exoticization, whitewashing, and appropriation of Asian Buddhism, presented as a mythical, exotic practice that might aid in coping with neoliberal crisis.

Headspace similarly promotes mindfulness through a simultaneous whitewashed universality and exoticization, claiming to be a completely "secular" program while at the same time relying on the exotic ornament of Asian culture and religion to promote its product. *Headspace* seeks to de-link mindfulness from its Buddhist origins, claiming to be a "secular" mindfulness program that is free from the religious connotations associated with Buddhist meditation practices. In Puddicombe's (2016) book, he explains his impetus for creating *Headspace,* remarking he wanted to make mindfulness "relevant for modern-day living. Nothing kooky . . . just straightforward tools that people could use to get some headspace" (p. 10). He explains that meditation comes with baggage, and it is hard to hear the word without "thinking of a yogi in a loincloth . . . or a shaven-headed monk" (p. 18). Therefore, Puddicombe set out to produce an 'accessible' form of mindfulness that did not repel people with its religiosity. Indeed, he writes that although mindfulness "has its origins in the Buddhist meditation tradition, there is nothing inherently 'Buddhist' about it" and claims *Headspace* offers a secular approach to meditation that can benefit anyone (Puddicombe, p. 18). Yet as Candy Brown (2016) suggests, this rhetorical tactic of claiming to have modernized and secularized mindfulness fails to sever it from its Buddhist roots.

Even the impetus to secularize Buddhist mindfulness in order to make it universally accessible remains mired in a strategy of whitewashing. As Hsu (2016) notes, secular mindfulness in the U.S. is embedded in the context of a white supremacist nation state in which "the mass appeal of secular mindfulness can only be secured insomuch as secular mindfulness can establish itself in opposition to [sic] peculiar otherness" (p. 374). Indeed, as is clear in Puddicombe's introduction, he wants to de-link Buddhism from its connotations with "shaven-headed monks" in order to make it more "relevant for modern-day living"—essentially distancing himself from the "peculiar otherness" associated with Asian Buddhism and attempting to make mindfulness more secular, Western, and therefore modern. Secular mindfulness thus selectively incorporates those aspects of Buddhism that make it seem exotic, while at the same time divorcing it from the threat of otherness or seeming *too* different. Moreover, as Toledo (2016) contends, corporate mindfulness or "McMindfulness" works to "compartmentalize" Buddhism, severing mindfulness from its roots and instead turning it "into a technique for *obtaining results*" (p. 31). Like mindfulness programs utilized in corporate headquarters, *Headspace* compartmentalizes mindfulness from its embeddedness in a particular religious worldview and transforms it into a marketable self-help strategy. Also, it points to the way in which corporate mindfulness not only whitewashes mindfulness but does so in service of a

larger crisis-management strategy which presents an exotic yet approachable, compartmentalized mindfulness practice as the solution for feelings of uncertainty, unproductivity and lack of worth.

Though this compartmentalization of Buddhism might attempt to de-link it from its grounding in a historically Buddhist value system, the presumption that it becomes a non-religious and therefore neutral practice remains a problematic assumption. For David Loy (2002), capitalism has come to function like a religion in and of itself, insofar as the market occupies a God-like position and produces investments in a dangerous value system of productivity, individualism and exploitation. For him, this investment in an economic, military and corporate system of violence reproduces what Buddhism regards as the three poisons at the heart of suffering; greed, ill will, and delusion (Loy, 2014). In this regard, we might consider how the "secularization" of mindfulness represents not its transformation into a universal, neutral practice but the way in which it is instead rearticulated within the destructive religious value system of the market.

Furthermore, this move to "compartmentalize" and secularize a part of Buddhist practice in order to make it universal involves a strategy of *appropriative synecdoche*. Appropriation in this phrase refers to the process by which a traditional practice is de-linked from its roots to serve the interests of white, Western society, while synecdoche refers to the rhetorical process by which a part is used to stand in for the whole (Nate, 2006). Adoption and secularization of mindfulness in these instances represent a process of appropriative synecdoche considering that it removes and decontextualizes a portion of Buddhism from its roots and attempts to make it universally applicable and desirable. This may make mindfulness more attractive to a Western population, yet it does not seek to transform the suffering produced from whitewashing or neoliberalism. Of course, simply wanting to make Buddhism accessible to more people is not itself problematic. *Headspace*, however, does not only attempt to bring mindfulness to more people but does so by stripping it of its cultural and historical origins in order to make it more palatable to a consumer base.

What is peculiar about *Buddhify* and *Headspace*'s drive to universalism is the way they couple this drive with a simultaneous claim to individualism. Both apps proclaim to make mindfulness more accessible—applicable to all people regardless of religious background or work affiliation—yet at the same time customizable to any individual user's needs. This move to personalize a product to any individual needs or group is an insidious operation of capital. One only has to look

to the way 'rainbow capitalism' caters to queer people in order to expand the reach of exploitation and profit under the guise of inclusion to see the way in which this endlessly customizable function actually works to uphold a regime of violence.

Additionally, it is this tension that perhaps points to the seemingly paradoxical relationship identified earlier, namely that neoliberal capitalism simultaneously works through connectivism while at the same time relying on a logic of individualism. Puddicombe (2016) claims that mindfulness can serve any purpose from becoming more effective in one's profession to performing better in sports. He likens mindfulness to learning to ride a bike: one may learn to ride a bike just like everyone else, but they decide where to ride the bike and what to use it for (Puddicombe, p. 11). This metaphor is precisely what Toledo identifies in corporate Buddhism: namely, the drive to turn mindfulness from ethically embedded to a supposedly value-neutral mechanism for obtaining desired results. Doing so reintegrates mindfulness into a neoliberal economy of productivity, fueling many of the very conditions which cause stress, burn out and anxiety in a crisis-driven neoliberal era. Mindfulness thus becomes enlisted in service of a larger crisis-management strategy, which makes alleviating suffering a question of *personal responsibility* instead of addressing its systemic causes.

Similarly, *Buddhify* stakes it claim to uniqueness precisely on its ability to cater to an individual's specific needs. In the company's "manifesto," *Buddhify* characterizes itself as a "choose your own adventure" app, likening the app to the popular choose-your-own-adventure books and video games (Buddhify, n.d.b). They advertise the "on-the-go" features of the app in which mindfulness can be fit into the busy day of any individual in a modern society (Buddhify, n.d.b). In this regard, *Buddhify* typifies the individualizing function of neoliberalism, which endlessly produces personally customizable goods to fit every niche market and potential consumer. Indeed, as mentioned previously, Wendy Chun (2016) contends that neoliberal digital networks increasingly work to produce a plural "you," epitomized by the use of big data in a neoliberal era to cater advertisements, products and services to each individual in order to maximize profits. *Buddhify* evinces this dynamic, in its aim to produce an app that may be downloaded to anyone's smartphone; used on-the-go between work, play and any other activities; and customized to fit precisely an individual consumer's needs. Chun articulates this drive to produce a plural "you" within a larger system of crisis, in which digital platforms consistently produce "updates" to deal with ongoing crisis and smooth over conflict or impediments in a

neoliberal era. This only further appropriates and decontextualizes Buddhist mindfulness by essentially rendering it synonymous with personalized media and corporate stress reduction techniques devoid of its historical context. It is within this context that mindfulness apps like *Buddhify* and *Headspace* have come to produce a crisis-management strategy for feelings of uncertainty while simultaneously relying on the individualizing function of neoliberalism that often contributes to those very feelings.

Conclusion

The contemporary era of neoliberalism in the West has been embedded in a historical sensorium of crisis; a sense of impasse in which people are increasingly seeking out strategies to deal with stress, feelings of uncertainty, lack of productivity and anxiety. While we might understand these feelings as the result of increasingly fragmented community ties and the ceaseless drive for productivity driven by neoliberalism, individuals often turn to mindfulness and other palliative, self-help strategies to deal with feelings of crisis. It is in this context that programs like Wisdom 2.0 or apps like *Buddhify* and *Headspace* emerge, catering to the desire expressed by companies and individuals alike for something that might help them focus, excel in a profession or task or simply take the edge off. Moreover, in these instances, mindfulness is yoked from any commitment to alleviating suffering, interdependence, dispelling the illusion of the self or seeking spiritual awakening beyond providing a temporary respite from stress. On the contrary, corporate mindfulness presents meditation practice as an individualistic coping mechanism, framing fragmentation and suffering as problems with individual habits rather than systemic issues of inequality.

I join other scholars in denouncing these practices for appropriating, whitewashing and separating Buddhism from its investment in ethical questions such as the alleviation of suffering, but I also have attempted to expand this conversation by demonstrating the relationship of these dynamics to crisis. As the Wisdom 2.0 conference, *Buddhify,* and *Headspace* all point to, mindfulness has increasingly been appropriated, whitewashed and exoticized in order to serve as a palliative crisis-management strategy. This strategy relies on the simultaneous disavowal of the "otherness" of Asian Buddhism while at the same time remaining reminiscent of it and utilizing the allure of an Eastern, exotic practice as an ornament for catering to consumers. While crisis is

embedded in the ordinary and is a result of precipitating conditions, corporate mindfulness strategies exacerbate rather than alleviate socially-ingrained crises of neoliberalism and racial violence.

While, for purposes of scope, I have chosen to focus primarily on corporate Buddhism and two particular mindfulness apps, the appropriation and Westernization of Buddhist mindfulness practices is a widespread phenomenon. Future directions for scholarly inquiry might include examining how the appropriation of mindfulness interacts with ongoing crises of mass incarceration and U.S. militarism. In an era of neoliberal and racial violence, it is imperative that scholars be ever on the lookout for palliative strategies that essentially quell resistance or critical confrontation with the systemic causes of crises and focus instead on their symptoms. These strategies may provide temporary reprieve but ultimately only produce a cruelly optimistic attachment to individual self-help mechanisms that maintain the status quo.

Finally, scholars might consider how Buddhist thought presents ways for confronting these systemic causes instead of dulling their effects. Such scholarship might bring together perspectives on the aforementioned Buddhist practitioners who used the teachings of the Buddha to combat social violence into conversation with scholars addressing contemporary neoliberal and racial crises in order to contemplate what an ethical approach to the relationship between crisis and mindfulness might look like. As a religious system steeped in the belief that an illusory notion of the self is at the root of human suffering, scholars might consider the ways in which Buddhist beliefs can actually provide a trenchant critique of the individualizing and fragmenting functions of neoliberal crisis.

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"Surely Some Revelation is at Hand": Yeats, Disaster, and the Generative Void

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Abstract

In this article, I extend the critical discussion of Yeats's interpretation of crisis and catastrophe. To do this, I examine Yeats's reading of nihilism and show that he adopts a generative formulation of the philosophy, one that is represented by the works of Benedictus Spinoza, Immanuel Kant, and Georg Hegel. Together, their understanding of the idea removes the negativity of nothingness and imbues it with generative capabilities. Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel all illustrate the subject, whether the individual person or the idea of God and Nature, as using the void of nothingness for redemption after experiencing a dissolution of "everything." I then interrogate the ways in which Yeats borrows representations of "disaster" from generative nihilism and executes this imagery in his later poetry, including Michael Robartes and the Dancer *(1921),* The Tower *(1928), and* The Winding Stair and Other Poems *(1933). Considering his interest in creation that these volumes exhibit, Yeats uses the gnostic catastrophe of Spinoza, Kant's reduction of the subject into a non-substantial void, and the Kantian and Hegelian sublime to diminish chaos to stillness. This allows him to extract the creative capacity from nothingness and imbue the void with creative possibility, an aim that he ultimately reaches at the conclusion of* The Winding Stair.

Three years before his death, Yeats recalls his merriment with the Rhymers' Club at the Cheshire Cheese in London in the essay "Modern Poetry: A Broadcast" (1936). His talks with the club members at the tavern stirred up weighty issues, including the pessimistic considerations that "nothing of importance could be discovered" and "only philosophy and religion could solve the great secret" (Yeats, 1961, p. 491). Paradoxically, though, neither philosophy nor religion could illuminate the darkness of secrecy because they had "said all their say years ago". However, Yeats seems to offer an alternative that could reinvigorate philosophy for a modern audience: a nihilistic mix of terror and the abyss. He declares:

> I think profound philosophy must come from terror. An abyss opens under our feet; inherited convictions, the pre-suppositions of our thoughts, those Fathers of the Church Lionel Johnson

> expounded, drop into the abyss. Whether we will or no we must ask the ancient questions: Is there reality anywhere? Is there a God? Is there a Soul? We cry with the Indian Sacred Book: 'They have put a golden stopper into the neck of the bottle; pull it! Let out reality!' (Yeats, 1961, pp. 502-503)

As Kuhn (2011, p. 13) argues, one of the most "significant modernist questions" is how one should "respond to a world of dislocation and fractured temporality in which identity has become fragmented beyond recognition." For Kuhn, Yeats's answer is intensity. Indeed, intensity for Yeats sees the stable center breaking loose and things falling apart but left in the wake of that destruction is not complete and unredeemable nothingness. Instead, he fashions a state of productive emptiness.

In this article, I investigate Yeats's interpretation of disaster and catastrophe, and explore his engagement with the centuries-old idea of nihilism. To do this, I examine the consequences of disaster's failure in the transitional volume *Responsibilities* (1914). This failure, I show, leads to cyclical dissatisfaction. After publishing *Responsibilities*, however, Yeats encounters certain works by Benedictus Spinoza, Immanuel Kant, and Georg W. F. Hegel, who all participated in a concept of nihilism—though they never named it so explicitly—that existed centuries before the publication of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Will to Power* (1901). The conception of nihilism I use borrows from two sources: first from Gillespie's investigation of nihilism's lineage in *Nihilism before Nietzsche* (1995), and next, from *Genealogy of Nihilism* (2002), where Cunningham (2002, p. xiv) frames nihilism as productive and states that it "endeavours to have the nothing as something" and "provides something out of nowhere." This is precisely what Yeats accomplishes in his later volumes of poetry. For the purpose of this article, I refer to the aforementioned consideration of nihilism as generative nihilism, to distinguish it from its post-Nietzschean connotation. As previous scholarship has more than adequately shown, Nietzsche's stimulus on Yeats is undeniable; yet, Yeats's images of disaster, on-loan from Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel, offer an avenue primed for further exploration in Yeats's sphere of influence. Thus, I interrogate how Yeats borrows representations of disaster from these philosophers, adapts such images, and implements them in his later poetry volumes, including *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921), *The Tower* (1928), and *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933). Considering his interest in creation that these volumes exhibit, I argue that Yeats uses the gnostic catastrophe of Spinoza, Kant's reduction of the subject into a non-substantiality, and the Kantian and Hegelian sublime to diminish chaos to stillness and draw light from the void.

The Poetry of a Failed Disaster

Disaster, apocalypse, and catastrophe. Critics have employed each of these words to characterize Yeats's mystical, philosophical approach to writing. Smith (1990, p. 12) notes a "pervasive" vision of all three in Yeats, particularly after *A Vision* (1925). Similarly, as Hough (1984, p. 63) states, Yeats writes *A Vision* in a mode of "apocalypse" and "revelation." Holdridge (2000, p. 150) then connects Yeats's rhetorical use of disaster to an approach that instigates transformation; he argues that Yeats sees "violence and mockery" as "prophetic of change that 'Heaven suffereth violence and the violent bear it away.'" The epochs that form the poet's system in *A Vision* therefore begin and end in violence and catastrophe, which shows Yeats's use of a negating, destructive, but generative force. For Yeats, the choice to explore disaster through poetry is rooted in his philosophical influences. In "Anima Hominis" (*Per Amica Silentae Lunae*, 1918) he declares:

> He only can create the greatest imaginable beauty who has endured all imaginable pangs, for only when we have seen and foreseen what we dread shall we be rewarded by that dazzling unforeseen wing-footed wanderer. We could not find him if he were not in some sense of our being and yet of our being but as water with fire, a noise with silence." (Yeats, 1959, p. 334)

Only through disaster and suffering can one find a meaningful sense of magnificence. For Yeats, the "wing-footed wanderer" arrives at the point of utter "dread" and reclaims catastrophe as prolific.

The formal and contextual characteristics of Yeats's poetry changed utterly by the time he read Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel. *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921), *The Tower* (1928), and *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933) demonstrate the language of catastrophe that destroys its subject while longing for a redemptive outcome. "Catastrophe" finds its lineage in the Greek *κατα* and *στρέφω*, which together mean "I overturn." This represents Yeats's view of history, and it aligns rather seamlessly with an old nihilistic determination of nothingness. Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel all illustrate the subject, whether the individual person or the idea of God and Nature, as using emptiness for redemption after experiencing a dissolution of everything.

Interestingly, though, it is the disaster's failure for Yeats that incites more fear and discontent than its success, and he explores this restlessness in *Responsibilities* (1914). Yeats externalizes genuine creation as a presence made from absence as he meditates on his own confrontation with the disaster (Engelberg, 1982, p. 57). He depicts the consequence of missing the disaster's

redemptive qualities in “The Magi”. The poem shows a speaker who envisions the Nativity scene from the perspective of an outside, bewildered individual. Painting a scene for the lifeless statues, he superimposes his own observations onto the figures:

Now as at all times I can see in the mind’s eye,
In their stiff, painted clothes, the pale unsatisfied ones
Appear and disappear in the blue depths of the sky
With all their ancient faces like rain-beaten stones,
And all their helms of silver hovering side by side,
And all their eyes still fixed, hoping to find once more,
Being by Calvary’s turbulence unsatisfied,
The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor. (Yeats, 1997d, p. 126)

Far from occupying a scene of chaos, the poem’s subjects are static. The Three Kings, as the speaker perceives, sport “stiff, painted clothes” and their “rain-beaten” stone-like faces reveal an antiquated longing. The poem’s unvarying ABAB rhyme scheme confines these figures; they cannot escape through a break in form, as the poem leads the “mind’s eye” to the concluding “floor,” the lowest point in the space of the poem. Even the progressive tense of “hovering” and “hoping” traps the figures; while “hoping” might suggest desire or potential for movement, the lingering impression of “hovering” immediately quells any expectation of liberation. Their unsatisfied “fixed” eyes reveal a vexation that plagues Yeats himself. As Jeffares (1984, p. 126) argues, the Magi are unsatisfied “because they represent Yeats’s belief that the Christian revelation was not final . . . Christ is uncontrollable because he is not final.” It seems clear that Christ’s resurrection and the upheaval it triggered could deliver neither the Magi nor Yeats from dissatisfaction. Disaster, in this case, fails to completely negate the metaphysical space of the poem, and thus a generative void cannot form. The lack of finality that Jeffares highlights vexes both the Magi and the speaker, who “now” and “at all times” see a vision of the “unsatisfied,” motionless figures. Both are confined in an apocalyptic circle of inaction that disaster’s failure directly causes.

Despite the failure of Christ’s disaster, the Magi nevertheless long for a deliverance from their immobility. For Wood (2010, p. 11), they eagerly seek unrest and the promise of “Calvary’s turbulence,” the event that summoned them to the child in the manger. The Magi, rather than

pursuing a transformation, seek the turbulence itself; they ignore what might hide in the core of turmoil as their eyes "still fix" on the next disaster (2010, p. 12). For Yeats (1916, p. 187), these figures represent "the habitual image suggested by the blue sky," as if they are doomed to remain chronically unsatisfied. Rather than acting as a generative void, the sky in this poem seems to swallow the figures as they episodically "appear and disappear" into the abyss of blue, unable reap the disaster for its creative properties.

The Disaster of Generative Nihilism: Yeats, Gnostic Catastrophe, and the Levelling of Everything

When it comes to comprehending and depicting the disaster in his poetry, Yeats garners information from Gnosticism, a perhaps unlikely adjacent philosophy to generative nihilism. However, the poet gains his knowledge of Gnosticism from a perhaps equally unobvious source: his reading of Spinoza. While critics have attributed Yeats's writing of the disaster and apocalyptic mode to Gnosticism, Spinoza is largely overlooked as a possible source for these ideas. As Bloom (1976, p. 212) suggests, Yeats did read Gnostic texts, but "generally in dubious versions or misleading contexts." Since, if Bloom is correct, Yeats studied Gnostic texts under ambiguous and even questionable circumstances, it is possible that he instead absorbed these concepts through Spinoza's nihilism. For instance, we know that he owned and most likely read Spinoza's *Ethics and de Intellectus Emendatione*, which scholars have previously linked to Gnosticism. Two statements in particular link Yeats's consideration of the Gnostic vision to Spinoza's nihilism. He uses one to end one of his final letters: "The last kiss is given to the void" (Yeats, 1955, p. 404). The second appears in *Where There Is Nothing*; Yeats (1966, p. 634) writes "We sink in on God, we find him in becoming nothing—We perish into reality." Martin (1986, p. 30) highlights both statements as exemplifying the same message. If so, Yeats's Gnostic vision moves compellingly close to Spinoza's nihilism, whose One Substance leads us to the abyss of emptiness but transforms that nothingness into divine plentitude, therefore imbuing it with infinite possibility.

Though they may seem at odds, Gnosticism and generative nihilism share perceptible similarities. For Hans Jonas (1958, p. 433), the Gnostic movement's connection to disaster is clear. He argues that the Gnostics grasped the particularly unnerving idea that the human condition has been fulfilled and performed "with all the vehemence of a cataclysmic event." Consequently, he

maintains that we may illuminate nihilism's disaster by juxtaposing it against Gnostic catastrophe. Additionally, in *Agon: Towards A Theory of Revisionism*, Bloom argues that any "adequate theory of poetic creation also must be a catastrophe theory. What is called creation, in art, is both a creation of catastrophe and a creation by catastrophe" (1983, p. 73). He elaborates, stating that catastrophe is "already in the condition of language, the condition of the ruins of time" (p. 74). For Bloom, the act of writing a poem entails a crisis: the external calamity that the poet reacts to reflects an internal struggle that he/she must also confront. Bloom contends further that poems themselves are "gnostic catastrophe creations" (p. 81). Creation is itself a catastrophe, a succession of tragedies created by an imperfect designer.

Yeats takes the nothing that his system needs from Spinoza, and this enables him to efface both God and Nature. The disaster seeps into Spinoza's philosophy rather unexpectedly: that is, through the erasure of Nature and a lingering Gnostic specter. On one hand, Spinoza's iteration of nihilism appears antithetical to Gnosticism; however, like the Gnostic God, Spinoza's deity, so to speak, does exist beyond attribute and negation because it is *only* attribute and negation. Spinoza's philosophy contains a dualism within-monism that collapses God, or the "One Substance," and Nature into one article. For Cunningham (2002, p. vix), this duality embodies the "logic" of nihilism because each entity cannot exist apart from the other: "God is made manifest in Nature, Nature manifests in God." Consequently, Spinoza can allot efficacy to "both" in the absence of "each," a formulation that enables him to interpret the "nothing" as "something". Such a provisional nothingness animates the void while banishing the negativity from nothingness. For Spinoza, the One Substance consequently "provides" Nature with existence and vice versa (Cunningham, 2002, 170). Through its negating power, the One Substance thus supplies a nothingness that fosters existence. As Badiou (2000, p. 101) suggests, "Let us say of [Spinoza] . . . he offers a salvation that promises nothing." This "nothing" ultimately directs Yeats's rendering of disaster to the void.

In addition to the *Ethics* and Gnosticism, Yeats obtains his understanding of generative disaster through his reading of Kant. For instance, in the *Opus Postumum* (1804), Kant aligns the phenomenal "World" with the noumenal God and vice versa. Kant's disaster materializes when he reduces the subject, the "absolute I," to a functional nothingness. While we cannot be certain how much of the *Opus Postumum* Yeats read, he did own and annotate a copy of *Kant's Critical Philosophy for English Readers* (1915), which outlines many of the concepts that the *Opus* tackles

(O'Shea, 1985, p. 144). And, like Spinoza, it appears that Kant found usefulness in diminishing a something to a nothing, and even further utility in using that negated space to function as something. His reduction of the subject to a nothing is an obvious example of this, but like Spinoza before him, Kant proposes a dualism that provides nothing. In humans, as Cunningham (2002, p. 94) states of Kant, a purely phenomenal object—that is, the thing as it appears—remains as such, while the noumenal—the thing-in-itself—transforms to exist simply as the phenomenal; this act functionally negates and dissolves the object. Ultimately, Yeats's endeavor aligns with Kant's own: to unite God and the World through humans in the wake of a negating force.

Finally, Yeats's thorough reading of Hegelian nihilism gives the poet a picture of a destruction that annihilates destruction itself. The annihilation and the emptiness that the disaster leaves behind is thus a conditional, transitionary space—the consequential void that fosters creation. Of the three old nihilists, Yeats read Hegelian philosophy most extensively; he housed eight different books on Hegel in his personal library, including *The Logic of Hegel* (1892); *What Is Living and What Is Dead of the Philosophy of Hegel* (1915); and *Studies in the Hegelian Dialectic* (1918) (O'Shea, 1985, pp. 70; 64; 123). For Hegel, the absolute is the nothing that negates itself, or, the annihilation of annihilation. This iteration of disaster, like the disasters that Spinoza and Kant postulate, is not the harbinger of absolute destruction. However, it requires that the individual recognizes the disaster's creative potential; if the individual can do this, the provisional nothingness that disaster leaves behind is truly provisional. As Hegel (1802 cited in Gillespie, 1996, p. 117) declares, "out of this abyss of nothing . . . the highest totality . . . at once all-encompassing and in the most joyful freedom of its form can and must arise." Yeats revises this language when he commands reality to be released in "Modern Poetry", and he gestures toward this idea in "The Cold Heaven" when the speaker "[takes] the blame out of sense and reason." Here, the hollowing out concludes in crying, trembling and rocking, and if the speaker can transcend these tumultuous emotions, the highest totality becomes an accessible consequence.

A Sublime Transformation: The "Terrible Beauty" and the Void

Yeats's representation of the disaster in his poetry noticeably borrows from the generative nihilism of Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel, owing at times a particular genetic inheritance to Kant especially. Yeats stands on the precipice of depicting a generative disaster in *Responsibilities*, but he stops

just short of lucidly presenting this outcome in these poems. Beginning with *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, the first volume after he began reading these philosophers, the poet's disaster suggests a transformation, and in his later volumes, a transcendence. By combining disaster with a generative will, Yeats reaches a void that yields plentitude and creation. Kant's sublime shows an object existing as objectively terrifying, but the individual viewer does not truly fear it. He clarifies this point in *The Critique of Judgment* when he declares, "The sublime is that, the mere capacity of thinking which evidences a faculty of mind transcending every standard of sense" (1790, p. 98). The sublime is therefore a part of the "supersensible" world, unbound by temporal and physical constraints, and formless and free (Holdridge, 2000, p. 33). Its nebulous properties and detachment from the realm of particulars make the sublime a vehicle that helps thrust the subject away from visible objects and toward a non-substantial void. The subject thus reaches beyond the idea of terror and toward a generative levelling. Extending Kant's implementation of the concept, Yeats latches onto the sublime's transformative quality and distills that into transcendence through his tragic joy. Yeats calls upon Kant's sublime to transform terror of annihilation into a state of near divine perfection. Such an action, as Holdridge (2000, p. 36) notes, will transport the individual to another plane.

In "Easter, 1916" (*Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, 1921), Yeats combines the ideas of tragedy and ecstasy together in his haunting refrain "a terrible beauty is born." Repeated three times, as if to actively evoke a movement beyond the physical world, his phrase suggests that the Easter Rebellion of 1916 possessed a nearly God-like power that not only "changed" but "transformed utterly" the trajectory of Ireland. The terrible beauty, devoid of definite form, positions the subject for a movement beyond physical understanding. In this way, the Kantian limitlessness that Yeats adopts does not lie in the possibilities for Ireland's future; rather, the subject vanishes because of this transformation, which can lead to a transcendence. At the poem's beginning, the speaker recalls the insignificant interactions he experiences with the people of his town in a foreboding tone that matches the disconcerting change about to take place:

I have passed with a nod of the head

Or polite meaningless words,

Or have lingered awhile and said

Polite meaningless words . . .

Being certain that they and I

But lived where motley is worn:

All changed, changed utterly (Yeats 1997b, p. 179)

Through repetition, the speaker emphasizes the inconsequential exchanges that he shares with the townspeople. "Meaningless" here conjures notions of action without intent. That is, the speaker partakes in these routine pleasantries because they are expected, or "polite," rather than substantial. However, tapping into the Kantian sublime changes the "meaningless words" that the speaker twice admits to uttering and replaces them with the "terrible beauty." Likewise, the sublime event that introduces the "terrible beauty" removes and replaces the "motley" fabric, a symbol that evokes images of foolish jesters. This act consequently eliminates the subject in the process: the "they" and the "I" are transformed, but the speaker does not reveal into what. In the poem's final stanza, the sublime event's transformative reach expands past the speaker's town to "wherever green is worn." Through this transformation, Yeats leads us to the Kantian non-substantial void: the entire erasure of what used to exist. The birth of the "terribly beauty" concludes the poem, an indication that the subject's vanishing is complete. It seems, then, that transcendence is a Yeatsian rendering of the Kantian non-substantial void. For Yeats (1961, p. 255), tragic joy marries two contradictory perceptions of a single feeling that is "the nobleness of the arts is in the mingling of contraries, the extremity of sorrow, the extremity of joy." Yeats expresses Kant's formless limitlessness in the space between those extremes.

One way that Yeats accomplishes this feat is through the figure of Oedipus. For Yeats, Oedipus represents a human embodiment of the sublime. In *A Vision*, Yeats asserts that the tome will "proclaim a new divinity" in Oedipus:

> Oedipus lay upon the earth at the middle point between four sacred objects, was there washed as the dead are washed, and thereupon passed with Theseus to the wood's heart until Amidst the sound of thunder earth opened, "riven by love," and he sank down soul and body into the earth. I would have him balance Christ who, crucified standing up, went into the abstract sky soul and body . . . He raged against his sons, and this rage was noble . . . He knew nothing but his mind, and yet because he spoke that mind fate possessed it and kingdoms changed according to his blessing and his cursing. Delphi, that rock at earth's navel, spoke through him, and though men shuddered and drove him away they spoke of ancient poetry, praising the boughs overhead, the grass under foot, Colonus and its horses. (Yeats [1937] 1956, pp. 27-28)

Yeats's language is striking and ferocious in this passage. Words like "thunder," "rage," and "shuddered" give life to the daemonic as it entirely trembles the landscape. But amidst all this

frenzy lies a transformation and a "balance." Delphi possesses and transforms Oedipus into a medium that leaves him enraged but also triggers the men to "bless joyfully" the language of poetry (Ramazani, 1990, p. 108). As Ramazani argues, the transformation of terror into joy is:

> the sublime's affective structure, and the spontaneous movement of language from one mind to another is the intersubjective course of the sublime. The powerful speech of Yeats's Oedipus makes overt the violence of the sublime. (1990, p. 108)

Another significant aspect of Yeats's Oedipus is his association with metaphysical disappearance. He sinks "soul and body" into the void of the earth and seems to surface knowing "nothing but his mind." The character seems to emerge as a transformed subject, a result that closely resembles Kant's vanishing and the philosopher's view of the sublime. By making Oedipus disappear and leading us to the void of the "terribly beauty," Yeats injects transformation into an atmosphere filled with destruction and catastrophe. Thus, Yeats's disaster edges even closer to uncovering the new beginning that he desires.

The "Unsatisfied Ones" Satisfied: Yeats's Fruitful Void

Through his reading of generative nihilism, Yeats applies a version of the sublime to uncover a generative transformation that the daemonic façade masks. We stand now on the precipice of creation that must be birthed into existence. For Yeats, birth is intertwined with his reclamation of the disaster and destruction. The speaker of "The Second Coming" asks what newness will be "born" out of the old world's demolition and "Easter, 1916" declares the nativity of a transformed reality. Both poems were born of real-world disasters: Ireland's Easter Rising and the First World War. Furthermore, Yeats also sees the terror, the daemonic consequence of the rebirth. In "The Mother of God" (*The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, 1933), a dramatic monologue spoken by the Virgin Mary, the speaker asks, "What is this flesh I purchased with my pains, / And bids my hair stand up?" (Yeats, 1997e, p. 249). Yeats, donning the mask of the new mother, embodies humans' reaction to a sublime event: an all-consuming fascination with its beauty and terror; the mother contemplates, "This love that makes my heart's blood stop / Or strikes a sudden chill into my bones." Her simultaneous attraction and repulsion, love and fear, solicits a forward-progress. Although the mother fears the "fallen star that [her] milk sustains," the birth has already transpired. Only the uncertainty left in the wake of such new-ness remains. If Yeats sees a rebirth spring from

the destruction's aftermath, he continues to fashion this void and clarifies it in *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair*.

In *The Tower* (1928) and *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933), Yeats descends ever closer to the unforgiving abyss, but before it can consume him entirely, he finds the redemptive void that he seeks. Perhaps befitting of such a descent, the temper of the poems in both these volumes is indeed, as Yeats calls *The Tower*, "bitter," and "verges on nihilism." (Bradley, 2011, p. 110). As Bradley perceptively notes, "the idealizing dream" of Ireland that dominated the early romantic verse of Yeats has become "a modernist nightmare" in *The Tower*. The order of the poems in the volume *The Tower* is perhaps noteworthy as well, since Yeats deliberately chose their placement. It follows, then, that Yeats may have conceivably intended the relative calmness of "Sailing to Byzantium" to frame and put in heartening perspective the poems that come directly after; that is, "The Tower", "Meditations in Time of Civil War" and "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", because their systems, content, and sentiments are quite perplexing and alarming (Bradley, 2011, p. 111). For Bradley, however, he more likely intended to simulate the slope from order into near chaos and anarchy mapped by several of his later poems. But, as we shall see, *near* is a vital additive to Yeats's chaos: like Spinoza and his substance monism, he leads us to the edge of the absolute emptiness, but he does not leave us to be consumed by the abyss. Rather, the generative qualities of nihilism redeem annihilation and cultivate the void.

Yeats's poetic masks often long for nothing. In "Meditations in a Time of Civil War" (*The Tower*, 1928) the "daemonic rage" which "imagined everything" haunts the poem's landscape, and the "rage-hungry troop" magnifies the discontent chaos. However, the troop appears to so desperately long for emptiness that he "plunges toward nothing" with his "arms and fingers spreading wide / For the embrace of nothing" (Yeats, 1997f, p. 206). The figure seems frenzied in his quest for nothingness: the speaker calls him "belabouring" and "tormented," "biting at arm or at face" as he moves head-on into the abysmal scene. While the speaker fails to understand the trooper's desire and Yeats does little to describe this nothingness, it is clear that the trooper is drawn to it. His outstretched extremities long and reach for it, as if this nothingness will offer him something more than he currently possesses. It is this alluring quality to nothing that tempts and terrifies, but also leads the speaker to "abstract joy" and "half-read wisdom of daemonic images" at the poem's close. While still incomplete, nothing's glimmering of a gratification from within the void begins to form.

Nothingness appears as transformative in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" (*The Tower*, 1928). Here, Yeats extends the image of the rage-driven troop who longs for the void to include a sublime vanishing of the subject that edges closer. Although rooted in the Irish Home Rule struggle, "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" is a poem full of vanishing. The speaker recalls, "Many ingenious lovely things are gone . . . " and even the things that otherwise seemed impervious to the vanishing, like "Phidias' famous ivories / And all the golden grasshoppers and bees" also are "gone" (Yeats, 1997g, p. 207). Human accomplishments in art, law, and philosophy are reduced to "pretty toys," but the toys now belong to the past. Time, for Mutter (2017, p. 152), changes everything, and human perception is quite susceptible to such an alteration. A vanishing of all material objects in a subject's world lays the foundation for a non-substantial void. Yeats primes the human subject for transformation by negating all achievement and physical items, but it is the swan that undergoes this change first.

The swan appears in several of Yeats's poems as a symbol of imagination, timeless existence, and conquest. In "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," though, this mysterious bird connects visibly to the void. First, Yeats (1997g, p. 208) bonds the swan directly to the human soul; the speaker expresses, "Some moralist or mythological poet / Compares the solitary soul to a swan; / I am satisfied with that." As Billigheimer (1986) shows, we can credit Plato for first connecting the swan with the soul. In the *Phaedo* (1927, p. 462), Socrates pronounces:

> Will you not allow that I have as much of the spirit of prophecy in me as the swans? . . . because they are sacred to Apollo, they have a gift of prophecy, and anticipate the good things of another world; wherefore they sing and rejoice on that day [of their death] more than ever they did before.

Given that Yeats read the *Phaedo,* we can assume that he understood the swan's connection with a creative spirit as well as the bird's celebration of its own destruction.[i] More fascinating still, however, is that the sublimity that Yeats's swan embodies shares similarities to Kant's sublime disaster and transformation.[ii] Through the swan, Yeats stages the soul's advancement into sublime change, a move that leads it to the void's edge. The posture that the swan takes before "that brief gleam of its life be gone" is dignified and undaunted: its wings are "half spread for flight" and its "breast is thrust out in pride / Whether to play, or to ride / Those winds that clamour of approaching night" (Yeats, 1997f, p. 208). The swan, and by extension the human soul, then shifts to an active seeker of the disaster and destruction, as it "has leaped into the desolate heaven". In a move that alludes to Kant's view of the sublime, this bird fails to fear the desolate heaven's immensity or

vastness, despite the object's quantitatively terrifying sensation. The terror that this void elicits exists as incredibly real and hostile. The speaker states:

The swan has leaped into the desolate heaven:

That image can bring wildness, bring a rage

To end all things, to end

What my laborious life imagined, even

The half-imagined, the half-written page (Yeats, 1997f, 209)

The vision of the soul leaping into the desolate heaven can bring wildness and even existence-ending rage; for Billigheimer (1986, p. 60), the life, the half-imagined and the half-written page that the poet has imagined may terminate. Additionally, as Mutter (2017, p. 149) elaborates, the poet is "half persuaded to join in the prevailing mood of cynicism and destruction; it is tempting to acquiesce in nihilism, even to jettison his own poetry." The speaker's use of "can" in this passage rather than "will" or "does," however, is noteworthy: while the soul's deliberate bounding has the power to potentially summon such disaster and wildness, this outcome is not guaranteed; it is merely a possibility. Attaining order and renewed creation are the unspoken alternative consequences to leaping into the desolate heaven of this poem's void.

Whereas the vision of the swan-soul leaping into the void elicits a potentially fearsome outcome, it is an act which Mutter (2017, p. 150) connects directly to "good violence," which he calls "aristocratic, heroic, creative, and passionate." This "good violence" bears similarities to the redemptive disaster of generative nihilism, an Apollonian force that enters in one of Yeats's most diminutive poems: "Fragments" (*The Tower*, 1928). This poem meditates on language and truth as springing from the void of darkness and is one of the clearest instances of Yeats's void at last fostering creation. His title, which indicates a whole entity that experienced a destructive dismantling, implies a necessary reconstruction from the remains of the disaster. The speaker attacks John Locke for leaving us with the waste of the physical world and for underestimating the source of their own inspiration (Holdridge, 2000, p. 150). As an empiricist, Locke denied the existence of an innate truth; for Yeats, he failed to see that the "Garden died." By contrasting the empirical with the unperceivable, Yeats (1997b, p. 214) positions nothing-as-something; in this case, a something that prophesizes:

Where got I that truth?

Out of a medium's mouth,

Out of nothing it came,

Out of the forest loam,

Out of dark night where lay

The crowns of Nineveh.

Revelation in this poem comes after disaster. Nineveh, once a powerful city and capital of Assyria, fell at the hands of Babylon. But that nothing finally reveals something definite: the truth, born from the bare soil and darkness. The truth springs from the void of darkness, an entity that negates the ability of the sense to perceive.

Finally, Yeats imbues his void with creative properties, an achievement that only amplifies in *The Winding Stair*'s "Byzantium." Each of the poem's stanzas moves from pentameter to tetrameter to trimeter lines, only to end with a pentameter line that now seems expansive; this reflects the narrowing and intensity of the experience the poem strives for. While we are accustomed to reading this poem as an allegory of the aesthetic process, it is yet another exercise in Yeats's rendering of the Kantian sublime. In the commentary to his *Collected Poems*, Yeats reveals that he "warmed [him]self back into life with Byzantium" after falling ill. A "poem that befit [his] years," the structure of "Byzantium" oscillates between varying line lengths that perpetuate the "images that yet / fresh images beget" (Yeats, 1997a, p. 248). The aroma of flame that "no faggot feeds" and no storm "disturbs" hovers menacingly over the landscape, threatening to consume metaphysical reality and drag it into utter terror. In a move that Holdridge (2000, p. 180) casts as the "negative" sublime latching onto the "positive" sublime, the fire threatens to eviscerate all *a priori* truths and leave us "with nothing but the abyss." Yeats crafts the soundscape of "Byzantium" with harsh, abrupt dins; a cathedral gong reverberates and night-walkers warble their song, but these sounds "recede" as the distained "complexities" of "all that man is" enters the scene. "Unpurged images" are unrefined, as if the flame has not yet lapped their edges. For these entities, transformation to sublimity has not yet occurred. Once the flames envelope the day's images, as Ramazani (1990, p. 160) articulates, they will "simplify through intensity" and "burn away the accidents of the chaotic life."

Just as the "rough beast" of "The Second Coming" appears out of *Spiritus Mundi*'s desert, the speaker experiences another vision that sees the potential in disaster. He reveals:

Before me floats an image, man or shade,

Shade more than man, more image than a shade;

For Hades' bobbin bound in mummy-cloth

May unwind the winding path;

A mouth that has no moisture and no breath

Breathless mouths may summon;

I hail the superhuman;

I call it death-in-life and life-in-death. (Yeats, 1997a, p. 248)

The "superhuman" image is the embodiment of contradiction: the speaker first describes it as an image, refines his description to form a human, only to negate the first statement and cast it once again as mere image. This figure seems wrapped up in circularity: it has a mouth but cannot use it because the figure lacks moisture and breath; however, the potential for utility nevertheless exists, even if not yet actualized. Furthermore, Yeats's superman sees the proclivity for creation beyond the disaster. Death and life collapse into one image to form a nothing that functions as something, a nothing devoid of negativity. In Kant's dynamical sublime, there is the sense of annihilation of the sensible self as the imagination tries to comprehend a vast might. As Bloom (1976, p. 225) highlights, the negative formula in this poem mirrors Phases 15 and 1 of *A Vision*, where "human incarnation is negated." However, Yeats's annihilation is neither absolute nor finite; instead, it is provisional. This is what the speaker achieves by collapsing death into life and life into death: the fusing of each negates the other, thus preparing a space for transformation. In this case, the transition between lives.

This is where the disaster of generative nihilism enters the poem most prominently. Amid the fury, fire, and "mire" of the landscape, a regeneration of sorts begins to transpire. The "smithies," who the speaker surrounds with hellish descriptions of metal and flame, surge the landscape's bedlam forward and bring the destruction, but the scene is not one of utter annihilation. "Begotten" and "beget" appear a total of three times in the poem's second half. As if they spring from the void itself, the flames are their own cause and "begotten of flame," and the "spirits" "blood-begotten," made of flesh, are "dying into a dance / An agony of trance" (Yeats, 1997a, p. 248). Their death, however, exists as celebrated, as "dance" and "trance" amalgamate into a sublimity that fuses merriment and pain. These images, sprung from the destruction and disaster of the action appear

to process in a never-ending litany that fills the space of the poem. Through this sublime, Yeats seems to gesture toward Kant's postulation that no phenomenon can disappear as the "images . . . yet / fresh images beget."

After the sublime, the idea of negation enters the poem to add supplementary explanation of Yeats's procreative disaster. As Miller (1965, p. 113) argues, Yeats aims to yield to God in this poem as a phase of "total objectivity." For Miller, "Byzantium" comes close to removing all distinctive qualities from the soul so that it might reach God without qualities. Unlike Miller, I do not suggest that Yeats means to reach God in this poem, but the purging of an excess firmly anchors this idea in a generative nihilism. Spinoza's Gnostic erasure of God and Nature, an act of pure negation, promises the purged nothing to which Miller and Yeats allude. This process of losing idiosyncrasy to reach total objectivity relates to Kant's vanishing of the subject and Hegel's absolute. For Hegel, absolute negativity is supposed to be a first principle, a ground from which everything else flows. While Miller uses the phrase "total objectivity" to characterize Yeats's yielding to the divine, the poet depicts this surrender as anything but quiet and passive. Instead, he leaves us with a "dolphin-torn . . . gong-tormented sea." For all of the poem's eradicating language, a ferocious rage still overwhelms the final line. In this ultimate line, Yeats reveals that exorcism is violent: Kant's vanishing, Hegel's annihilation of annihilation, and Spinoza's gnostic disaster all require fury.

Conclusion

Reaching the non-substantial void is an arduous task; it requires both trauma and catastrophe: an utter change and a loosening of anarchy. However, Yeats harnesses this chaos and mixes it with an order that enables the dark to finally grow luminous in his poetic system. His reading of the generative nihilism of Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel aids the poet in his endeavor. In his last letter, written to Elizabeth Pelham on January 4, 1939, three weeks before his death, Yeats concluded:

> I am happy, and I think full of an energy, an energy I had despaired of. It seems to me that I have found what I wanted. When I try to put all into a phrase I say, "Man can embody truth but he cannot know it." I must embody it in the completion of my life. The abstract is not life and everywhere draws out its contradictions. You can refute Hegel but not the Saint or the Song of Sixpence. (Yeats, 1955, p. 922)

Yeats finally reaches the still point and achieves a satisfaction with his life and poetic vision, and this satisfaction imbues much of his late poetry. As he concludes in his "Supernatural Songs"

(*Parnell's Funeral and Other Poems*, 1935),

There all the barrel-hoops are knit,

There all the serpent-tails are bit,

There all the gyres converge in one,

There all the planets drop in the Sun. (Yeats, 1997h, p. 285)

The circularity that characterizes this stanza sees the Sun acting as a stable center, with the wild gyres all finding unity in the amorphous "there." Through his mode of disaster and catastrophe, Yeats finds the new center that he seeks. He finds this center in the void that the disaster of generative nihilism—"the logic of nothing as something"—leaves behind (Cunningham, 2002, p. xiv).

Endnotes

[i.] In the "Great Year of the Ancients" section of *A Vision*, Yeats writes extensively on the "Platonic Year." In this section, he includes parables from the Phaedo, including Plato's tale of dividing an egg with a hair.

[ii.] In a note to "The Tower", Yeats connects the swan to transformation. He recalls, "When I wrote the lines about Plato and Plotinus I forgot that it is something in our own eyes that makes us see them as all transcendence. Has not Plotinus written: 'Let every soul recall then at the outset the truth that soul is the author of all living things . . .'"

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Writing *Saudade*: Navigating Home, Homeland and Sexuality in the Work of Gabriela Mistral and Elizabeth Bishop

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Abstract

For poets Elizabeth Bishop and Gabriela Mistral, the potential of Portuguese saudade was an answer to the crises of alienation and identity they faced as exiles. Drawing upon their poetry, correspondence, and translations of Lusophone literature, this paper examines how, by engaging with this foreign concept, both queer women poets living outside of their respective homelands engaged with their own senses of isolation and unhomeliness. Describing the potential of saudade in an endnote to the section titled "Saudade" in Tala*, her third volume of poetry first published in 1938, Mistral states "I firmly believe, with Stefan George, in a future of borrowing language to language in Latin America. At least, in the case of certain words, clear achievements of the genius of each language, unshakable expressions within their range of 'true' words" (2003 p. 244). Both poets turned to this word as they were reconciling the heteronormative forces displacing them within their homelands. Ultimately, Bishop and Mistral mobilize the notion to address the traumas of displacement, loss, and sexual difference as they explore the 'truth' and nuance of the word through their writings.*

Introduction—Discovering *Saudade*

The word *saudade* has been a concept central to Lusophone literature from early folk poetry to a brief literary period in the 1890s known as *Saudosismo* and beyond. The idea is often translated into English as 'solitude,' 'nostalgia,' or simply 'yearning', and takes on new significance when examined by non-Portuguese speakers upon relocating to Brazil and Portugal. *Saudade* is notable not only for its centrality to Portuguese and Brazilian literature but also for its relative resistance to translation.

In a 2004 survey conducted by the firm Today Translations, the word was ranked as the seventh most difficult to convert and the only word of European origin ranked in the study's top ten (Young). The difficulty and nuance, as well as its prominence in the Portuguese language, likely resulted in Bishop and Mistral's affinity for the concept as they attempted to define it in the process

of acclimatizing to the language and its differences from their primary languages. *The Oxford English Dictionary* provides three definitions for the word:

> Longing, melancholy, nostalgia, as a supposed characteristic of the Portuguese or Brazilian temperament.
>
> Vague and constant desire for something that does not and probably cannot exist, for something other than the present, a turning towards the past or towards the future; not an active discontent or poignant sadness but an indolent dreaming wistfulness.
>
> [Y]earning for something so indefinite as to be indefinable: an unrestrained indulgence in yearning. ("Saudade, n.")

Both Chilean poet and diplomat Gabriela Mistral and North American poet Elizabeth Bishop[1] formed an affinity with the concept, evoking it within their poetry as well as their correspondence with other major writers within their social networks. Ultimately, this idea provided a means for these writers to come to terms with the alienation resulting from their sexuality while living in voluntary exile. Upon becoming acquainted with *saudade*—following Bishop's complete relocation to Brazil in 1952 and during Mistral's tenure as a consul in Portugal from 1935-1937—both poets attempted to translate the concept into their respective languages, making note of its centrality to its language and culture of origin. They noted the idea's usefulness in personal communication, as well as its potential to address broader sentiments and human experiences, including their own understandings of alienation. The vague universality of *saudade*, encompassing an unspeakable, undefinable nostalgia, served as an inspiration to both poets. In their introduction to *An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry*, Bishop and her Brazilian contemporary, Emanuel Brasil, highlight the importance of *saudade* in the context of Brazilian literature. Bishop introduces the word to readers by defining it as "the characteristic Brazilian longing or nostalgia . . . strongly associate[ed] with homesickness," noting that this feeling "appears obsessively" in Brazilian poetry from the Romantic period to the present (1972, p. xviii). This bilingual anthology serves as an introduction for many English speakers to Bishop's Brazilian contemporaries, including Carlos Drummond de Andrade and Joaquim Cardozo, whose

[1] In an interview with Regina Colônia for the newspaper *Jornal do* B*rasil*, Bishop described herself as "a North-American poet. . . living in Brazil." Bishop's self-definition as North American instead of simply American gestures towards her childhood spent with relatives living in Canada and the United States. This distinction also reflects the hybridity of her identity and a heightened sense of unhomeliness considered later in this analysis. This interview was reprinted in George Monteiro's *Conversations with Elizabeth Bishop,* 1996, p. 50.

work Bishop translated in part because of the sentiments of *saudade* select of their poems evoked. Bishop contributed a number of her own translations to the anthology, including "Cemetery of Childhood", a translation of Cardozo's "Cemitério da Infância", a poem dramatizing the loss of childhood innocence as a walk through a garden which decayed long ago. This anthology project reflects the poet's interests as a relocated writer living in Brazil as well as career-long themes of her work including childhood and losing one's home, themes which reflect the traumas of her childhood as well as her experiences of alienation as a queer woman.

Mistral, who was also a queer woman, spent the latter half of her life in exile serving as a Chilean diplomat in various countries including Portugal, Mexico, and the United States. Like Bishop, she introduced readers to the concept of *saudade* in her creative work. In *Tala*, her third volume of poetry, first published in 1938, Mistral titled the fifth section of the collection "Saudade", paying homage to Portuguese romantic and folk traditions while also addressing the topics of loss, childhood innocence, and home in the section's five poems. In Mistral's endnote to the section title, she expresses the ecstasy of being inspired by another language and approximates translations for her Spanish-speaking audience on both sides of the Atlantic while admitting the impossibility of understanding *saudade* in her homeland of Chile:

Suelo creer con Stefan George en un futuro préstamo de lengua a lengua latina. Por lo menos, en el de ciertas palabras, logro definitivo del genio de cada una de ellas, expresiones inconmovibles en su rango de palabras "verdaderas." Sin empacho encabezo una sección de este libro, rematado en el dulce suelo y el duce aire portugueses, con esta palabra *Saudade*. Ya sé que dan por equivalente de ella la castellana "*soledades*." La sustitución vale para España; en América el sustantivo soledad no se aplica sino en su sentido inmediato, único que allá le conocemos. (2001, p. 244)

I firmly believe, with Stefan George, in a future of borrowing language to language in Latin America. At least, in the case of certain words, clear achievements of the genius of each language, unshakable expressions within their range of 'true' words. Without embarrassment, I title a section of this book, completed on the sweet soil and in the sweet manner of the Portuguese, with this word "*Saudade*." I know its Castilian equivalent as "*soledades*." The substitution is sufficient for Spain; in America the noun soledad does not work but in its immediate sense, the only meaning it has there. [2]

Admitting the inexactitude and fallibility of the act of translation, she acknowledges that any attempt at translation will ultimately fall short. *Soledad*, her proposed translation, roughly equates to 'solitude,' which lacks the nostalgic qualities of *saudade* in Latin American Spanish. As Estrela

[2] All translations are the author's unless otherwise noted. The author owes thanks, in this instance, to peer reviewers who made valuable suggestions for this translation.

Viera explains in her comparative study of the two words as featured in the work of Portugal's Fernando Pessoa and Spain's Antonio Machado, *soledad* lacks the "complex cultural construction" and "unique psychological facets" as well as its ties to national identity (2007, p. 127).

Mistral also discussed the subject/concept in her prose work. She meditates on the concept in "Recado sobre Anthero de Quental, el Portugués" ["Note about Anthero de Quental, the Portuguese"], which is a biographical sketch of a poet with whom Mistral shared the experience of being an outsider, an exile and a traveler. Quental, a Buddhist born on the island of São Miguel in the Azores, spent much of his adult life in Portugal, and was a product of empire who mastered the language of the colonizer and returned to the European metropole. Mistral would follow the same path decades later, emigrating first to Spain and then to Portugal. In her article on Mistral's tenure as a diplomat in Portugal, Elizabeth Horan notes even more intimate parallels between the lives of these poets. Like Mistral, Quental adopted children when single. As Horan notes, Mistral focuses on these biographical connections and "speculates on the inner life of Anthero de Quental, who never married and had no lovers, in terms relevant to herself" (2009, p. 414). One of the section's titles, "Sin mujer" ["Without woman" or "Wifeless"], reflects Mistral's own public image as motherly without a husband.

Quental was not a contemporary of Mistral. In fact, he died (by suicide) more than forty years before Mistral wrote the piece. Mistral's decision to write about Quental reflects their shared experiences of exile and (at least perceived) queerness. She takes the opportunity to meditate on the concept of *saudade* and its poetic qualities at one point in a lyrical extended sentence:

> Ella significa melancolia a secas y entraña luego una dulzura apesadumbrada; ella vale por una sensación estable de ausencia o de presencia insólita; ella es metafisica y se colorea de una nostalgia aguda de lo divino; ella toma la índole de una cosa temperamental permanente y la de una dolencia circunstancial y ella se sale de lo portugués y se vuelve un achaque humano universal, un apetito de eternidad que planea sobre nuestro corazón temporal. (1978, pp. 367-368)
>
> It expresses dry melancholy and also involves a sorrowful sweetness; it equates to a steady sensation of absence or of an extraordinary presence; it is metaphysical and is colored by an acute nostalgia for the divine; it takes on the nature of a permanent temperamental thing, that of a circumstantial ailment, and it comes from the Portuguese and turns into a universal human ailment, an appetite for eternity that soars over our fleeting heart.

For Mistral, *saudade* seems to exist in a series of contradictions—sad yet sweet, absence and

presence, permanent but beyond the ability of the mortal human heart to comprehend. The description seems to reflect the senses of loss and displacement that the author and her subject seem to share.

Horan also notes the political marginalization the poet faced as a result of her rejection to diplomatic posts on the basis of her gender in the region of Western Europe, ultimately resulting in a sense that as the poet writes this piece she "stands literally on the furthest western strand of Europe, turning her back on the Spain that rejected her, facing the Atlantic and Brazil, to which she was likely to transfer" (2009, p. 413). The poet identified with both Portugal and Quental as marginalized entities, and perceived *saudade* as a means of considering the pain resulting from her displacement as well as the marginalization she experienced as a woman, as queer, and as a racialized foreigner. Horan notes the magnitude of the concept's significance: "*saudade* also appears in her subsequent writings from Brazil and becomes synonymous with the mood of her exile" (2009, p. 413).[3]

It is precisely the multi-faceted loss and identity-driven significance of the concept that led both poets to meditate upon the concept in-depth and represent it in their poetry and correspondence. As queer exiles, questions of identity, childhood, home and belonging featured heavily in their work. In an essay titled "Pa' la escuelita con mucho cuida'o por la Orillita': A Journey through the Contested Terrains of the Nation and Sexual Orientation", Manolo Guzmán introduces scholars to the term 'sexile,' a portmanteau of 'sex and 'exile.' Broadly defined, the sexile is produced as a result of "the exile of those who have had to leave their nations of origin on account of their sexual orientation," fleeing their homelands due to homophobic cultural, social and/or economic forces (1997, p. 227). While one cannot account completely for these writers' motives, Mistral's permanent exile (working as a diplomat for Chile across Europe and the Americas) and Bishop's seventeen-year exile reflect the hostility of their homelands.

Mistral and Bishop voluntarily left their nations of origin as a result of some combination of their writing talents and the sense of feeling out of place in their respective homelands. As Licia Fiol-Matta notes in *A Queer Mother for the Nation*, Mistral received anonymous letters early in

[3] The poet identified so much with saudade and the marginalization of Portugal that Horan suggests "Mistral chose boldly when she made Portuguese central to her public identity, accepting the Nobel as 'la voz directa de los poetas de mi raza y la indirecta de las muy nobles lenguas española y portuguesa'" [The direct voice of the poets of my race and the indirect voice of the very noble Spanish and Portuguese languages] (2009, p. 416)

her career as a civil servant "that revolved around her non-femininity and included accusations of her being *una marimacha* [mannish] and *una asquerosa* [disgusting]" (2002, p. 63, Fiol-Matta's translations in original). Mistral remained closeted her entire life; however, her relocation afforded her opportunities to embrace her sexuality, including the final decade of her life spent with her partner Doris Dana. Fiol-Matta notes that "Mistral left Chile to further her writing career, but also because she was permanently out of place there and felt persecuted" (2014, p. 36). Relocation and her writing afforded her reprieve from the crises of alienation she faced in her homeland and opportunities to process these traumas.

These currents of homophobia became even more evident when Dana died in 2007 and she bequeathed a trove of Mistrals documents as well as audio and video recordings of the couple to her niece, Doris Atkinson. This collection, referred to as *el legado* ["the legacy"] effectively confirmed Mistral's sexuality. In an article titled "A Queer Mother for the Nation Redux: Gabriela Mistral in the Twenty-First Century", Fiol-Matta, revisiting her monograph on Mistral's queerness, considers the reaction of the Chilean state's cultural apparatus to these revelations following decades of guarding Mistral's image and signification, a "fixation on the masculine, unmarried, and childless 'mother'" (2014, p. 36). *El legado* also reveals the degree to which the poet had embraced the very gesture that alienated Mistral early in her career within Chile, pushing her towards what Fiol-Matta describes as an "obsession with finding a permanent home to write in" (2014, p. 46). Mistral would go on to masculinize herself in later life as she "refers to herself with the male gender" and adopts a "signature of 'Gabriel'" in correspondence with Dana (2014, p. 45). Upon relocating and defining a home for herself while embracing her relationships, the masculinization that had played a significant role in alienating her within her native Chile takes on a new form as the poet playfully and romantically employs her masculinity, perhaps embracing a butch-femme dynamic between herself and Dana. One might also read this as another historical example of the masculinity without men examined by Jack Halberstam in *Female Masculinity*. Mistral's experience as a sexile, relocating due to homophobic harassment, afforded the poet the distance to reconcile her masculinity and to embrace the elements of her image and subjectivity that resulted in this initial alienation.

Bishop's various displacements in life were frequently associated with her romantic partners. Bishop relocated to Key West with Louise Crane prior to settling in Brazil with Lota Machedo de Soares. In these periods of exile, the insularity of the experience—having few ties to the new

geography—affords privacy and safety, but also opens possibilities of self-acceptance. For both Mistral and Bishop, *saudade* provides a means of understanding and describing the emotions they felt in their state of sexile. This is evident in their letters as well as the poetry, short stories and translations they produced while living outside of their respective homelands.

Invoking *Saudade*

In their personal communications, Bishop and Mistral both adopted *saudade* as a means of fondly addressing loved ones. In a letter dated April 16, 1938 to Argentine writer and editor Victoria Ocampo, Mistral used the word offhand in personal correspondence:

> A hybrid day, yesterday that is, on one hand pure *saudades* for you, and on the other, Sarita Bollo. (She left last night.)
>
> Broad and emotional nostalgia [*saudades*] for Connie and for me, for those eight *happy* days (it makes me fearful to set down the adjective…). (Mistral, G. & Ocampo, V. 2003, p. 57, ellipsis in original)

It is clear, however, that Mistral's understanding of the concept is more than a simple sense of yearning. For Mistral, a sense of happiness is tempered by the dominant sense of longing in the word as she suggests that for her and her companion at the time, Consuelo 'Connie' Saleva, happiness is, in some way, incompatible with *saudade*. There is fondness but also pain in the word.

Bishop, too, adopted the Brazilian/Portuguese custom of invoking nostalgia for her friends. In a letter to fellow American poet Robert Lowell, dated Dec. 10, 1954, Bishop introduced him to *saudade* in terms of yearning as "a very nice word that seems to include all the sentiments of missing friends in one" (Bishop E. & Lowell, R., 2010, p. 156). For this reason, Bishop began closing her letters to friends and family with "*abraços* [hugs] *e saudades*" (Millier 1995, p 538). Similarly, Bishop exhibits her understanding of the weightiness of the word in another letter to Lowell, dated Dec. 1958: "It is beautiful here, but Lota [her partner] and I are feeling horribly poor and great *saudades* (that overworked word)" (2010, p. 258). Again, the word's ambiguous nature—fond, yet painful—is on display with this particular usage. Bishop's parenthetical note, however, expresses her understanding of the weight and potential of the meanings carried by the word. Both poets experienced joy at being with their romantic companions but sorrow at being away from their loved ones and/or their homelands, a reflection of their divided existence as sexiles.

While both poets exhibited an understanding of *saudade* in its casual senses, such as yearning for a loved one, the writers both understood its more complex uses like yearning for one's former self (e.g., childhood innocence or an identity destabilized in a moment of crisis). As the poets encounter the concept of *saudade,* both turn nostalgically to their respective childhoods for a topic of inspiration. By turning to their losses of childhood innocence, Mistral and Bishop address the losses associated with the distance between themselves and their homelands. Both poetry collections emerging out of their time in Brazil and Portugal—Mistral's *Tala* and Bishop's *Questions of Travel*—reflect this, not only through their focus on childhood but also in terms of the collections' organizational schema, particularly the section titles and the geographic themes of these sections.

Translators of Mistral's work, including her companion Doris Dana, have interpreted *Tala* as "Harvest" for English-speaking audiences. Also translated as "felling" or "cutting down," the word suggests an inevitable end or a seasonal reaping. Ursula K. le Guin explains her choice of the word "Clearcut" as part of her own translation of a volume of Mistral's poetry: "The noun *tala* and the verb *talar* have to do with havoc—felling trees in great numbers, razing buildings to the ground. It is a violent word. Our term for the most ruthless and destructive kind of longing seemed a fair translation" (2003, p. 125). The title suggests an emotional destruction which is perhaps most prominent in the work's opening, "Muerte de me Madre" [My Mother's Death]. With this collection, Mistral turns from her lullabies and verses on motherhood in *Tenura* [Tenderness] to examine the loss of her mother as well as the waning possibility of becoming a mother herself: the beginning of a series of losses cataloged in the collection. Similarly, "Deshecho" [Undone] describes the unraveling of a mother and the speaker's shame for not sharing in the institution of motherhood.

As Horan notes, *Tala* was nearing completion during Mistral's time in Portugal (2009, p. 413). The volume's organization also reflects Mistral's complex geography and memories of places left behind, including Chile. Its sections, particularly those titled "América" and "Saudade", contain poems gesturing towards her time as an ambassador to the countries of Mexico, Portugal, and the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico, referencing in the poems a range of figures from Aztec gods to Mistral's contemporaries in the world of Lusophone literature. Also reflecting her time abroad, the five poems about Chile in this section reflect her estrangement with her homeland and with her childhood such as "País de la ausencia" ["Land of absence"] and "Todas íbamos a ser reinas" ["We

Were All to Be Queens"], as discussed below.

Though Bishop never brought the actual word *saudade* into her own work, the nostalgic sentiments towards homeland and childhood innocence are clearly perceptible in *Questions of Travel*, first published in 1962. The volume's two sections of poetry titled "Brazil" and "Elsewhere" are separated by Bishop's autobiographical short story "In the Village", which recounts the loss of Bishop's childhood innocence and the scream of her mother shortly before her mother was hospitalized for mental illness. Like Mistral's sections of *Tala*, the sections of *Questions of Travel* reflect different geographies and moments in Bishop's life. While the poems in the section titled "Brazil" capture the country and its culture, the majority of the poems in the "Elsewhere" section take place in Nova Scotia. These poems recount the time leading up to her mother's institutionalization, placing the three sections of the volume—"Brazil" poems, the short story "In the Village", and the "Elsewhere" poems—in reverse chronological order, reproducing the qualities of *saudade:* looking towards the lost homeland and the deceased with nostalgic eyes. The poems "Manners", "Sestina" and "First Death in Nova Scotia" present remembrances of her grandfather, grandmother and cousin respectively. "Sandpiper" (a portrait of a migratory bird) and "Filling Station" (an account of a gas station with traces of domestic life—a doily, comic books—blurring lines between home and work) explore the liminal nature of home and belonging.

This alienating effect is also central to Mistral's "Saudade" poems in *Tala*. "La Estranjera" [The Foreigner] describes the depth of a woman's alienation in language and culture. "Beber" [To Drink] presents a woman in search of home in life and in memory. "Todas íbamos a ser reinas" is an account of four seven year-old girls growing up, including one named Lucila, Mistral's given name, and another named Soledad, Mistral's approximation of the word *saudade*. The queer utopia of female unity in a land of bounty in northern Chile at the beginning of the poem succumbs to a future of disappointment and separation as their dreams fall apart. They grow older but do not become the queens they dreamed of becoming. While the others experience marriage, motherhood and widowhood, Lucila, is left alone and inherits an imaginary kingdom. Like the poet herself, Lucila finds her happiness not in her literal homeland but in the geographic distance and unimagined queer future she must invent for herself in a state of exile.

Bishop's "In the Village", the story dividing the poems about Brazil and the poems about Nova Scotia in *Questions of Travel*, like "Todas íbamos a ser reinas" and "Muerte de mi madre", brings

to the forefront of the collection the losses of mother, home and childhood as it recounts the events leading up to her mother's descent into madness. After the loss of her mother, Bishop spent the rest of her childhood scuttled between the homes of relatives in New England and Nova Scotia. This break reflects a loss of innocence—a before and an after—reflected in the warmth and the pain of the volume's poetry about her childhood. Bishop's short story reflects what Homi Bhabha defines as an "unhomely moment" catalyzed out of an "incredulous terror" at realizing one's displacement (1994, p. 8). This terror results from the innate sense of not belonging at home as a result of loss, as well as one's queerness and one's foreignness as a result of relocating. While Bhabha's decolonial revision of Freud's notion of the unhomely reflects an "estranging sense of a relocation of the home and the world," Bishop's "One Art", as well as Mistral's "País de la ausencia", perform multiple vectors of displacement and alienation by using elements of repetition, surveying losses, and deploying negative constructions (1994, p. 7). The speakers of these poems both examine deep cultural and personal losses. "One Art" takes the form of an internal dialogue recounting and reassuring oneself, while the speaker of "País de la ausencia" revisits a homeland devoid of everything that made it home.

The speaker of "One Art" systematically catalogues a life's worth of losses while assuring herself that "loss is no disaster." Everything in the poem, from its structure to Bishop's diction, conveys this sense of *saudade* as Bishop approaches the topic of loss. The poem is written in a traditional style: a villanelle defined by iambic meter and refrain lines which convey its reflective (bordering on obsessive) tone. In an attempt to convince herself that these losses are not so grave, the poem's speaker opens "One Art" by declaring that "The art of losing isn't hard to master" (ln. 1). It soon becomes apparent to the reader that the loss is greater than originally outlined, and that the speaker's words to the contrary are an attempt to convince themselves otherwise. Following the villanelle form, Bishop uses the refrain lines in "One Art" to reaffirm, throughout the poem, that "[t]he art of losing isn't hard to master" (lns. 6, 12, 18). Enacting a performance of pain and consolation, the four lines ending in "disaster" (lns. 3, 9, 15, 19), such as "I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster" (ln. 15), also provoke strong feelings of reassurance and denial. The non-refrain lines call into question the validity of the first line, walking a tightrope between the warmth and devastation of *saudade*—the crisis of loss on the one hand and the potential salve of memory on the other. As the poem echoes, assesses and reassesses its first line, Bishop establishes a sense of loss, yearning, and denial reflecting the idea of *saudade*.

The speaker's feelings of painful reflection continue as they list various personal losses and tells herself that the loss of "None of these will bring disaster" (ln. 9). The specific losses catalogued by the speaker range from small items, such as "door keys" and an "hour badly spent" (ln. 5), to large ones, like a "continent" (ln. 14) and the beloved "you" of the poem (ln. 16). These objects fall into the same categories used to explain *saudade,* including abstract concepts such as innocence and trust as well as material things such as places and people. This painful yearning, reflective of *saudade*, is central to the poem and its catalog of losses. The speaker starts to list this series of personal losses in the third stanza with some abstract losses. Detailing these losses, she instructs herself, "Then practice losing farther, losing faster: / places, and names, and where you meant/ to travel" (lns. 7-9). Bishop uses an understated tone to express the *saudade* of the speaker. Reassurance and denial are expressed as Bishop structures her list of losses from least to most painful. In this sequence, the speaker does not directly mention or describe the pain she feels, but rather denies the gravity of the pain she has experienced by employing words such as "isn't" and "none."

The speaker's list of abstract losses is followed by a set of more concrete losses in the fourth stanza, beginning with an incident from her childhood, stating, "I lost my mother's watch" (ln. 10). The loss of the watch is, in fact, four different losses: first, the literal loss of the watch; second, the supervision of her mother; third, the distant sense of childhood innocence; and lastly, the watch gestures towards the time spent meditating upon these various losses, cycling through them and experiencing the pain of *saudade*. The catalog of literal losses continues as the speaker remembers her "three loved houses," "two cities," "some realms [she] owned, two rivers, [and] a continent" (lns. 11, 13-14). Upon losing these houses, cities, and rivers, the speaker of the poem loses pieces of her personal and cultural identity. The speaker experiences the pangs of *saudade* not only for the places and possessions she has lost, but also these pieces of herself. The same can be said of the last stanza. With the loss of this loved one, the speaker also loses an important relationship. In the case of "One Art", this includes the loved one's gestures and mannerisms, such as her "joking voice" (ln. 16). Ties are severed between self, mother and home (as well as homeland). The speaker's desire to regain the watch, her memories, her homeland and her missing childhood innocence is painful and reflects the different aspects of the Portuguese concept of *saudade*—loss and yearning, immensity and indefinability.

The last lines tie the rest of the poem together and serve as a resolution, declaring "It's evident/

the art of losing's not hard to master/ though it may look like (*Write it*!) like disaster" (lns. 17-19, Bishop's emphasis). These lines exemplify *saudade* in its contradiction and understatement. They extend the sense of denial, reflection and reassurance expressed in the first stanza and the refrain lines of the poem, preserving the tone of painful, understated loss evoked by the speaker's catalog of losses. Writing *saudade* offers the speaker a means of understanding the crisis of loss not just in terms of material objects or loved ones, but also loss of place. The time that Bishop spent in Brazil resulted in more than just an admiration for its culture, natural beauty, and language. The experiences she had and the knowledge she gained, whether consciously or unconsciously, led to the incorporation of ideas such as *saudade* into the body of her work. The potential of writing s*audade,* for Bishop, was a means of grounding the crisis of loss between loss/displacement and the indelible potential of memory.

For Mistral, *saudade* (as well as its so-named section in *Tala*) serves as a medium for exploring her vague but powerful sense of nostalgia for her homeland, as well as the lost, idealized childhood notions of self and womanhood she ultimately subverts in the section's poems. As Mistral became a nationally recognized figure, she adopted a public persona as mother of the nation of Chile, subtly subverting notions of femininity. Her public persona and the autobiographical nature of much of her work frequently countered cultural constructions defining womanhood as predicated on giving birth, appearance and her dependence upon a man (Fiol-Matta, 2002). The first poem in *Tala*'s "Saudade" section, "País de la ausencia", is also dominated by feelings of loss. Its title, translated as "Absence Country" and "Land of Absence", is the mystical result of the speaker's cumulative losses, a parallel to the structure and function of Bishop's "One Art". Returning to a land the speaker once knew, the poem catalogues the missing flora, fauna, geographical features and people. A mysterious land of absences comes into relief in the poem, almost like a film negative. In the absence of everything familiar, a nightmarish land emerges, bringing to life the speaker's sense of alienation as her life became more detached through death and distance.

"País de la ausencia" begins with a description of this land produced in absence and characterized by its lack of life and color as it is compared to dead seaweed ["alga muerta"] (ln. 5). The land is characterized solely in terms of absence as Mistral catalogues all of the attributes it lacks through a series of comparisons, often relying upon repetition to emphasize this point. Her "Land of Absence" is ageless ["edad de siempre"] (ln. 7), occupying a space outside of the familiarity of time. It bears no pomegranate or jasmine and lacks skies and seas ["No echa Granada,

/ no cria jazmín, / y no tiene cielos / ni mares de añil"] (lns. 9-12). The elements of creation, from flora to fauna, and the elements of the heavens and seas so familiar and foundational as to be established in the creation story of Genesis do not exist in this alien land. This repetition of the negatives "no" and "ni" ["no" and "neither"] emphasize that the land the speaker describes is created out of a general lack of familiarity. This lack of the familiar is precisely how Mistral highlights the constructs of *saudade* as she meditates upon her own disconnect with her homeland of Chile while serving it abroad as a diplomat.

The poem's form differs greatly from Bishop's compact villanelle but relies upon repetition to illustrate the constant resonance of alienation within *saudade*. The lines alternate between three and two stresses, always ending with the latter. The end of each stanza is also consistently marked by the rhyming of the last and third to last lines with the sound of í ("neblí" ["fog"] and "feliz" ["happy"] in the first stanza, "oí" ["I heard"] and "morir" ["to die"] in the second and so on) while the first line of each stanza ends with an "a" sound ("ausencia" ["absence"], "granada" ["pomegranate"] etc.). These characteristics, in combination with the refrain lines "and in a land without name / I shall die" ["*y en país sin nombre* / *me voy a morir*"] (lns. 15-16, Mistral's emphasis), produce a reflective sense of loss and unhomeliness approaching the obsessiveness of Bishop's villanelle (p. 84-5, Dana's translation). In the case of both of these poems, the presence of *saudade* is visible in this overt obsession with the past and the evasiveness of home and innocence. This disconnection is most clearly emphasized in the third stanza, in which the speaker declares, "Neither bridge nor boat / brought me here" ["Ni puente ni parca / me trajo hasta aquí"] (1971, lns. 17-18, pp. 82-83, Dana's translation). Mistral can provide no explanation for arriving in this land she never sought out or discovered ["no lo buscaba / ni lo descubrí"] (lns. 21-22). This allusion to the fairy tale, a parallel to the loss of a mother's watch in "One Art", invokes *saudade* for childhood innocence as well as the loss of childhood innocence in these fairy tales.

Mistral concludes the stanza with a major turn in the poem as the speaker accepts the land of absence as her new homeland: "*Y es mi patria donde / vivir y morir*" [*And it is my homeland / to live in and die in*] (2003, lns. 27-28, pp. 190-1, le Guin's translation, Mistral's emphasis). The speaker accepts the loss of homeland and goes on, in the following stanzas, to explain that the origin of this land is in her own losses and that the memories of the things gone by are her closest rendering of home and homeland:

Me nació de cosas	[It was born to me of things
que no son país;	that are not of land,
de patrias y patrias	of homelands and homelands
de las criaturas	of all the living beings
que yo vi morir	I saw die,
de lo que ero mío	of that which was mine
y se fue de mí.	and went from me.
Perdí cordierras	I lost mountain ranges
En donde dormí	where I slept
Perdí huertos de oro	I lost orchards of gold
dulces de vivir;	sweet to be in
perdí yo las islas	I lost islands
de caña y añil,	of cane and indigo;
y las sombras de ellos	and their shadows
me las vi ceñir	I saw close in around me
y juntas y amantes	together and loving
hacerse país.	becoming my country.]
(1973, p. 84)	

Mistral's cataloguing of losses from the abstract (connection with the homeland) to the concrete (landscape and people) bears striking resemblance to Bishop's "One Art". The latter, however, lacks the specificity of Mistral's poem. Moreso than Bishop, Mistral evokes specific geographic features of the homeland she left behind, such as the Andean mountain range, the islands of the sea as well as the country's fruit and flowers. In both cases, the poets' evocation of the loss of home and homeland points to the nostalgic, nationalistic idea of *saudade.* Mistral acknowledges this with the poem's dedication to fellow diplomat and poet Ribeiro Couto, a Brazilian consul to France in the 1930s. Upon writing the poem, Mistral had lived outside of her homeland for approximately fifteen years and shared this feeling of *saudade* with Couto, a fellow South American poet in exile, who was able to appreciate her use of *saudade* in the poem and the so-titled collection.

The final stanza of the poem returns to the formless images of the opening stanzas. Bodiless, headless apparitions (lns. 47-48) follow the speaker slowly, turning into her new homeland over many years of wandering. In this acceptance, the speaker acknowledges the destructive nature of her *saudade*: what she yearns for can never be regained. For this reason, she resigns herself to the declaration that she makes in the poem's refrain: "*Y es mi patria donde / vivir y morir*" [*And it is my homeland / to live in and die in.*] (lns 53-54, Le Guin's translation, Mistral's emphasis). The speaker's new homeland is defined by its emotional and physical distance from the original

homeland and by its formation through the speaker's absence and memory. The poem's focus on homeland [patria] and upon memory elicits *saudade* from the reader.

Conclusion

In the examined poems, Elizabeth Bishop and Gabriela Mistral invoke yearning for the homeland while distancing themselves from any concrete sense of home, rendering performances of their own states of self-exile from these homelands and the crises of identity and culture resulting from the emotional impact of their respective exiles. The strongest invocations of *saudade* can be found in Bishop's "One Art" and Mistral's "País de la ausencia", which are both dominated by loss and alienation. By examining Bishop and Mistral's understanding of the concept of *saudade* as well as its significance in their correspondence and work, one gains a greater understanding of the poets' cultural and poetic influences. It would be simplifying to merely label either poet as great within the traditions of English or Spanish literature. This is due to the fact that, in many ways, their work is a continuation of their Portuguese and Brazilian predecessors and contemporaries. Bishop and Mistral, through their exploration of *saudade* in their writings, came to terms with an array of losses, including the landscapes they abandoned as sexiles and the unhomeliness they experienced. Ultimately, the writers found freedom in the foreign and alien as they came to terms with losing their childhood innocence and their homelands while embracing their own notions of womanhood, citizenship, and sexuality. In the cases of Mistral's "País de la ausencia" as well as Bishop's "One Art", the poets' writing takes on a performative quality as they ruminate on their losses by listing them and compounding these losses with each refrain, as well as through the formal decisions made in the poems and assembling the volumes containing them. The effect that the poets create reflects the richness of *saudade*—its persistence, its vague alienating force, its pain and its potential. For both writers, the richness of this concept became a means for understanding the loss and alienation that they experienced while recuperating the memories of the homes and cultures that they lost.

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Crisis and Transformation: The Aftermath of First Contact in Three Mid-20th Century Science Fiction Novels

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Abstract

Despite being a hallmark of science fiction since the inception of the genre, narratives that feature first contact scenarios between humans and alien civilizations became particularly popular in the middle of the twentieth century. Critical analyses have long neglected the uniqueness of first contact narratives in this period, especially their clear 'mentorship-like' rather than 'invasion-like' nature and the invariable transformation of humanity that follows the event. This article attempts to fill this gap in the research by comparing how the aftermath of first contact is treated in novels by the 'Big Three' of science fiction: Arthur C. Clarke (Childhood's End*, 1953*)*, Robert A. Heinlein* (Stranger in a Strange Land, *1961*)*, and Isaac Asimov* (The Gods Themselves, *1972*)*. The article argues that the structure of first contact in these narratives is deliberately crafted to appeal to both contemporary cultural (mainly Cold War related) anxieties, and to hard-wired biological biases. In each of the novels discussed, this transformation sees humanity, through various means, become more like the aliens. This change results in a type of hyper-sociality, which can be viewed in a positive or negative light depending on the narrative context, the conflicting attitudes towards communality and individualism, and the contemporary zeitgeist of the Cold War. In addition to a close reading of the three texts, the article also employs a sentiment analysis, with the help of Matthew Jockers' 'syuzhet' package, in order to uncover the emotional valence of the transformation underlying the trope.*

Introduction

Fictional scenarios of first contact between humans and alien civilizations have a long history that stretches back to Antiquity. In his *True History*, written in the 2nd century AD, Lucian of Samosata takes his protagonists on a fantastical journey to the Moon where they meet the 'Moonmen' who, in a very human-like fashion, fight the citizens of the Sun over the colonization of the Morning Star. According to Fredericks, Lucian's work clearly shows "interest in the strange and bizarre, and the thrill of experiencing it," as well as aspects of "interplanetary imperialism and warfare" (1976, p. 50)—two familiar aspects of science fiction that have been constant companions of first contact narratives over the years. The first aspect is better known as the 'sense of wonder' or

'sensawunda' of classical science fiction (Knight, 1967) and has been described as an intangible sensation that invokes a feeling of awe "that short-circuits analytic thought" (Csicsery-Ronay, 2002, p. 71). The emotion of awe appears to have evolutionary origins (Keltner & Haidt, 2003, p. 306) and rests on "perceived vastness, and a need for accommodation," as well as "an inability to assimilate an experience into current mental structures" (Keltner & Haidt, 2003, p. 297).

In first contact narratives in particular, this sense of awe owes much of its effect to "the question of whether humans are unique in the universe" (Geppert, 2012, p. 341), which has had a place in public consciousness since the time of ancient Greek philosophers (Geppert, 2012, p. 341). Contemporary science fiction and other works of speculative fiction (horror, fantasy, etc.) typically explore this question through awe-based phenomena, and partially derive their attraction from their depiction of supernatural experiences. Because the effect of these narrative elements relies on behavioral patterns hard-wired in our brains, they have managed to maintain their attraction.

A colonialist paradigm, or the second aspect of science fiction in Lucian's *True History,* is full of cultural context and much more likely to change under external, contextual pressures. This paradigm can be thought of as a framework of thinking where both the possibility of conquering 'inferior' groups and the possibility of being conquered by 'superior' groups exist as either cultural desires or fears. It also appears in 20th century science fiction, and is provided with additional momentum by the highly popular genres of invasion and imperialist literature of the late 19th century. Science fiction adopted aspects of colonial literature, "but without, except in rare cases, questioning, critiquing, or moving beyond the colonizing impulse" (Grewell, 2001, p. 26). Hence, an optimistic, mellowed-down version of this genre, a "technologically based astrofuturism" most commonly found in the Space Operas that dominated the science fiction genre in the first half of the 20th century, continued to be "orthodoxy in the 1950s and 1960s" (Poole, 2012, p. 260). However, over the years, this sentiment subsided under the influence of anti-colonial and civil rights movements, which had major repercussions for both first contact narratives and the entire genre of science fiction. The 'rare cases' that challenged colonial attitudes mentioned by Grewell began to rise in number, and instead of an almighty, morally superior and conquering species, humanity was increasingly presented as immature and vulnerable.

Moreover, contemporary cultural anxieties asserted a strong influence on the science fiction genre. The term 'cultural anxieties' is sometimes blindly deployed by constructivist critics, who

typically ignore the actual cognitive processes behind it. Cultural anxieties can be understood as misfirings of our evolved reactions of fear and anxiety that "originate in an alarm system shaped by evolution to protect creatures from impending danger" which is "biased to discover threat" (Öhman, 2000, p. 587). Although the existential danger behind Cold War anxieties was rather abstract, and without the 'immediate' threat posed by a predator chasing prey, the destructive, life-threatening potential behind these anxieties was still quite palpable. Thus, the exploration of Cold War anxieties through supernatural phenomena was doubly imbued with an affective viscerality, therefore strengthening the capacity of these narratives to attract the attention of the readers.

Probably the principal anxiety of the period of interest for this article, lasting from the end of the Second World War to the early 70s, was a paranoia about a nuclear holocaust that, to some, seemed almost inevitable at the time. According to Smith, expectations of nuclear annihilation covaried with contemporary events, with incidents like the Korean War and the Cuban Missile Crisis causing spikes of nuclear fears (1988, p. 559). The Space Race was likewise in full swing and, although an ostensibly positive venture aimed at the betterment of mankind, it soon became clear that it was a clandestine way of building up ballistic rocket technology. This contributed towards a cognitive association between the two concepts and "the Space and the Atomic Ages" became "inextricably intertwined" (Geppert, 2012, p. 342).

These geopolitical realities contributed towards two developments that had a hand in shaping first contact narratives in the period. First, they increased human self-importance: although we might be newcomers to the 'high roller' table of the Universe, at least we are there at all. Secondly, they contributed towards the creation of 'agency panic': an "intense anxiety about an apparent loss of autonomy" coupled with a conviction "that one's actions are being controlled by someone else or that one has been 'constructed' by powerful, external agents" (Higgins, 2013, p. 230). This was a natural reaction to a situation where existential decisions were being made on the level of superpower nation states, far beyond anything a single individual could affect or change with their own actions. Therefore, this cultural anxiety manifested itself in the form of dread, which suggested to readers that "unavowed, unknown, and perhaps concealed and inexplicable forces rule the universe" (Carroll, 1990, p. 42). This dread resembles the 'short-circuiting' of our reasoning powers that Csicsery-Ronay (2002) ascribed to the sensation of awe in science fiction. However, unlike awe, this sensation attributes a certain maliciousness to the grand and unknown.

Science fiction authors were not only directly influenced by these cultural anxieties and contemporary phenomena but were also under a constant pressure for innovation by a readership hungry for anxiety-laden narratives. Morth underscores the "intensive process of discussion between writers and their readership" and the "continuous feed-back process" that had a marked influence on how science fiction authors shaped their narratives (1987, p. 104). Hence, a crucial property of the creative process is "cultural selection" which "occurs as a result of competition for limited attention, memory, and expression" (Mesoudi, 2006, p. 331). In the fight for the spotlight, better reception, and success for the products of their labor, it was imperative for writers to infuse their novels with narrative elements that could best capture the readers' interest.

When talking about cultural anxieties that influence cultural production, prior studies on speculative fiction have frequently taken psychoanalytical, Marxist, or other approaches influenced by continental philosophy. This article, on the other hand, regards the dynamics between cultural developments and cultural production through the prism of biocultural criticism and cultural evolution. This is an underutilized perspective in science fiction studies, curiously so considering the fact that many of the ideas by proponents of the field of cultural evolution and those by science fiction scholars are oftentimes remarkably convergent. For example, proponents of cultural evolution have noticed the effectiveness of minimally counterintuitive (MCI) concepts in attracting the readers' attention (Boyer, 1994, p. 35), closely mirroring the widespread concept of "fictional 'novum' (novelty, innovation)" in science fiction studies, which has to be "validated by cognitive logic" if it is to suitably estrange the reader (Suvin, 1979, p. 63). According to Upal, minimally counterintuitive concepts can be better remembered than normal concepts or "maximally counterintuitive concepts that violate a larger number of intuitive expectations" (2010, p. 194). Hence, the minimally counterintuitive idea of "a book that thinks" would fare better in cultural transmission than the fully intuitive idea of "a book about thought" or the maximally counterintuitive idea of "a book that thinks and has babies" (Barrett, 2008, p. 331). Both MCI concepts and the cognitively estranging 'novum' suggest that it is crucial for the estrangement produced by narrative novelty to be tempered by a degree of plausibility.

Similarly, the discursive concept of the science fiction 'mega-text', which "works by embedding each new work" in a vast "web of interpenetrating semantic and tropic givens or vectors" (Broderick, 2005, p. 59), has an analogous manifestation in cultural evolution through the metaphor of the 'primordial soup' (Johnson, 2010, p. 31). For science fiction writers, the wealth

of extant narratives and cultural influences serve as a primordial soup of ideas, plots, and settings, with each of its elements acting as an 'adjacent possible', capturing "both the limits and the creative potential of change and innovation" (Johnson, 2010, p. 31). Crucial for both of these concepts when applied to the formation of new tropes, or novel clusters of narrative elements, is that, just like the biological evolution of new species, their formation tends to work not in leaps but in small, gradual changes. Therefore, it is only natural that, by working in the same milieu, the work of science fiction authors of the period that dealt with first contact scenarios converged towards a similar shape, that they filled the imaginative niche carved out by cultural anxieties. This new generic form was then added to 'the primordial soup' or the 'mega-text' as a unique cluster of elements, ready to be reshaped and remodeled by other authors, and thus, a new trope was born. In the rest of this article, I will refer to this trope as 'Post First Contact Transformation' or PFCT in short.

The already common narratives of first contact with intelligent extra-terrestrial species began to therefore shift from the scenarios of conquest, where humans either conquered or were conquered by aliens, towards more nuanced extrapolations of PFCT. Moreover, despite their variation, the novels that fit this trope depict humanity as being capable of radical change. This change can be either biological or cultural in form, and is most often triggered by first contact with alien civilizations. These narratives typically portray pre-contact humanity as on a path towards self-destruction until a miraculous first contact initiates a reversal of this path. The change of humanity in these novels is a very specific one—dictated by the extra-terrestrials but, in effect, an amplification of uniquely human traits carried over from our evolutionary past, such as collaboration, altruism, norm following, and so forth. The amplification of these traits makes the change a movement towards increased sociality, for better or worse, depending on the unique narrative context of the novels. Despite what might be understood as a latent pessimism in some of these narratives, they still contain hope in the capacity of Mankind as a species with enormous potential which it cannot fully tap itself. Thus, with the alien species as a catalyst and with the 'old' humanity being the principal reactant, a new, altered humanity is created.

In addition to the aforementioned cultural anxieties, there is an even more serious identity-oriented issue visible in the variations of PFCT narratives. Despite the antagonism against communists during the Cold War, fueled by tribalist crusades like McCarthyism which were striving to shut out "morally unsatisfying complexity" (Storr, 2019, p. 158), certain aspects of

communist ideology retained an attraction, at least in its pure, idealized form. Beneath the authoritarian front, which was the main target for Cold War propaganda, the emphasis on communality and equality did not go unnoticed, especially in pre-civil rights movement America, where the deep inequalities and injustice at the very core of society were starkly visible. Moreover, individual authors, in their roles as creative agents, were faced with a mental tug-of-war between the conflicting impulses of individualism and collectivism, which contributed to the vastly different takes that Clarke, Heinlein, and Asimov had on the positivity or negativity of humanity's movement towards hyper-sociality.

In order to trace the different variations of the trope, and the authors' treatment of the individualism/collectivism dialectic, this article features a computational analysis of the emotional valence of the texts. Previous sentiment analyses (Reagan et al., 2016; Jockers, 2015b) have aimed to reveal the hidden, shared patterns of the emotional arcs of different novels, claiming that there is a limited number of plot shapes in existence. However, these analyses never narrowed their scope to a single trope, despite the unique potential of the method to visualize the variation of the affective profile of the trope in different narratives that contain it. This article will utilize sentiment analysis for this very purpose, by using the 'syuzhet' package (Jockers, 2015b) in the programming language R.

The 'syuzhet' sentiment lexicon, incorporated in the package, was developed by the Nebraska Literary Lab and was crowdsourced through a survey where participants were asked to put words into two categories: positive and negative. The package parses large quantities of text and assigns sentiment values to each word of the text in accordance with the lexicon, which are then added up on the level of individual sentences. Finally, the text is divided into a hundred 'chunks' and the mean sentiment value of each chunk is plotted across narrative time. In order to test the accuracy of the package, Jockers hired several students to manually (i.e., subjectively and without the aid of the package) code the sentiment of a few novels that spanned a variety of genres and compared the results to the sentiment arc produced by the 'syuzhet' package. He found that the resulting sentiment analysis closely matches the subjective experiences of human readers, and his results were independently confirmed by several other researchers (Jockers, 2015a).

The package facilitates the literary analysis of the article by providing empirical evidence about the affective profile of the change in PFCT narratives. It is important to remember that the method

provides a ‘macro’ view on the change of the emotional valence in the text and each movement of the line chart represents a change of the mean emotional valence of a chunk containing hundreds of sentences. This limitation is relatively inconsequential in this particular use case, as the transformation of humanity in PFCT narratives is an unfolding process that makes up most of their plot. So, even though the syuzhet package cannot be reliably used in the actual close reading of the relevant novels due to the scope at which it operates, it can rewardingly supplement it, providing invaluable descriptive information otherwise only attainable by intuition and guesswork.

In the three case studies that follow, the abovementioned sentiment analysis will add to the close reading of the relevant novels. I will further flesh out the central aspects of the trope, contextualize its use against the producing authors and their cultural milieu, and reveal the ways in which it interacts with the narrative environments unique to each of the novels.

Case studies

The case studies will deal with the PFCT trope in the works of the ‘Big Three’ of mid-twentieth century science fiction, an honorary historical marker earned by their great popularity and prestige: Arthur C. Clarke (*Childhood’s End*, 1953), Robert Heinlein (*Stranger in a Strange Land*, 1961), and Isaac Asimov (*The Gods Themselves*, 1972). The ‘Big Three’ are not only selected due to the status of their works as ‘representative’ cultural narratives, a common practice in cultural studies and a staple of science fiction studies in recent times (DeKoven, 2004), but also due to their unique, canonical position in the science fiction genre.

Although working within the limitations of literary canon might be seen as perpetuating certain established hierarchies of literary value, it is their very canonical status that makes them highly relevant for the analysis. This is because the popularity and prestige of science fiction novels is dictated by a so-called ‘power law’, where a few authors have been able to accumulate considerable popularity at the expense of most other science fiction authors. Moretti qualifies this dynamic as “the perverse market logic—to those who have, more shall be given—that goes by the name of increasing returns” (2013, p. 146). The very fact that this trope was used by the most popular and prestigious science fiction authors of the period means that the specifics of the trope would trickle down to other, less popular authors (whose novels are not necessarily inferior to those of the ‘Big Three’). For example, in his *Sentinels from Space* (1952), published almost

simultaneously with Clarke's *Childhood's End*, E.F. Russell instills the same belief in the hidden potential of humanity, which is only revealed after first contact with a 'superior' alien species. Another example is *The Black Cloud* (1957), a hard science fiction novel where, just like *The Gods Themselves,* the PFCT trope is largely used to explore other scientific speculations.

Childhood's End **(1953)**

Just like one of Clarke's other great novels, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Childhood's End* posits the expansion of human capacities through alien intervention, which involves a first contact event with a transformative effect on humanity. The novel opens with the United States and the Soviet Union competing to be the first nation to launch a spacecraft into Earth's orbit. Suddenly, massive alien spaceships appear over cities all over the world. The aliens soon enforce a direct supervision of human affairs, which they claim is for humanity's own salvation. Although a new 'golden age' of wellbeing and technological advancement does indeed begin, it comes at the expense of human creativity and culture. After some time, it is revealed that the 'Overlords' came to usher in mankind's transcendence: fusion with the Overmind, a vast cosmic intelligence containing the disembodied life energies of thousands of bygone alien civilizations.

This variation of PFCT was not only limited to Clarke—as mentioned earlier, in E.F. Russell's *Sentinels from Space*, humanity is similarly revealed to be at "a larva-like intermediate stage of development preceding a form of 'cosmic butterfly' which lives amongst the stars" (Morth, 1987, p. 95). However, unlike the transformation of humanity in Russell's novel, the one in *Childhood's End* is "not merely an evolutionary quantum leap but a true apocalypse in the double meaning of the word: revelation and destruction" (Gomel, 2014, p. 153). The novel abounds with clear references to Christian apocalyptic narrative, which is evident in Jan's pondering over humanity's end:

> So this, thought Jan with a resignation that lay beyond all sadness, was the end of man. It was an end no prophet had ever foreseen—an end that repudiated optimism and pessimism alike. Yet it was fitting: it had the sublime inevitability of a great work of art. Jan had glimpsed the universe in all its awful immensity, and knew now that it was no place for man. (pp. 158–159)

Jan's thought process perfectly shows the ambiguity of the change of humanity in PFCT narratives. The positive aspect of the transformation is that, by dropping our human corporeality, we become one not only one with all humanity but all extraterrestrial alien races that can undergo

this transformation. McKee argues that Clarke himself saw this process as humanity "becoming divine," where the Overmind is a deity that humanity becomes a part of (2007, p. 241). However, according to Gomel, Clarke's apocalypse is explicitly anti-humanistic (Gomel, 2014, p. 154). Unlike the "apocalyptic transformation promised in the Book of Revelation," which was meant to "repair humanity's relationship with God without destroying its essence," Clarke's narrative is "the negation, rather than the fulfillment, of human history" (Gomel, 2014, p. 154). Moreover, with respect to the effect of this narrative on its audience, the working of our cognition is defined by an awareness of our corporeal humanity, which is why we tend to root for human agents in narratives, unconsciously adopting their goals (Boyd, 2001, p. 6). Clarke's narrative is, therefore, also difficult for its readers to receive wholly positively, as humanity's final ascendance involves a loss not just of corporeality, but individuality. The resulting 'being' is, literally, inhuman.

While the prevalence of religious systems, particularly Western and Abrahamic, which espouse Cartesian substance dualism would suggest that humans have a tendency toward viewing the body and soul as separate, recent research has suggested that our evolved cognition cannot help but closely associate the two. In a cross-cultural analysis of various funerary rites, religious mythology, iconography, and religious doctrine, Hodge (2008) shows that although we do have the capacity to visualize Descartes' total separation of body and soul and understand it in an abstract sense, the vast majority of our religions and mythologies never really embraced the extremities of this idea. Bering claims that this is mostly due to the cognitive bias of 'person permanence' (2011, p. 117): the idea that our innate understanding that people who are out of sight still exist (and engage in various activities), gets extrapolated to their absence after death. Therefore, the embodied understanding of the afterlife is as a physical location, so the deceased who reside there retain some form of human corporality, along with their bodily functions and the ability to experience pleasure (this is why the afterlives of the virtuous are typically depicted as places of specifically hedonic rewards). Therefore, the sharpness and scope of the loss of humanity in the climax of *Childhood's End*, where the children ascend to space as a massive beam of light, could potentially shock or unsettle the reader. This shock, in combination with the simultaneous message of salvation and 'humanity becoming divine', leaves the ending of *Childhood's End* highly affectively ambiguous.

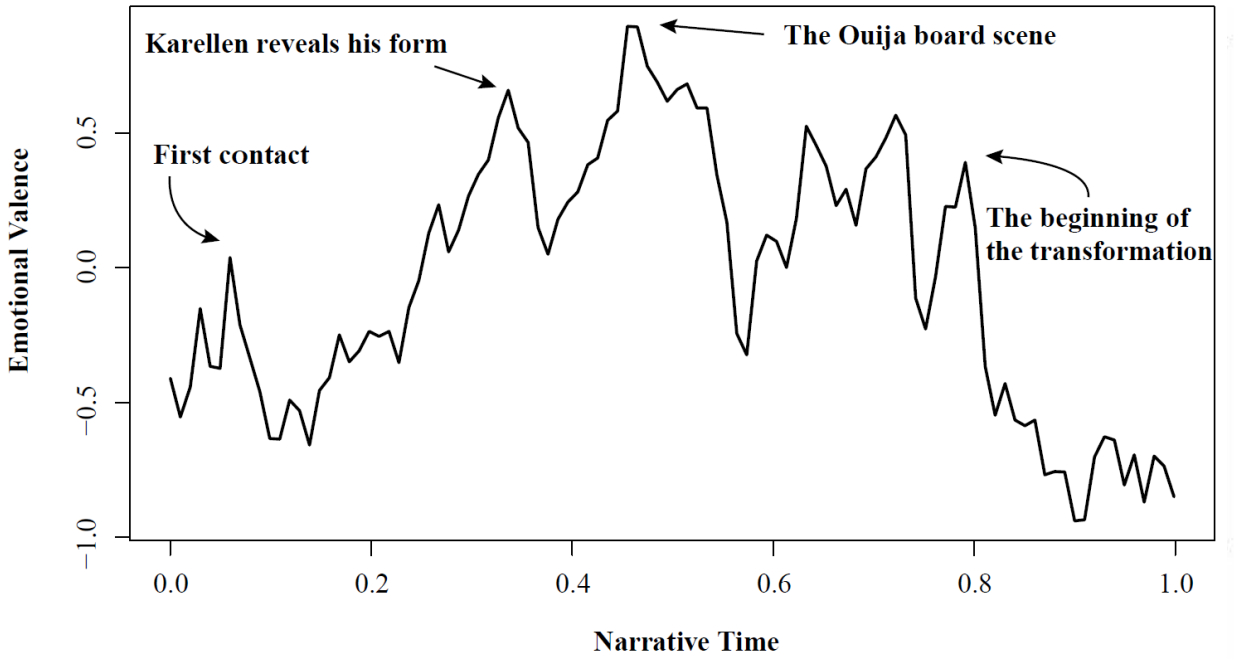

Figure 1. The emotional valence of the plot in *Childhood's End*

In the case of such ambiguity, the 'syuzhet' package can allow us to connect the affective profile of the narrative to Clarke's use of the PFCT trope by revealing the emotional valence of the text. As shown in Figure 1, the transformation of humanity in the aftermath of first contact is followed by a rise and fall or an 'Icarus' narrative pattern. The unique trajectory of the plot in Clarke's story indicates that the emotional valence of the language reaches its lowest levels in the last part of the novel. This could suggest that Clarke saw the transformation of humanity and its incorporation into the Overmind as a predominantly negative development. In addition to the first contact between humanity and the Overlords, Figure 1 has three other annotated events, all of which indicate sharp drops of the emotional valence of the text. The first one follows the reveal of Karellen's (the leader of the Overlords) true form, which is that of a demon from Judeo-Christian-Islamic mythology. This event not only decreases the emotional valence of the text, but also serves as a minimally counterintuitive concept, meaning it is more likely to assume a place of importance in a reader's experience of the narrative. Additionally, a sharp decline of emotional valence immediately follows the Ouija board scene, where the Overlords see the first signs of human psychic abilities. The final drop is after the transformation begins to manifest itself physiologically, which kickstarts the gradual loss of human individualism. According to Karellen, this

transformation

> starts with a single individual—always a child—and then spreads explosively, like the formation of crystals round the first nucleus in a saturated solution. (p. 143)

This pattern, which characterizes the beginning of humanity's transformation, is repeated in both of the other novels included in the case studies and is clearly a crucial part of the trope.

What the computational analysis cannot show is the maturation underlying the narrative, triggered by the mentor-student relationship between the Overlords and the humans. The title of the novel itself implies that we are children that must be brought up by a more mature alien race. However, this maturation is bittersweet, as the clear progress and development implied by the word are counterbalanced by a 'loss of innocence'. The negative implications of this phrase are further highlighted by the fact that the Overlords take the shape of demons, the most extreme form of the 'Other' in human imaginative culture. As the 'mentors' in this process, the Overlords do appear to be cognitively superior to humans, but they are far from godlike. Despite their technological and intellectual supremacy, the Overlords lack the vast potential of humanity. This is brought to the fore by Karellen towards the end of the novel, when he mourns the fate of his species, which, to fulfill its role of guiding others to the Overmind, is denied salvation for itself. The Overlords are doomed to be forever locked in the physical realm, much like demons are locked in Hell in Christian mythology, and denied the ability to transcend into the Overmind.

The shape of the PFCT trope in *Childhood's End* may also be influenced by Clarke's personal beliefs about the importance of space travel for the future of humanity and the growth of our species. Clarke was a member of the British Interplanetary Society and, together with some of its other members like Olaf Stapledon, "represent[ed] a particular style of British science fiction focusing on space exploration and the anticipated positive influence of science" (Dunnett, 2012, p. 514). Clarke believed that astronautics, as a period in the development of humanity, would trigger a new renaissance, with an explosion of creative activity in its wake (Poole, 2012, p. 261), disregarding the effect of the space race on the doomsday clock. On the flipside, if humanity is robbed of this essential period in its development, as in *Childhood's End,* stagnation and a downturn of intellectual production are soon to follow. According to Clarke, "without [interplanetary travel], the human mind, compelled to circle forever in its planetary goldfish bowl, must eventually stagnate" (1961, p. 72). Therefore, the fact that first contact with the Overlords

prevents humans from undertaking space travel could be yet another contributing factor for the falling emotional valence of the text.

Stranger in a Strange Land (1961)

Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* likely made the most significant impact on popular culture out of the three novels included in the case studies. It received the Hugo award in 1962, was the first science fiction novel to become a best-seller in both a hardcover and paperback form, and has never gone out of print since its release (Higgins, 2013, p. 229). Its plot is relatively simple. Prior to the timeline of the novel, an expedition is sent to Mars, but loses contact with Earth after landing. Twenty-five years later, a post-WW3 government sends a second expedition to Mars, which discovers a human born to members of the first expedition but raised by Martians. 'The Man from Mars', Valentine Michael Smith, is brought to Earth, where he gradually introduces Martian customs to humanity, forms a religion, and catalyzes a transformation of Terran culture before dying a martyr's death.

The novel quickly became "a counter-culture Bible" (Heer, 2014) that appealed to many different groups. It was revered by the burgeoning hippie movement, which used it "as a blueprint of sorts to experiment with communal relationships and religious practices" (MacFarlane, 2007, p. 92), but it was also "one of the few novels . . . that Charles Manson allowed the members of his 'family' to read" (Higgins, 2013, p. 229). Most importantly, *Stranger in a Strange Land* spawned a religious movement of its own—The Church of All Worlds, named after the church that Smith formed in the novel (Possamaï, 2002, p. 204).

This is not the only time that aspects of science fiction religion "were transmuted from fiction to absolute truth" (Gomel, 2014, p. 152). In a cultural landscape riddled with existential fears, people were quick to embrace the alternative spirituality offered by science fiction, and many real life religions or cults have delved into the "cultural reservoirs" (Possamaï, 2002, p. 204) of science fiction for inspiration. Several such examples are L. Ron Hubbard's still widespread Scientology, the New Age UFO cult Heaven's Gate (whose members committed mass suicide in order to ascend and join a superior alien race, a turn of events eerily reminiscent of that in *Childhood's End*) and Aum Shinrikyo, a doomsday cult that carried out sarin attacks in Tokyo in 1995 (Gomel, 2014, p. 152). In addition, certain North American Spiritualist movements have adopted aliens as "spiritual

guides" since the beginning of the UFO phenomenon (Porter, 1996, p. 337). All of these cults or religions are a part of a "spiritual revolution" influenced by "the massive subjective turn of modern culture" where instead of a "life lived in terms external or 'objective' roles, duties and obligations" people "turn towards life lived by reference to one's own subjective experiences (relational as much as individualistic)" (Motak, 2018, p. 130). However, despite this emphasis of the subjective, all of them function in tight groups or societies that nurture some forms of communality.

This same mixture of individualism and communality, as well as the entirety of the religious sentiment in *Stranger in a Strange Land,* is encapsulated in the phrase 'thou art God', which frequently recurs in the novel. This dictum implies that all living beings are both independent units and spiritually interconnected. The almost Spinozan pantheism of the phrase is moderated by the influence of the 'subjective turn' mentioned by Motak—the hidden truth behind 'thou art God' allows every individual that accepts the tenets of The Church of All Worlds (the one in Heinlein's novel, not the real-world imitation) to unlock their hidden potential.

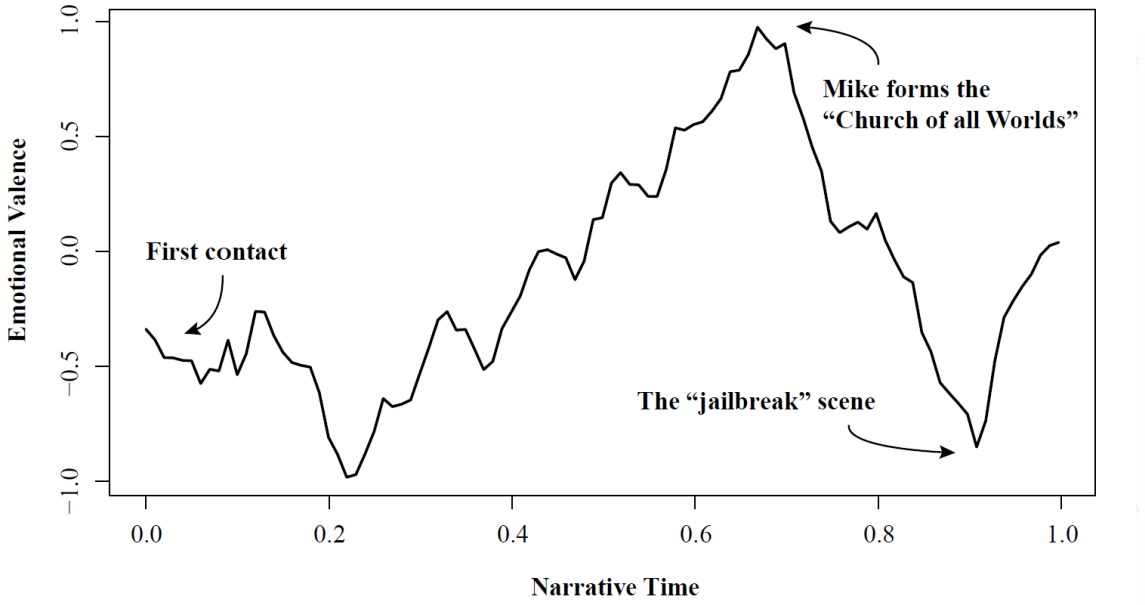

Figure 2. The emotional valence of the plot in *Stranger in a Strange Land*

The emotional valence of the novel shows a rise and fall pattern with a sudden increase towards the end, where the events leading to Smith's self-sacrifice and the act itself are shown to have positive emotional valence and are hence seen as positive developments. Albeit bittersweet due to Smith's death, the end of the novel implies that humanity is on the cusp of salvation. Moreover, the improvement of humanity in this novel is more palpable than the one in *Childhood's End*, as

humanity both retains its anthropomorphic features and is on the verge of gaining super-human powers to manipulate the external world for its benefit.

In shaping the outcome of the PFCT trope, certain peculiarities of Heinlein's personal life made him quite susceptible to the conflict between individualism and communality. In his youth, he had strong leftist views and relied on welfare himself, but "later in life, as a libertarian, he would rail against 'loafers' and the welfare state" (Heer, 2014). Moreover, the socialism that he espoused in his early days was distinctly American, "bred on Looking Backwards and the Bellamy Club tradition rather than the new Marxism that was entering America along with new immigrant groups" and had close ties to cooperatism, an ideology best described as "a collective business ethic" (Mendlesohn, 2019). Heinlein's collectivism was a collaborative interaction between the individual wills of different people, which in his view was quite different than the form of socialism espoused by the Soviets, which he heavily criticized, going so far as to call it "Red Fascism" (Heinlein, 1949 cited in Mendlesohn, 2019). Heinlein also wrote explicitly anti-communist works like *The Puppet Masters*, where space slugs from Titan invade Earth. The slugs, serving as explicit analogues for Soviet communists, take over individuals' minds, turning them into soulless drones. Thus, his antagonism is towards a communalism that rejects any semblances of individualism (a breed that probably only existed in his head).

In *Stranger in a Strange Land*, Heinlein's agenda continues in the same vein, but is much more subtle. The culturally superior Martians have a highly social culture, maintaining very close social relationships with their 'water brothers'. The link is formed through the sharing of water, which is a rare resource on Mars. This relationship is highly altruistic in nature and is marked by mutual commitment and trust, and one 'water brother' is understood to never lead another into 'wrongness'. Early in the novel, Smith is surprised by the human ability to have multiple 'water brothers', which implies that human relationships, even those of literal kinship, are less stable and more transient. Moreover, Martian religion is based on the concept of 'grokking'—an understanding so thorough "that the observer becomes a part of the observed," allowing the subject "to merge, blend, intermarry, lose identity in group experience" (Heinlein, 1961, p. 287). This keystone of the Martian mindset is frequently presented in the text through providing Smith's estranging perspective of the world, which serves as a minimally counterintuitive concept. This perspective, shaped by his Martian upbringing, is extremely unusual and thus cognitively attractive and highly memorable. In addition to providing a defamiliarizing effect of mid-20th century social

norms, Smith's teachings enable humanity to gain self-possession, through tearing down the self-imposed cultural barriers that hold back the full realization of human potential.

Similarly to *Childhood's End*, the transformation is first realized through a single individual, Valentine Michael Smith, who, with his human biology and Martian culture, is a liminal character best capable of putting these events into motion. This is highlighted by Jubal Harshaw, an eccentric polymath who often serves as a mouthpiece for Heinlein's socioeconomic worldviews. Harshaw echoes Spencerian 'survival of the fittest' notions in the context of spreading Martian teachings on Earth, claiming that their inherent 'superiority' will have a spiraling effect with positive consequences for Mankind. Towards the end of the novel, he tells Smith that:

> If one tenth of one percent of the population is capable of getting the [teachings about Martian spirituality], then all you have to do is show them—and in a matter of some generations the stupid ones will die out and those with your discipline will inherit the Earth (p. 567).

It is possible that the Martians' decision to allow Smith to accompany the second human expedition back to Earth is meant to send ripples through human society and make it more amenable for its improvement and future collaboration with the Martians. In fact, the Martians appear to be quite vehement in enforcing their own worldview on other civilizations. Long before the events of the novel they "had encountered the people of the fifth planet, grokked them completely, and had taken action" (Heinlein, 1961, p. 124), annihilating their world and forming the Asteroid Belt in the process. At one point, Smith claims that:

> by their standards, [humans] are diseased and crippled—the things we do to each other, the way we fail to understand each other, our almost complete failure to grok with one another, our wars and diseases and famines and cruelties—these will be insanity to them. (Heinlein, 1961, p. 560)

Their complete disapprobation of the frailties of humanity might even make them resort to "mercy killing" (Heinlein, 1961, p. 560) in order to preventatively deal with a dangerously aggressive and imperfect humanity. Therefore, releasing Mankind from these cultural constraints even has existential significance, and the salvation behind the transformation is quite literal.

The Gods Themselves **(1972)**

Asimov's *The Gods Themselves* differs from both *Childhood's End* and *Stranger in a Strange Land* in many ways. Despite its name, it does not deal with religion to quite the same extent as

either of the other two novels. Moreover, the PFCT trope is not the narrative bedrock of *The Gods Themselves*, as Asimov came up with the story after being dared by Robert Silverberg to write a story about the fictional 'plutonium-186'—an element that cannot exist in our physical reality (Asimov, 1980, p. 552). The novel opens in the aftermath of a catastrophic global energy crisis, spurring the search for new methods of energy generation. To this end, a scientist, aided by extradimensional aliens, discovers how to tap into the energy of a parallel universe via an 'Electron Pump'. Unbeknownst to him, this could turn the sun into a supernova and wipe out both humanity and the aliens of the parallel universe. Over time, and with the help of Lunarite technology (developed by the scientists of the increasingly genetically and culturally divergent Lunar colony), a safe way of using the method is discovered, which would destroy neither of the two universes.

The Gods Themselves is not only an outlier in the case studies but also in Asimov's oeuvre. The novel was written after a fifteen-year hiatus from writing serious science fiction. Moreover, although Isaac Asimov rarely wrote about aliens, this novel, which is largely considered as one of his best, even by Asimov himself (Asimov, 1995, p. 225), presents the entirety of the novel's middle, eponymous part, '…The Gods Themselves…', through an alien point of view. Unlike the other two novels featured in this article, *The Gods Themselves* does not feature direct contact between the humans and the 'enlightened' alien species, but communication is effectuated through interdimensional energy transfer. Such indirectness of first contact is not something entirely new. For example, *Lumen* (1872), by French 'proto' science fiction author Camille Flammarion, also lacks a direct first contact scenario, as the existence of extraterrestrial life forms is revealed to its protagonist by a benevolent cosmic spirit, who acts as an intermediary. However, the real inspiration behind the specifics of first contact in the novel seems to be the increased funding and research in the early 70s towards SETI style projects, which hoped (and still do) to achieve contact through information transfer rather than through actual encounter with aliens in the physical world.

In *The Gods Themselves*, some of the main benefits of the 'syuzhet' method are nuanced due to certain peculiarities of the formal composition of the novel. Each part deals with different characters and 'races' (Terrans, aliens, and Lunarites), each having their unique features and perspectives, which skews the emotional trajectory of the plot. The fact that each part of the novel has different characters with unique idiolects and immersed in a completely different cultural or even biological context, should caution against an overreliance on the produced graph. However, the graph does provide one unmistakable insight into the nature of the transformation itself—its

clear positivity.

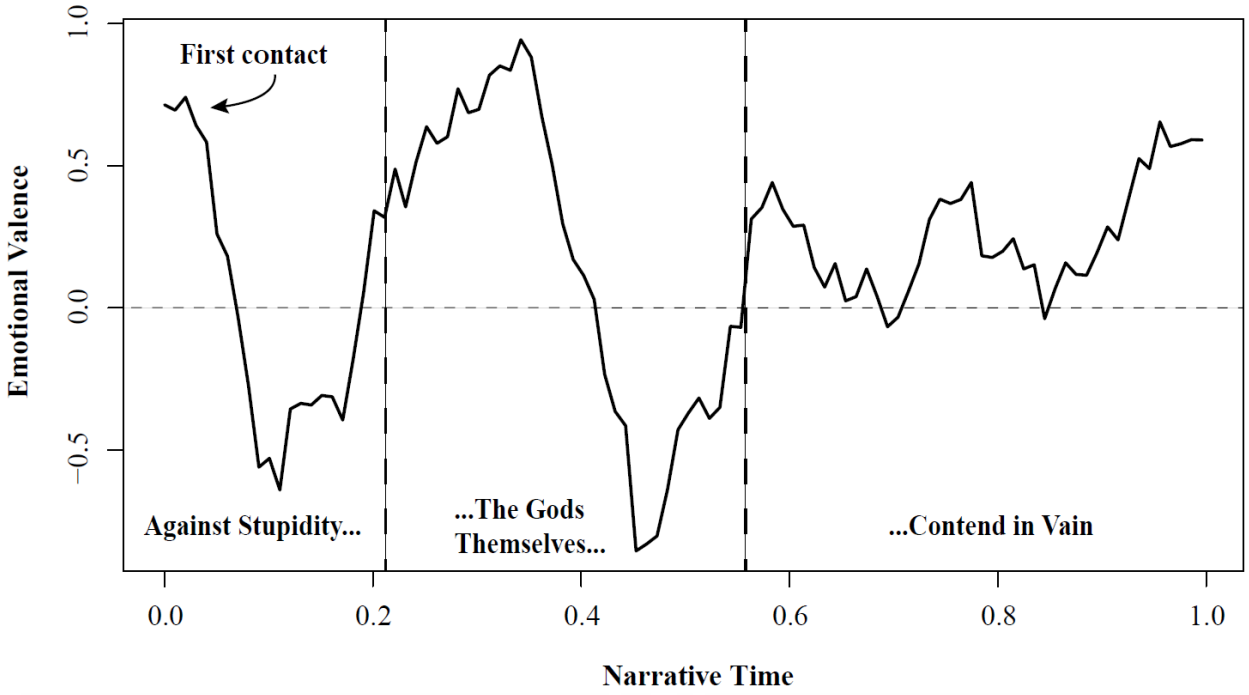

Figure 3. The emotional valence of the plot in *The Gods Themselves*

Like a typical representative of 'hard science fiction', *The Gods Themselves* has a reduced density of religious topics, which are replaced with an 'idolatry' of science and technology. Therefore, a good deal of the transformation of humanity is done through mimicking the aliens' technology. This is typical of the genre where the belief of a supernatural universe where salvation could only be divine is typically redirected "toward a much more acceptable belief in a natural universe where technology saves" (Peters, 1977, p. 20). This makes the student-mentor relationship between humans and the aliens more literal than in the other two novels. However, the aliens do not necessarily have the moral high ground, as the 'hard ones' (the final stage of maturation for their species) seem to lose some of the altruistic tendencies present in their adolescent forms, especially the stage referred to as 'emotionals', and seem indifferent to the idea of obliterating an entire universe to save their own. Just like in the other two novels, aliens do not grow or learn in the aftermath of first contact and remain inert, while the exact opposite happens on the human side.

In addition to technological progression, humanity seems to advance morally and culturally. For most of the novel, humans are shown to be extremely selfish and self-centered, especially in the first part (perhaps aptly named 'Against Stupidity…'), where most of the motivation behind

the actions of the characters seems to be dictated by self-serving impulses. However, later things change. For example, in the third part of the novel, Denison, a cynical scientist turned businessman, is able to overcome his selfish impulses and professional jealousy against Hallam (the person credited with inventing the 'Electron Pump') and, by working with the Lunarites, manages to make the novel's crucial breakthrough. The message is clear—apocalypse can be averted, and utopia achieved, only through increased collaboration and overcoming selfishness. Moreover, it is frequently emphasized that the aliens are not necessarily more intelligent than humans, only more technologically advanced (despite the seeming implications of the novel's title), which emphasizes the inherent potential of humanity.

Moreover, the aliens in *The Gods Themselves* are not as counterintuitive as they may seem at first: despite their bizarre appearance, their cognition is not that different to that of humans. Therefore, the inclusion of an alien POV is a minimally counterintuitive rather than a maximally counterintuitive concept, which interferes with our immersion in the narrative in a much more superficial way than might be expected. Even the middle, most outlandish part of the novel is quite immersive, despite focusing entirely on the aliens. After all, it is told through the perspective of the 'emotional' Dua, whose clear empathy makes her cognition the most human-like among the aliens.

The final transitional form of humanity in the novel are the Lunarites (or the 'Moonmen') who fully embrace technology as a means for salvation. They engage in space exploration, reject the restraints of Terran social norms, and live in a tighter, more communal society than Earth-based humans, embracing technology for the improvement of humanity. Most importantly, Lunarites are open to genetic engineering (a taboo topic for the Terrans), which albeit being transformative, does not quite go to the posthuman extremes of Clarke's *Childhood's End*, wherein the entirety of Mankind dissolves in a beam of light and departs the Solar System. Hence, the transformation of humanity in *The Gods Themselves* and its crowning achievement—the departure of Lunarites into deep space with the newfound propulsion energy afforded by the Electron Pump—are unequivocally progressive for humanity, and hence positive.

Conclusion

Post First Contact Transformation, or PFCT, is a common trait of mid-twentieth century science

fiction novels, mostly due to the Cold War related cultural anxieties that were reaching their peak during this period. While variations within the trope exist, they all feature a large-scale transformation of humanity in its narrative fabric, and occasionally an accompanying transformation on a micro level that mirrors the former.

One of the main sources of variation within the trope is related to the materialism of the transformation. It appears that in narratives where human corporeality and agency are eventually abandoned, the transformation is imbued with a negative emotional valence, and in those narratives where humanity retains its anthropomorphic traits, the transformation has a more positive emotional valence. This is due to our innate anthropomorphic bias, which makes us see the loss of human features in a negative light. Moreover, in all these narratives, humans are shown to be capable of transformation while alien species are not, either because of their higher position on the cosmic hierarchy or due to internal limitations that make them inferior to humans in some way. The aliens remain inert and are not changed by the first contact event which has such a transformative effect on humanity.

After the mid-70s, the PFCT trope lost much of its popularity and it becomes near impossible to find science fiction novels that feature all of the components of the trope. This decline of popularity could be attributed either to the weakening of the surrounding cultural anxieties that played such a crucial role in the formation of the trope, or to the 'ebb and flow' dynamic that speculative fiction, with its heavy reliance on the novelty of ideas, is particularly susceptible to. After an idea rises to popularity, the market tends to become oversaturated with it, after which it is dethroned, subverted and satirized. However, *Childhood's End*, *Stranger in a Strange Land* and *The Gods Themselves* have all managed to live on, despite the decline in popularity of the trope itself. This may be due to the prestige of their producing authors, but must also be influenced by the novels' heavy use of narrative elements that appeal to our hard-wired biological imperatives, whose effects remain unvarying even with a changing cultural context. Moreover, the three novels feature a vast array of ideas, contradictions, and novelty, which have a high capacity for eliciting continued thinking about both the intradiegetic and the extradiegetic world. By remaining in the consciousness of the readers for a longer period of time, the chances of the novels for being recommended, or 'transmitted' to others, increase. The resulting discourse surrounding the novels drives positive feedback loops of popularity that further contribute towards their 'canonical' status. Finally, all the novels feature a large proportion of alien-related counterintuitive biases, making

the novels more memorable and hence more likely to ‘stick’ in cultural transmission (a crucial aspect of the abovementioned feedback loop of popularity).

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Moonlight in Miami: The Split Sociopolitical Reality of South Florida As Told By Barry Jenkins

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Abstract

This paper explores the sociopolitical implications and reflections of the 2016 film Moonlight*. By looking at the film with these considerations, and by contextualizing themes and moments from the film with contemporary scholarship and social data, this paper offers a clearer understanding of both the film and the city it takes place in—Miami. As sociological literature from the past thirty-odd years suggests, Miami has often been the site of both tense racial relations and progressive ideals in the face of mass migration. The city has historically been lauded as a model of inclusivity while, simultaneously, much of its population experienced inequality and discrimination. While this research indicates one sort of social history in Miami,* Moonlight *provides an additional perspective, from a marginal standpoint that has often been overlooked by academic research. By taking both of these perspectives into account, this paper hopes to illuminate how Miami as the progressive city of the future has so far failed to live up to these expectations, while also illustrating that such expectations are still within the realm of possibility.*

Introduction

Miami, as an object of academic and popular criticism in the last fifty years, has maintained a split personality. Despite a wide variety of aphoristic proclamations naming it a city of the future, stark cases of social injustice and racial tension persist. Miami is at times deemed cosmopolitan though also provincial. There is a Miami that has made huge strides of inclusivity in relation to the immigrant communities that exist there, as well as a Miami reckoning with decades of racial tensions. There is a littoral Miami, referred to as glitzy and glamorous (and white), as well as a landlocked, seemingly stranded Miami, seen as unglamorous (and black). The history of these Miamis, well-documented in popular publications and theorized about in academia, exemplifies a split personality. Croucher observes these personalities stemming from postmodern conditions, as the contradictory nature of Miami is prototypical of the coming age of twenty-first century cities. In her view, cities have entered a constant state of change, places of shifting terrains which impact the "inherently political and contextual nature of the social definition of reality" (1997, p. 14). In

other words, as cities continue to influence populations, and vice versa, both cities and populations will continue to develop socially, culturally and politically, in a sort of ideological calculus. Such a fluid existence, at least in the eyes of critics writing about Miami, indicates its role as an enigma compared to other cities. Croucher and other critics call into question the identity of Miami moving into and through the twenty-first century. These scholars indicate a difficulty in speaking about Miami as if grasping at straws, rendering the city a site of birth, combination, rebirth and transformation.

The 2016 film *Moonlight* similarly calls into question competing and ever-shifting conceptions of identities, such as racial identity, gender-normativity and sexual orientation. Drawing upon first-hand experiences growing up in Miami, the filmmakers contemplate the ways that geographies, histories, politics and mainstream narratives impact upon the unstable identities of both Miami and its residents. The film focuses upon a black, gay man, Chiron, from Liberty City in Miami, and his experiences as he grows from a young boy to a young man. The film is replete with allusions to his geographic context, and the ways in which that context interacts with various aspects of his identity in overlapping and intersecting ways. An awareness of both this geography and the critical discourse surrounding Miami's social history is crucial for a deep understanding of the film. This paper analyzes *Moonlight* as a film in and of Miami, a place capable of illustrating both instability in identity as well as a place of constant, radical identity formation and re-formation. By taking advantage of a setting in this city, the filmmakers tell a unique story that, like the city itself, gestures towards the future possibilities of identity formations on both individual and societal scales.

Miami

Miami's perception in both academic and popular critique is that of an enigma. As Marvin Dunn notes in *Black Miami of the Twentieth Century*, while Miami was reputed "as the rising star of the Western Hemisphere" in the 1980s, it was also in the throes of occasionally violent racial tension amidst several notable moments of mass insurrection from the late 1960s through the mid-1990s, to the point that "the city was declared in the national press to be the most racially torn city in the [U.S.]" (1997, p. 245). In the wake of the earlier riots, in 1968, local police officials went so far as to compare them to "firefights in Vietnam" as quoted in a New York Times article (1968). Dunn

writes, “For those who lived through the decade of fire [the 1980s], the psychological scars have been deep” (1997, p. 246).

Despite this tension, there existed a concurrent wake of positive criticism seemingly or willfully ignorant of the racial animosities and disparities. In a 1994 speech, President Bill Clinton spoke of the “Spirit of Miami,” a call to look forward through international struggles with a friendly, cooperative flair reminiscent of Miami and the productive talks there during the Summit of the Americas. He went so far as to call the summit “a moment when the course of history in the Americas changed for the better,” (Goshko, 1994). Alongside the Miami which was rife with racial tensions existed a Miami being lauded the world over as a multicultural city of the future. Croucher addresses this, writing that:

> Never too far removed from the glitz and glitter of the ‘American Riviera’ are the burning buildings and the broken glass of a ‘Paradise Lost.’ The multitude of metaphors that have been used to characterize Miami facilitate little more than the understanding that Miami is a city not easily understood (1997, p. 1).

As noted extensively by Dunn, as well as other critics such as Portes and Stepnik, Rose, and Croucher, Miami experienced an oft-misunderstood political and social transformation in the second half of the twentieth century. At once praised for the assimilation of over a million (primarily white) Cuban immigrants, the city was simultaneously home to a steep decline in the quality of life of other minority populations, most notably the black American and Haitian communities. That is to say that Miami is a city divided, a reality which affirms Croucher’s thesis that Miami is “a city without true substance, a state of mind instead of a state of being” (1997, p. 2). Miami is a city thoroughly of the postmodern world—a city disjointed politically, geographically and ideologically.

Numerous critics have observed Miami’s paradoxical structure. As Aranda, Hughes and Sabogal claim:

> [Miami] has been envisioned by Latinos/as friendly to Spanish speakers and Latin American/Caribbean traditions, and also as a place where immigrants can “make it,” an idea propagated by the success stories of the first waves of Cuban immigrants. Yet, at the same time Miami houses complex social hierarchies that sort immigrants’ life chances unequally and reflect Miami’s bimodal economic structure, U.S. racial ideologies and geopolitical projections, and cultural norms transplanted from places of origin (2014, p. 4).

This view is bolstered by data from recent decades regarding the uneven educational

opportunities throughout Miami-Dade County. Dunn cites a plethora of statistics to illustrate the disparity in educational opportunities and outcomes for black Americans compared to the rest of the population in Miami. As he notes, many attempts at integration throughout the second half of the twentieth century became engrained in inequitable outcomes; busing for out-of-district students, a method used to circumvent the problem of housing segregation, became so segregated itself that in 1985, 19,000 of the 23,000 students being bused to school in Miami were black, while at the same time 94% of private school students were white (1997, pp. 234-236). This stands in stark contrast to the reality for the growing population of "Cuban exiles and their children [who]," as noted by Rose, "gained privileges in areas in which African Americans continued to face discrimination, particularly education" (2015, p. 217). Rose continues:

> The state legislature and Dade County School Board persistently sought ways to deny black children access to [primarily white] public schools while they willfully admitted exiled Cuban children (2015, p. 217).

Such educational differences continue on into the twenty-first century, as Johns Hopkins' Center for Social Organization of Schools has recorded (Greenlee, 2008). Dade County shows a greater number of "dropout factories" in primarily black sections with an overall dropout/transfer rate of 80% for black students. Similarly, Dade County School Board statistics from the 2005-2006 school year show a 67% graduation rate for white students and a 43% rate for black students (Dade County School Board, 2013). One of the direst examples of this comes from the primarily black area of Miami known as Liberty City, home to *Moonlight*'s main character, and home as well to Miami Northwest High School, which posted a retention rate (rate of first year secondary school students who graduated from that school) of only 36% in the same school year compared to rates well into the 80s and 90s for primarily white areas of the county.

Moonlight

Dunn's and Aranda et al.'s juxtapositions of these Miamis uncover the thread of at-odds views of Miami: both a cosmopolitan city of the twenty-first century and a city-in-progress, struggling to deal with the reality of unequal access to political and educational opportunity. These disparities in Miami's public education illustrate that the realities of everyday life in Miami are notably different for black populations compared to white populations. Simply, to live in Miami and be black is fundamentally different than to live in Miami and be white. While, Dunn indicates, the

world was focused primarily on the glitzy figuration of Miami, a new symbol of the Western Hemisphere, there were lives being lived in other parts of Miami that unveiled an entirely different reality. The reality of life in this other Miami during the span of the late 1990s and early 2000s is one of the primary focuses of *Moonlight*.

Both director Barry Jenkins and the original playwright Tarrel McCraney were brought up in social contexts similar to those portrayed in the film. *Moonlight* is rooted in the same reality depicted by Dunn and ignored by much of the world. Jenkins has been quoted in a number of interviews acknowledging the importance of the film's setting:

> The film's setting is crucial. It takes place during the war-on-drugs era because that was a key part of my childhood—I was poor and black and my mom was an addict ("Director Barry Jenkins...", 2017).

This is not only the personal history of Jenkins as well as McCraney, but also of the main character of the film, Chiron, who the audience watches in three distinct parts of his life, each approximately six years apart. The first two sections in particular, "Little" and "Chiron", paint a picture of what life was like in the underrepresented area of Miami that existed in the shadows of the global city down the street.

The filmmakers throughout illustrate the instability of Chiron's life. The first scene shows a young Chiron running away from a group of bigger boys, ducking into what we later learn to be a "crack house": where (typically) poorer people come to buy and consume drugs. Chiron locks himself in until the boys chasing him disappear, at which point Juan, an adult, breaks through the plywood-covered window and helps to calm the frightened boy. Chiron, though perhaps scared of Juan's demeanor—not dissimilar to those Chiron was running away from—accepts Juan's help silently and tentatively. In this brief opening sequence, we see Chiron as a scared and shy little boy, completely unlike the suave and masculine Juan who, as revealed later, is a drug dealer. This is in line with Dunn's analysis of the late twentieth-century reality for young black Miamians, who looked "to the drug dealer as the neighborhood role model and mentor" (1997, p. 338). It is at this point that the viewer learns the film will be crucially centered in the context of the War on Drugs, and the characters' lives will be intertwined with that social reality. This is made only clearer when, later on, we find out that Chiron's mother is addicted to crack-cocaine and, moreover, is supplied by the boy's new-found hero—Juan.

The film, however, refuses to rely upon stereotypes of Juan as a black drug dealer from Miami.

His character is portrayed from the first moments of the film as caring and respectful towards Chiron, departing from both Chiron's and the viewer's expectations. Juan even assumes a fatherly air around the young boy, who clearly cares for Juan, especially because Juan allows him to escape geographically from Liberty City and thereby leave behind the space he grew up in and has come to fear. In Liberty City, Chiron is faced with constant antagonism, both from peers at school and from his mother at home. Juan and his home become a place of refuge for Chiron, as indicated when Chiron unexpectedly shows up one day at Juan's home seeking comfort away from the difficulties of his life in Liberty City, including his tenuous relationship with his mother. Wordlessly, the next shot is of the two arriving at the beach: the sound of the tide roaring loudly indicates that they are a long way from where Chiron lives. While at the beach, Juan performs a sort of baptism of Chiron—literally teaching him how to swim, figuratively teaching him about masculinity and racial identity. This baptism illustrates the trust that Chiron places in Juan; even though Chiron does not know how to swim, he still agrees to let Juan protect and teach him in the rough waters. Juan actively cares for Chiron, whom he identifies as a fellow outsider. Chiron is an outsider because of his burgeoning queer sexuality; Juan is an outsider as a black Cuban in Miami. Chiron's anxiety is conveyed through the partial submersion of the camera, which, like Chiron himself, is barraged by the waves, imparting a sense of near-drowning. Such visual tumult is mitigated only by Juan's guidance and instruction, providing a steady hand to stand strong against the tide.

After such a frightful yet empowering experience, Juan delivers a brief monologue that is the film's first direct comment on racial identity. Juan says that there are a "lotta black folks in Cuba; wouldn't know that being here though." He is comparing his childhood as a boy in Cuba with his experience as an adult in the U.S., a place where white Cubans have been warmly accepted and integrated, while black Cubans are forgotten and seemingly erased. This reality is also affirmed by Dunn and others, who note that there has been an apparently smooth transition for white Cubans into Miami (aided by the help of the Border Patrol when found at sea). This is a stark contrast to the experiences of black Cubans and black people from other Caribbean countries such as Haiti, who were not considered welcome in South Florida (as evidenced by the fact that Border Patrol would deport them before reaching the U.S.). The assimilation of white Cubans is held up as the success story of multicultural Miami; invariably ignored are the experiences of black people living in the city, experiences shown by the filmmakers and substantiated by the disparity in educational

outcomes as discussed above.

The filmmakers also shot *Moonlight* so that the audience feels destabilized not only by the contrasts of the plot, as the instability of Chiron's life is shown through his inability to fit in at home and at school, but also by the cinematography and audio profile. Throughout the film, there are many shots in which the subject is in focus, but the rest of the shot is blurry, even sometimes shaking. When Chiron enters school, fearful of what torment he faces inside the doors, the school appears to be quaking around him. When he enters his home with the expectation of an inevitable disagreement with his mother—and, at times, outright abuse from her—the room appears to be shaking as well. This evokes a feeling of tense nervousness in the viewer, mirroring Chiron's own fears. As he walks around his neighborhood and city, the camera projects the outside world as a blur of discomfort and muted colors, sometimes to the point of being unrecognizable. These techniques render the film jarring for its audience, thereby communicating the instability of Chiron's living conditions. Furthermore, the filmmakers portray both homes where Chiron lives with his mother to be dark, and cavernous: not in their size, but in their appearance of being closed off from the rest of the world. These dark homes signal Chiron's fear and solitude, a far cry from the bright spaciousness and welcoming nature of Juan's home and later the home of Juan's girlfriend, Teresa, to say nothing of the welcoming openness of the beach. Such radical juxtaposition between these spaces again enhances the viewer's understanding of Chiron's childhood as saturated with disorienting, confusing environments and signals clearly his attempts to escape those spaces.

The same sense can be culled from the soundscape of the film. When walking around near his home in Liberty City, the sounds of dogs barking, people fighting, inaudible but aggressive conversations, and police sirens dominate the background audio, thereby invoking an additional stress-inducing companion to the out-of-focus cinematography. The viewer is thereby forced to be tense when Chiron is tense. The filmmakers illustrate that Chiron is more at ease, or escaping mentally from this world, when the sounds of the ocean take over the speakers, or when the sounds of his neighborhood are drowned out by the classically-inspired musical score. When Chiron is at ease, the viewer can be at ease.

The comparatively calming sounds of the tide crashing into the shore, or of water being drawn for a bath and lightly disturbed by the bather, indicate, too, a central motif of the film: water as a

source of renewal, rebirth, and catharsis. This is first experienced when Juan and Chiron visit the beach together and Juan teaches him to swim. Throughout the rest of the film, Chiron is seen to perform similar quasi-religious rites. In the film's first chapter, after a sexually charged moment at school makes Chiron visibly uncomfortable and confused, he goes home and draws himself a bath. Later in the film, there are several instances of Chiron filling a sink with ice and water and splashing it all over his face, each time taking care to look at himself in the mirror so that both he and the audience can see the changes he has undergone. This moment is particularly poignant after Chiron is made the victim of anti-gay violence at school. As he walks out, a bully, Terrel, commands Chiron's friend and recent (secret) lover, Kevin, to "Hit his fag ass." Afterwards, with blood and cuts all over his face, Chiron is framed close up, using the sink to wash his blood away, and to symbolize as well a transition from his childhood fear to his mature confidence. This ritual, now presented to the audience for a third time, signifies Chiron's attempts to cleanse himself. In the following scene, he walks into school aggressively, his gait more reminiscent of Juan's than his own. He silently puts his backpack down, and then hits Terrel over the head with a chair.

Chiron is shown, immediately after exacting his revenge on the bully, being arrested and forced into a police cruiser. The scene is given renewed meaning when compared to a discussion from after the original incident with Terrel, when a school administrator attempts to get Chiron to press charges. "If you don't press charges," she tells Chiron, "we can't stop this from happening." She continues, "if you were a man there'd be four other knuckleheads sitting right next to you," signaling from an authority figure that Chiron's reluctance to comply with the school's disciplinary system is a sign of cowardice. As this new iteration of masculinity is presented to him, which directly contrasts with his lessons from Juan, Chiron looks incredulous. The viewer, then, is forced to understand what Chiron already knows—the legal system, broadly conceived to include school administrators, is not there for *his* protection. Chiron was attacked at the command of a bully who had previously done the following: called Chiron a faggot; insulted Chiron's mother by suggesting he (Terrel) had had sexual contact with her; and made a snide comment in class about Chiron needing to change his tampon. The final of these occurred in front of a teacher, a supposed authority figure, who did little to stop the exchange.

With such confusing conceptions of manliness around him, it is all but natural for Chiron to be doubtful of what the school administrator was saying to him—the system had already failed him. In his world, in which he had been attacked by almost everybody in his life for being gay and

treated, often, as less than a person, what could this administrator know about what it means to be a man, or know how a man should handle such a problem? In his reality, to go into the school and take matters into his own hands is, for Chiron, an act of agency, a way of telling himself and those around him that he is indeed a person and that he will indeed stick up for himself even if others refuse to act on his behalf. A victim of verbal and physical violence within his local community (a community marginalized within the city of Miami), Chiron is further marginalized when he is unable to partake in the established legal realm, shown by his disdain for pressing charges at the school administrator's behest. In less formalized terms, he is unable to fit in, confide in and gain protection from his peers. Unprotected by both the law (as a black American) and his peers (as a queer black man), Chiron suffers a crisis in which he himself takes his protection into his own hands, and ends up being arrested for it. Mere hours after one of the few intimate moments of Chiron's life, when he shared a tender, meaningful sexual exchange with Kevin, that same person betrayed him. Chiron is marginalized from even the margins, and feels it necessary to take matters of protection into his own hands in a jarring moment that rejects the logic of his school's administrator.

To refer to Portes and Stepnik, these kinds of marginalizations within the black community are historical hallmarks of racial identity in Miami, as factions within black populations have divided themselves. As they write:

> A tangle of conflicting and often contradictory perceptions, attitudes, and interactions yielded a confusing scene where racial solidarity alternated with class and ethnic factionalism as well as economic competition…[that contributed to] a growing process of differentiation in the black population of Miami (1993, p. 178).

As evidence, Portes and Stepnik refer to the riots of Miami in the 1980s, claiming that, though the riots themselves were inspired by poor black communities from places like Liberty City, the political establishment of Miami preferred to convene with middle class and wealthy black community leaders who, at first, resisted those very acts of insurrection. Similarly, other lines have been drawn within the black community, such that queer black individuals like Chiron are thoroughly excluded from the mainstream black community and doubly excluded from society at large. This indicates not a monolithic community of black Americans in Miami, which is perhaps the assumption of those outside black populations, but rather one that is schismatic, as portrayed by the violence against Chiron during the film.

Moonlight is rife with symbolism that illustrates the sectarian nature of the black community of Miami and highlights the difficulties of growing up poor and black in Miami at that time. It goes on to show how growing up in this context can lead to social and political marginalization, as well as alternative forms of migration that include more than the global migration which Miami became known for at the same time. In particular, the film takes as its subject various forms of migration: most notably, the migration of people from school to prison and from prison back to society, and the movement of marginalized people to further margins. Chiron's story intersects with these issues when, seeking retribution for hateful violence against him in the method that presented itself to him, he is sent to prison for an indeterminate amount of time, after which we join him in the film's third chapter.

Such racial and class-driven disparities call into question Miami's burgeoning role as a global city. Taking into account both the spirit of cosmopolitanism that Clinton praised and the less "glitzy" underbelly geographically associated with places like Liberty City, what is Miami's role as a player on both the American and global geopolitical stages? Will Miami be a melting pot that illustrates that countries are capable of assimilating foreign immigrants in the era of globalization and massive migratory movements, or rather the scene of some of the most atrocious racial disparities in a country replete with racial-atrocities?

Amidst a city with so confusing an identity as Miami, *Moonlight* asks the audience to contemplate what other kinds of split personalities are better viewed, in line with Croucher's work, as splintered, postmodern-influenced identifiers as opposed to clear-cut, black and white truths. As Croucher writes:

> Use of the categories "black," "Cuban," "Jewish," and "Anglo," assumes the existence of easily identifiable groups with shared interests and fails to recognize that the labels themselves mask a variety of distinct social identities that crosscut and overlap ethnicity (1997, p. 159).

The film does well to juxtapose competing conceptions of identity—Miami both as the drug-stricken city that Chiron grew up in, and the coastal Miami that Chiron comes to identify as a place of acceptance and rebirth. At the same time, Chiron is continuously confronted with competing conceptions of what it means to be black, male and queer by confounding the expectations of each of those adjectives.

In her paper "Doing *Fake* Masculinity, Being *Real* Men", Ford establishes a sort of baseline for

the black male identity that Chiron appears to be grappling with. By interviewing a number of black, male subjects, she extrapolates some of the apparently definitive traits that they use to define black masculinity. She claims that:

> …doing black masculinity is personified in a dark-skinned, athletic, intimidating figure who achieves and maintains status and peer approval through money, material possessions, attention from women, and tales of heterosexual encounters (2011, p. 44).

Ford suggests this persona is often achieved via a "thuggish demeanor" (2011, p. 44), and that, accurate or not on a larger scale, this portrayal is the reality proffered by black men in her study. As such, it is useful to consider for a moment how this plays out in the film.

In many ways, Juan emulates these traits. He asserts authority over those that work beneath him in the drug trade. He walks with temerity compared to Chiron's bashfulness, and undeniably lives his life with heteronormative assumptions, as he exhibits via subtle suggestions throughout the film. However, when Chiron as a young child confronts Juan with questions about sexuality in the wake of being seen differently by peers and even his mother, Juan does not follow through with the expectations set out by Ford. Though originally taken aback by Chiron's question about being gay, Juan does not respond negatively, though he shares a silent, telling glance with his girlfriend. Rather, he defends Chiron's burgeoning queer identity and tells him not only is it acceptable to be gay, but that it has no bearing on Chiron's status as a man. A man, to Juan, is not, therefore, someone who is exactly like him, nor the "thug" stereotype illustrated by Ford. Rather, it is someone who demands respect. In Juan's words: "You could be gay but you can't let anybody call you no faggot." This sets a clear distinction between identifying as queer, which Juan defends, and allowing people to oppress you because of your character, which Juan tells Chiron is unacceptable. Juan thereby confounds the viewer's assumptions by supporting Chiron, but at the same time frames his support from a perspective of reductive heteronormativity. Being a man is not about being strong and straight to Juan, but about unapologetically being and standing up for oneself. However, that Juan does not fully understand the systemic nature of Chiron's oppression is evident in the fact that following this advice leads to Chiron's arrest and jailing.

The film here comes into conversation with historical representations of black men over the past century, as in Andrew Leiter's figuration. Here, we see Chiron acting as the U.S. imagination largely expects him to act—remorselessly and illegally violent. This is reminiscent of Leiter's "black beast" image, a trope "developed slowly out of slavery and crystallized in white minds over

the last decade of the nineteenth century" (2010, p. 3). Though Leiter's work concerns media produced closer to the beginning of the twentieth century, it is applicable here, as he acknowledges, inasmuch as this image has been subverted in order to challenge racist assumptions about black Americans that have persisted beyond the supposed fall of Jim Crow. In many ways, the violent manner in which Chiron seeks to defend himself calls attention to the fact that, though the formalized legal framework of Jim Crow has disappeared, it has not been replaced by a framework that adequately defends the rights of black American populations, and forces black populations to often take matters into their own hands. This is exemplified by Chiron circumventing legal recourse in favor of personal violence against a bully, and harkens back to similar situations wherein black populations have forgone established institutional frameworks in favor of personal or community-led action.

For instance, organizations like Black Lives Matter (BLM) have sought alternative routes to change the law in the lineage of activists such as Martin Luther King, Jr., whose role as quasi-advisor to presidents in the 1960s helped to bring about the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and whose death brought about the Civil Rights Act of 1968. It was only after nearly a decade of democratic demonstration in U.S. public spaces that King was able to garner such a role though. BLM has likewise favored taking to the streets to voice their political aspirations, and used other extra-institutional methods, in stark opposition to police and to the chagrin of swaths of white American populations who see groups like BLM as antithetical to their vision of the U.S., a vision steeped in a revised history that cherishes piecemeal parliamentary action and political niceties. King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" affirms this point: "We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed…For years now I have heard the word 'Wait!' It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This 'Wait' has almost always meant 'Never.'" It is important here to note several points: (1) the legislative success of King's movement for civil rights was the direct outcome of years of extra-institutional organizing; (2) the changes brought about by those pieces of legislation did not lead to the widespread black liberation they were meant to; and (3) racial disparity in the U.S. persists to this day. These points are confirmed by the very existence of the BLM movement, as black Americans are forced time and again to mobilize themselves in lieu of being able to exercise traditional political power and without the protection of the state.

Chiron's story is a case in point of national issues, and *Moonlight* asks viewers to consider for themselves the status of race relations in the U.S., as it tells the story of a boy (and then a man) who is unable to rely on institutionalized frameworks for protection. This detail is also crucial when considering the lack of political representation available to Chiron. As a child, Chiron had little support from the people who are supposed to raise him and be his community, with the sole exceptions of Juan and his close friend Kevin. As an adult, Chiron is forced to navigate political and social realities in a similar manner, attempting to navigate a harsh, racist world on his own as an ex-convict (a third marginalizing factor in his identity), in a manner not unlike the social movements described above. Chiron, seeing injustice right in front of him, is forced to take matters into his own hands throughout the film and claim justice for himself, which mirrors the mobilization of BLM in the wake of a series of murders of black Americans at the hands of U.S. police since 2013. While Juan endeavours to show Chiron a Miami in which one is able to create themselves, even those marginalised from the margins, like Juan himself, Chiron still sees a city and a state that does not seem to want him.

In the wake of his arrest, incarceration and movement back into society, it can be assumed that Chiron was subject to an issue which has come to the fore recently in Florida—the denial of former convicts the right to vote in elections. Though this reality is not brought up in the film, it figures in that Chiron was more likely than not denied the right to vote because of a retaliatory mistake he made as a child, effectively silencing the political voice of someone who is most in need of political support. Had Chiron come from a more inclusive or entitled context, or had he simply gone to one of Miami-Dade's more successful schools, such attacks on his masculinity and sexuality would have been less likely, and his punishment would perhaps have been handled within the confines of the school and not the law, had the situation arisen at all. According to the Sentencing Project, there are currently six million Americans barred from voting because of a felony conviction, more than half of whom have completed their sentences entirely—including parole and probation (2016). One can look at the extreme case of Florida, in which more than one fifth of black Floridians are unable to vote, either due to explicit, institutionalized disenfranchisement or the many cases in which it is unnecessarily extended due to poor intra-governmental communication or laborious difficulty in the reinstitution process. As such, there is a large number of Americans who are not represented politically, including Chiron. If Chiron's violent outburst against Terrel is figured as a method of self-protection due to a lack of protection by other agents, then his ensuing

disenfranchisement only serves to further marginalize him from institutional protection and representation.

The lessons learned from Juan during the beginning of the film, and affirmed by Kevin in the middle and final chapters, are not merely encouraging Chiron to express himself in alternative ways. Chiron also views these lessons as permission: that no matter what you hear from other individuals, or from society at large, and no matter the myriad ways in which you are silenced by the context in which you exist, to exist itself is a radical act. At the end of the film, Kevin asks, "Who is you?" to which Chiron replies, after hesitating, "I'm me. I ain't trynna be nothing else." He had already confounded Kevin's expectation of who he would be several years after last they saw each other. Chiron, considering Kevin's question after years of questioning himself, has settled on an answer at last. Kevin, as evidenced by the non-gendered question "Who you doing?" in reference to Chiron's romantic involvements, had not expected the oldest version of Chiron we see in the film to be a re-creation of Juan (hyper-masculine, drug dealer), but rather the same quiet, queer boy he remembers. But Chiron does not shy away from himself—he embraces both his new self as a self-proclaimed "trapper" as well as his queer self, confounding Kevin's expectations of what it means to be a "thug," to return to Ford's language, and what it means to be queer by simply being both of those things.

When the two men ride in the car together, the audience hears a song called "Classic Man" blaring over the stereo. At first, it seems that the song symbolizes Chiron's denial of his queerness and the thick, tough exterior he has put on as a façade. This is transformed when Kevin asks Chiron a sensitive question about his sexuality. Chiron replies by turning the music louder as the chorus comes on, seeming to answer Kevin's question by proxy, telling Kevin "I'm a classic man," shirking assumptions about who he should be and updating the notion of what a classic man is. Moments later, Kevin and Chiron lay together in the same position they did years earlier, after their first sexual exchange in Kevin's apartment by the water, as Chiron drifts to sleep with the din of the crashing surf in the background, combined with a soft classical melody. These sounds combine to remind the viewer of earlier times in Chiron's life when he felt at ease. The final shot is the dream of the twenty-something Chiron: the young Chiron of the first chapter standing on the beach, his hideaway, presumably the day he first went with Juan. This last moment suggests a future of acceptance and inclusion for Chiron, who has finally made it back spiritually to the same shores at which he was baptized by Juan and Kevin in different ways, and left behind the obscure

dreams of his past. Chiron is once again taken in by Kevin in the third chapter, and he is finally able to stay in the part of Miami that was never meant for him: the Miami of radical identity formation, reformation and transformation, where water (the site of each of these agency-defining moments) is the primary interlocutor. At all of these distinct moments, the sound of the waves inveterately crashing blares.

Conclusion

Croucher acknowledges both Miamis in her work on the city—in short, white Miami and black Miami. But her main thrust suggests that this division is not indicative of an order that is set in stone, but rather subject to constant revision. As she posits:

> Ethnic groups in modern settings are constantly recreating themselves, and ethnicity is continuously being reinvented in response to changing realities both within the group and the host society (1997, p. 15).

Moonlight is indicative of a changing social and ethnic reality. Little attention has been paid to films with only black actors, especially stories of queer black people; this one not only received popular notice and critical acclaim, but even won the most prestigious awards in the film industry. The context of Chiron's youth has been transformed, and reform has been called for and approved, as voters in the state of Florida elected in 2018 to reinstate the voting rights of former felons *en masse*. While this suggests a changing tide, racial disparities persist. After all, despite *Moonlight*'s great success, perhaps the most famous image associated with the film is the mistake at the Academy Awards, in which *Best Picture* was incorrectly awarded, at first, to *La La Land* (Berman, 2017). Even in this triumphal moment for the film, it was symbolically outshined by a film which affirms the domination of white Hollywood—a domination further consolidated by the creators of *Moonlight* being sequestered during their time to speak. Furthermore, despite the referendum on felon voting rights being approved by the public, conservative politicians in Florida have resisted such legal development, effectively quashing the will of the statewide electorate in favor of the racially-exclusionary status quo (Mazzei, 2019; Bazelon, 2018).

In line with Croucher, though, this film indicates that the relationship between Miami and the black people that live there has changed in the decades even since Croucher wrote her book, and that, with this reformation, the city has been remade as well, from a city awash in racial tensions and disparity to a city in which Chiron is able to feel at home in a neighborhood that was once not

for him. Chiron has taken it upon himself to stake his claim, so to speak, taking agency in his own life and reforming the opinions of those around him. The film gives voice to an often-marginalized identity and enables Chiron to form and reform his own identity in a way that is newly possible in a city known the world over as a bastion of equality and identity-making. Perhaps, finally, the Miami that President Clinton and others noted for its inclusivity, and for its model as a city of the future, is accessible to those who have been perennially excluded because of their class, education, sexual orientation or race. Perhaps, finally, the city associated with an ability to seal one's own fate will finally extend that same right to natives and immigrants alike, no matter which neighborhood or country they grew up in. Though this reality is likely still decades in the future, *Moonlight,* much like the city itself, allows us to imagine both the Miami of the past, in all its complexity, disparity and racial tensions, as well as the Miami of the future, and the possibility therein for all the people who live there. *Moonlight* is both reflective of the Miamian context, while also having an impact on Miami's reality.

The sociopolitical tide in Miami is, without question, retreating from the reality described by Dunn, Portes and Stepnik and others. Though there are certainly still disparities in class, sexual orientation and race, strides in the right direction illustrate that *Moonlight* is reflective of Miami's past, present, and, potentially, future. Miami, too, is reflective of *Moonlight*. Croucher notes that every context is changed even by portrayals of that context (1993, p. 14). *Moonlight* can help the audience not only identify scarcely told stories of Miami's past and judge for themselves the reality of Miami in the present, but also to get a sense of what Miami might become should the characters of the film not be the exception but the norm. By allowing people to shirk expectations of what they are supposed to be, perhaps in a Miami of the future Chiron would not have to try to live up to the expectations put forth by Ford, and perhaps it would not be extraneous of Juan to break free of those expectations. Similarly, perhaps it would become the norm in Miami, and the world over, that people could choose their lives for themselves outside of the constraints of class, race, sexual orientation or any other such identifiers.

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Book Review – *Cormac McCarthy's Violent Destinies: The Poetics of Determinism and Fatalism*, Edited by Brad Bannon and John Vanderheide.

Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2017, 349 pp., £62.50.

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Previous essay collections concerning popular American writer Cormac McCarthy have often been organised around a more generalist approach to his work, encompassing essays on important topics such as religion, philosophy and style. However, as academic scholarship on McCarthy gained traction into the twenty-first century, more specific collections began to emerge, including Julian Murphet and Mark Steven's *Styles of Extinction* (2012), which was solely focused on McCarthy's Pulitzer-prize winning novel, *The Road* (2006). The subject of this review, *Cormac McCarthy's Violent Destinies: The Poetics of Determinism and Fatalism* (2017), further charts new territory in the currently thriving field of McCarthy Studies, offering the first dedicated collection of essays on the issues of determinism and fatalism in McCarthy's fiction.

Following a lively foreword from long-established McCarthy scholar Rick Wallach, co-editors Brad Bannon and John Vanderheide (2017) stress the thematic importance of determinism and fatalism in their introduction. Determinism and fatalism constitute a subfield in McCarthy Studies: their presence is always felt in critical readings of the texts, even when it is more implicit than explicit. The editors then provide useful definitions of these themes. Determinism advocates that all events are necessary, that free will is ultimately an illusion. On the other hand, fatalism is described as "the notion that certain events have been determined and will come to pass one way or another" (2017, p. 5). The subject matter of this collection may be specific, but these broad definitions give the contributing writers much to work with.

The first essay does well to engage the collection's preoccupations with aesthetic movements, particularly given literary naturalism's long debated associations with determinism, (more so than fatalism, as we learned from Zola's founding text on naturalism, *Le Roman Experimental* (1893))

and chance. In his reading of the first novel of The Border Trilogy, *All the Pretty Horses* (1992), James R. Giles establishes novel connections between naturalism, romanticism, and the American West, coining the term "Romantic Naturalism." Naturalism is a useful, and indeed under-examined, lens in which to view McCarthy. Giles's consideration of the strength in McCarthy's blended and hybrid forms speaks to both naturalism's adaptive influence, as well as the effect of McCarthy's diverse range of influences. Furthermore, Giles's examination of the character Alfonsa in *All the Pretty Horses* (1992) as a "naturalistic agent" who reinforces the patriarchal order to which she has been subject provides a welcome engagement with McCarthy's often overlooked yet evidently complex female characters. Later in the collection, contributing editor Vanderheide also and notably deals with issues of gender in a nuanced, intersectional approach to the issue of fate in *Suttree* (1979).

McCarthy's violent landscapes, and the diabolical figures that occupy them, unavoidably raise questions of ethics. The collection broadly engages the texts with many philosophical heavyweights (Nietzsche, Heidegger, Spinoza, to name but a few) in order to traverse these questions in conjunction with determinism and fatalism. Chapter Two is no exception, as Woods Nash situates *Child of God* (1973) in relation to John Locke, arguing that the central character, Lester Ballard, lives not within the Lockean social contract, but "the apolitical or prepolitical condition of human beings" (2017, p. 43): the state of nature. Ballard is far from the sole practitioner of violence in this novel, and Nash illuminates these complexities by assessing the distinctions between "lawful" and extralegal forms of violence, in a world where Locke's Christian God is nowhere to be found.

Nash admits that he does not extend his reading to Jay Ellis's level of victimization when considering Ballard, but his essay nevertheless prompts us to reflect on notions of identification with this grotesque figure. A later essay in Chapter 5 undertakes an argument that could, at least from its description, be thought to uphold a potentially sympathetic view of violent characters. In this Chapter, Adrian Mioc claims that two of McCarthy's most memorable antagonists, Judge Holden of *Blood Meridian* (1985) and Anton Chigurh of *No Country for Old Men* (2005), can be viewed as ethical. In contrast to Nash's essay, which situates Ballard in relation to overwhelming social forces of determinism, Mioc examines Holden beyond "duration," a being with no stable identity and, therefore, one who exists outside of any clear-cut notion of morality. Meanwhile, Chigurh aligns his actions with determinism: his lack of free will absolves him of moral

responsibility. Chigurh is described as "a man of his word" (2017, p. 133), whose Spinozian commitment to the causal chain of events culminates in "teachable" moments for his victims, such as Wells and Carla Jean. Any observant reader of *No Country for Old Men* (2005) would be careful to avoid taking Chigurh's self-aggrandizing philosophy at face value.

Whilst Mioc's essay raises questions about the notion of freedom in its relation to the embodied self or a higher good that Nietzsche would refer to as "essence," in Chapter 3, Denis L. Sansom claims that, in opposition to libertarian ideals, moral agency always acts in tension with the material world. In this essay, Sansom finds teachers not in Chigurh or Holden, but in the various instructive figures who appear throughout the course of the Border Trilogy. Sansom makes an important distinction here: McCarthy's Teachers offer *interpretations* of reality, rather than descriptions of it. Thus, we can gain several insights on humanity from the Border Trilogy, many of which return to the tensions inherent within McCarthy's body of work: between good and evil and between determinism and destiny, but these "cannot give a plausible explanation of the full human experience" (2017, p. 86).

The emerging tension between a higher order (divine or otherwise) and the material world marks a consistent thread throughout *Violent Destinies*. Chapter 4 sees Rasmus R. Simonsen trace a challenging philosophical path centred around the interconnections between objectivity and subjectivity in *The Road* (2006). This essay can be placed alongside the work of scholars such as Raymond Malewitz, adding to existent discussion on objects and their use in the McCarthy oeuvre, as well as their relation to American identity, modernity, and nation-building. Simonsen is interested in how an object loses its previously established conformity in a post-apocalyptic world where batteries become acid goo and where the last remaining can of Coca-Cola loses its meaning as a potent symbol of capitalist consumer desire. What becomes of American gun culture after the social world has ended? The revolver *demands* the man's engagement—out of desperation rather than desire—as he attempts to fight for his and, more importantly, his son's survival. Thus, the man and the boy's interactions with objects throughout the novel affects the "narratological reality," further complicating the pair's sense of agency in this highly circumscribed universe.

Despite Simonsen's intervention, *Violent Destinies* is, as a whole, more generously weighted to McCarthy's earlier works. Of course, the Southern Gothic affiliated violence and depravity of *Child of God* (1973) or *Outer Dark* (1968) is markedly thought provoking in the affect of its prose, and *Blood Meridian* (1985) (which is focused on in four out of the eleven essays) has long been

perceived as McCarthy's most accomplished work. Nonetheless, further attention to *The Road (*which is read widely across third-level contemporary fiction courses, and was recently introduced to high-school programmes across the U.S.), as well as inclusion of other later works that transcend the genre of the novel such as *The Sunset Limited* (2006) or *The Counselor* (2013), would have been very welcome in this contemporary volume. There is much to be said about determinism and fatalism in McCarthy's post-9/11, late-capitalist fictional worlds. Many scholars have read these later works as progressively complex with regard to the issue of free will, particularly given McCarthy's own evolving personal, philosophical, and scientific sensibilities.[1]

This quibble aside, this is a comprehensive, astute collection of essays that adds challenging new ground to the field of McCarthy Studies. These writings thoughtfully uncover and evaluate tensions in McCarthy's body of fiction. The crises of this fiction, be they existential, social, or universal, defy resolution. Nonetheless, as is evidenced here, further enquiry into understanding these texts continues to offer potential to the areas of literary criticism and theory, as well as to interdisciplinary readings that incorporate fields as diverse as ecology, theology, science, linguistics, psychology, and, of course, philosophy. With an evidently broad range of influences, it is no surprise that McCarthy's fiction continues to invite scholarly interest, particularly given the increasingly uncertain times in which we live.

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1. See Jane Elliott's (2013) work on Suffering Agency. This new paradigm, which Elliott traces across several works of contemporary (American) aesthetics, explores the ways in which subjects such as the man in *The Road* are 'suffering agents'—those who must make choices that are both "imposed and appalling" (p. 84). Presented with options such as self-amputation or cannibalism in order to avoid death, every choice is agonised; every outcome is undesirable. In my own research, I map this theoretical framework onto the resurgence of naturalism in twenty-first-century American fiction.

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Book Review – *The Discourse of Environmental Collapse: Imagining The End*, Edited by Alison E. Vogellar, Brack W. Hale and Alexandra Peat.

London: Routledge, 2018. 201 pp. £81.26

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The Discourse of Environmental Collapse: Imagining The End calls for urgency in discussion as well as action. The book under review effectively captures this immediacy in tone and spirit and dwells upon the various facets of collapse related to, or emerging from, climate change. At the very outset, in the introduction to this interesting collection of essays, the editors proclaim that this volume "explores . . . our current moment of crisis as an age of collapse" (p. 1). The collected essays aim to discuss patterns of collapse and the visibility of collapse in contemporary media narratives, an objective in which they are mostly successful. The book draws discourses on collapse from different disciplines, time zones, and points of view to establish an interconnected understanding of imagining the end.

The book is divided into three parts: "Doc Collapse", "Pop Collapse" and "Craft Collapse". The first part of the book primarily documents as well as highlights the measurability of climate change occurrences. The second part dwells upon the communication of environmental collapse in mainstream popular media. The third part focuses on creative interpretation, framing and crafting of the collapse narrative. The first part comprises of four chapters and the second and third parts comprise of three chapters each.

The first chapter, titled "Culture and collapse", is written by Michael Egan and focuses on slow disasters and the Anthropocene. It explores, in detail, the connection between Voltaire and Rousseau's debate between good and evil, and neoliberalism, increasingly visible natural disasters and the onset of contemporary collapse narratives. In the process, Egan points out that catastrophe is inevitable, continuous and permanent.

While Egan observes the inevitability of collapse, the second chapter, by Jesse Peterson, titled "Are dead zones dead?", focuses on the "collapsed and collapsing" (p. 33), specifically within human-water relationships. Peterson points out the tendency to specify dead zones by human consumption rates and not 'life' at sea. He also discusses collapse as a "timed" event that is precipitated by climate change and geoengineering. This chapter introduces the reader to the concept of human-water relations and the tendency to hyphenate a vital resource such as water with the Anthropocene.

The third chapter, by Joanna Nurmis, is titled "Can photojournalism steer clear of the siren song of collapse?", and deals with photography as it is used to communicate climate issues and its significance in the climate change narrative. While the earlier chapters discuss the continuity of collapse and the precipitation of such collapse in contemporary times, documenting climate change and the resultant collapse is Nurmis' central concern. Considering the reach of photography to the general public and the impact it can thus create, this chapter is timely, particularly due to its discussion of the changing impact of climate photography since 2006 to date. The only omission this chapter can potentially be accused of is the non-inclusion of even one actual photograph in it.

The omission of graphic images or photographs in the third chapter is somewhat compensated by Ann Gardiner in the fourth chapter by the many graphic pages extracted from Philippe Squarzoni's (2012) graphic comic Climate Changed: A Personal Journey Through Science. Titled "Environmental collapse in comics", Gardiner extends the discourse on graphic representations and documentations of collapse by focusing on the French comic writer's documentary comic about climate change. Gardiner also takes into account Squarzoni's use of unusual narrative tools, such as data visualization, in his portrayal of the issue of climate change. The chapter discusses in detail the clever, evidence-based narrative strategies adopted by Squarzoni in his comic art to bring home the point of environmental deterioration. It specifically focuses on the construction of a meta-narrative with respect to climate change in Squarzoni's comic art.

Part II of the book, titled "Pop Collapse", begins with a discussion of the avalanche of apocalyptical environmental imaginings in pop culture, a phenomenon quite aptly termed "collapse porn" (p. 91). The discourse on graphic content on climate change and collapse continues with Guy D. Middleton's essay, "This is the end of the world as we know it: narratives of collapse and transformation in archaeology and popular culture". In terms of both content and sheer

readability, this is undoubtedly one of the book's best chapters. The author analyses a range of images of the end of the world from magazines spread over a hundred years and several continents. The central focus of the article is on the "narratives generated by archeology" (p. 108). Middleton, through the example of popular documentaries from BBC and History Channel, aptly summarizes the mainstream tendency to dramatize collapse narratives based on interpretations rather than facts, and the pitfalls of such practices.

While Middleton furthers his argument with a thorough discussion on archaeology and popular culture, Chapter 6 from Part II, Jen England's "Survive, thrive, or perish", switches focus to contemporary engagement with end times in video games, suggesting that this medium may be a valuable way to address narratives of collapse. Popular video games Wasteland and Fallout are analysed as simulations which might prepare one for different forms of collapse in the real world. England argues that "envirotechnical disasters" (p. 120), i.e., environmental disasters caused and/or aggravated by technical failures, may add to both environmental and social collapses and that the growingly popular world of video games can be used as a medium to enhance awareness about the need to work against the possibilities of collapse.

If awareness and consequent preparedness do not bring the desired result, then there must be a plan to escape. "Zooming out, closing in", the seventh chapter of the book, written by Alison E. Vogelaar and Brack W. Hale, focuses on the scope of escape from collapse. The central point of discussion in this chapter is the concept of "spaceship ecology," which is based on collapse-oriented escape. With the help of two popular Hollywood movies, Gravity and The Martian, the authors underline the possibilities and limitations of spaceship ecology. A particularly salient discussion on the now well-known Biosphere 2 experiment enriches the argument further.

The discourse established around the various forms and manifestations of collapse in Part I and II of the book is summarised in the beginning of Part III. This discourse is then furthered in I. J. MacRae's chapter, "Imagining the apocalypse", which engages with the representation of ecological collapse through a comparative analysis of photography, art and literature. MacRae investigates the photographs of Edward Burtynsky, the art of Andy Goldsworthy and Cormac McCarthy's (2006) novel, The Road, to find a trope for the generic perceptions of collapse in human and non-human interactions. He further dwells on the finality of apocalyptic narratives and the need to find ways out of such scenarios for humanity. The author concludes that a thorough

comprehension of the finality of ecological disasters should ultimately lead humanity to find "new, strange paths" (p. 156) that lie beyond such possibilities of collapse.

Matthew Griffiths' essay, "Something akin to what's killing bees", is the second chapter in the third part of the book. This chapter discusses collapse narratives through the unusual bee poetry tradition (p. 166). One of the key points of discussion in this chapter is the human interventions in the collapse experienced by bee colonies, and the parallels that can be drawn to the potentially largescale collapse of modern human society.

The last chapter of the book is written by Alexandra Peat and is titled "Salvaging the Fragments". Peat takes up the metaphor of the shipwreck and, drawing from Virginia Woolf's fascination with the same, discusses in detail Emily St. John Mandel's 2014 novel Station Eleven. Peat opines that, while collapse is likely taken seriously, as is evident from the visibility it now increasingly receives in the works of literature, Mandel's Station Eleven drifts away from that seriousness: instead of portraying environmental collapse as apocalyptic, it hinges on the hope of a new world that is "just out of sight" (p. 191). Peat further concludes that it is probably only in a fragmented and flawed narrative as that of Station Eleven's that collapse can both be imagined and dealt with.

Overall, The Discourse of Environmental Collapse makes a compelling read while never letting the reader forget the grimness of the issue of environmental collapse. Barring a few chapters that falter in terms of readability, especially Peterson's "Are dead zones dead?", which was difficult to follow owing to a roundabout style, this book is a well-intentioned addition to the discourse of environmental collapse and regeneration. It is enriched by interdisciplinary comprehensions and perspectives on environmental collapse, contemporary discussions on human-nonhuman interactions, and policy making and awareness measures to deal with apocalyptic possibilities. Hence, this book can appeal to a vast audience ranging from scholars, researchers, and policy makers to a more general reader.

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Book Review – *Why Representation Matters: The Meaning of Ethnic Quotas in Rural India,* by Simon Chauchard.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. 292 pp. £67.99.

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Despite being one of the most logical and essential policies in a welfare state, positive discrimination resiliently remains a matter of passionate debate in popular discourse. Sometimes, it is witnessed, the waves of this popular discourse actually carry into legal domains. Two recent policies in India bear testimony to this phenomenon. The Maharashtra legislature granted a reservation1 for Marathas, an erstwhile culturally and economically dominant caste community, in state educational institutions and government jobs. On the other hand, the union government introduced a 10% reservation for a new category, termed the Economically Weaker Section (EWS), in central educational institutions and government jobs. The EWS category has been defined as those not belonging to the already reserved categories of Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST) or Other Backward Classes (OBC) and whose annual family income is below eight lakhs. Vehemently criticised by academics, activists, lawyers and other intellectuals, these policies have been introduced against the backdrop of numerous studies and even government censuses and family surveys that clearly demarcate differential socio-economic status of historically marginalised groups of SC, ST and OBC. In this context, Chauchard's book brings a unique perspective to the literature on reservations by exploring the nuances of the psychological effects of reservation policies.

An output of his PhD study, Chauchard's book argues that reservations have a positive impact

[1] The term 'reservation' implies a quota of seats being set aside, 'reserved,' for the mentioned category in educational or political institutions or in job appointments in the specified institutions or in representation in any specified domain. It is common parlance in Indian legal and everyday communication. Refer to pages 8, 122, 131, 132, 141, 142, 200, 201, 202 and 204 of Indian Constitution.

on the psychology of intergroup relations, thereby improving the nature of day-to-day interpersonal relations. Chauchard's study, incorporating a combination of focus groups, observation methods, informal interviews and two Large-N surveys, was conducted in 2009 in the Indian state of Rajasthan, focusing on male village-level council presidents or sarpanches belonging to the SC category. Through his qualitative data, Chauchard theorises that reservation policies can positively impact interactions between disadvantaged groups benefitting from the policies and the dominant groups around them through two mechanisms. Chauchard defines one of these as the 'strategy mechanism,' developed through perceived social and/or legal norms of intergroup interactions. That is, if the dominant groups perceive that they can get away with discriminatory behaviours, they will continue to do so, but will refrain from doing so if they believe the socio-legal environment is stringent. He defines the second one as the 'taste mechanism,' consisting of deeply rooted beliefs or stereotypes. A positive change through this mechanism implies building an actual appreciation for members of reserved groups.

Testing his theory through the two surveys—one each with members of SC and dominant castes—Chauchard reveals that reservations activate strategy mechanism(s) rather than taste mechanism(s). Stereotypes, self-stereotypes and prejudice remain negative when dominant groups tend to perceive that hostile behaviours towards SCs can attract legal sanction. Chauchard, however, argues that even the limited changes triggered through strategy mechanism meaningfully impact everyday intergroup behaviours. Dominant groups of villages having experienced reservation are less hostile than those of villages not having experienced reservation. Similarly, SC members from the villages having witnessed reservation are more assertive and less deferential than their counterparts in villages not having experienced reservation.

Chauchard's book is organised into nine chapters. The first two chapters introduce his study and give an extensive literature review, the next two give insights and theory from his qualitative research and the following four describe his quantitative methods and their findings. The last chapter examines the validity of his findings and their implications for institutional reforms.

Chauchard's book unveils important terminology that can be employed in the conceptualisation of psycho-social dynamics of intergroup perceptions. However, his research enquiry does not arise from a strong contextual foundation. Caste, as a reality, exists in the form of a social hierarchy deeply entrenched through centuries of axiological, religious, lingual, economic and knowledge

domination systems. As noted by Guru (2009, p. 16), “humiliation is not so much a physical or corporeal injury; in fact, it is more a mental/ psychological injury that leaves a permanent scar on the heart.” Changes in these systems happen gradually through cultural activism, concerted political dissent and forces of diffusion brought in through urbanisation, globalisation and economic democratisation. Social policy is a combined reflection of the founding ethos of the nation-state—liberty, equality and fraternity, in India’s case—and the composition of ruling regimes. India currently favours upper caste Hindus due to the ideological inclination of its ruling party which implemented the EWS and Maratha reservations. The dominant psycho-social dynamics are, therefore, shaping the reservation policy rather than the other way around. This contextual reality contradicts the logic of measuring psychological impact of reservation policies. Consequently, even the finding that reservations trigger only strategy mechanism(s) and not taste mechanism(s) is not revelatory.

In his literature review, a very commendable effort, while Chauchard discusses empirical studies such as Chattopadhya and Duflo at length, he mentions theoretical and commentative works such as those of Ambedkar, Phule and Guru only in passing. A deeper engagement with these works would have enabled Chauchard to frame his query more sharply. Secondly, Chauchard’s study suffers a major drawback in terms of respondent demography. Even while he clearly states logistical difficulties as a cause, the exclusion of female respondents cannot be ignored while evaluating findings of his study. As is widely acknowledged, gender and caste combine to produce deepened levels of discrimination. Hence, by not including the voice of this doubly discriminated sub-community, Chauchard’s findings suffer from a demographic and thereby socio-cultural bias. Lastly, the attempt to measure the redistributive effect of the reservations does not seem to align with the psychological focus of the study. In chapter four, Chauchard himself theorises that reservations are unlikely to have a major redistributive effect, while in chapter six he states that the small sample size does not allow him to arrive at a decisive conclusion on potential distributive effects. The very rationale of including questions on this theme in the survey design is, therefore, questionable.

Chauchard’s study is yet an important one that pursues its objectives rigorously. This is certainly reflected in his exhaustive discussion on terminology and his review on the domain of reservations. The innovativeness and intensiveness of his research design are also noteworthy. Recording survey questions in the local dialect and administering them to respondents in complete

privacy is a unique data collection method that could be emulated by researchers, even those from backgrounds similar to that of respondents. For these reasons, Chauchard's study is undoubtedly one that cannot be ignored by scholars and students of political systems. Even general readers will be enriched in terms of understanding the dynamics between values and prejudices of people, social policy and its implementation and social research.

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Book Review – *Reinventing Sustainability: How Archaeology Can Save the Planet*, by Erika Guttmann-Bond.

Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2019. 192 pp. £25.00.

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In 2010, *World Archaeology* published an article by Erika Guttmann-Bond (2010, p. 356), which stresses the importance of sustainable agriculture for developing and developed countries, and argues that "we already have the technology to make substantial improvements in the way we manage the countryside." In order to support this argument, Guttmann-Bond examines the use of wetlands for farming purposes, traditional water collection and transportation methods in desert areas, ways to minimize soil erosion and the benefits of intercropping. Guttmann-Bond's book *Reinventing Sustainability: How Archaeology Can Save the Planet* is a return to these ideas. This book, which ambitiously examines a vast field, attempts to inform general readers that "we can use some aspects of early technology, and we can combine old, tested techniques [re-discovered through archaeological excavations] with new systems and inventions, to create a healthier, more sustainable and environmentally richer planet" (Guttmann-Bond 2019, p. 8). Guttmann-Bond (2019, p. 1) is very clear that much of the discourse surrounding human interactions with the environment has focused on "the failures of the past." The goal of her book is to inform readers of some of the successful ventures using traditional knowledge, which she hopes will lead to further initiatives in sustainability.

Reinventing Sustainability is divided into seven chapters presenting the reader with a survey of the different traditional farming and building techniques that have been successfully used in different environments and time periods. The first chapter provides some contextual information, introduces readers to fundamental problems that have affected both agriculture and the environment, and provides a general overview of archaeology. First, Guttmann-Bond provides background information on the Green Revolution and identifies the negative effects it had on communities around the globe. It had detrimental consequences on human health and the

environment, it failed to maintain higher crop yields over prolonged periods of time, and many farmers turned away from using traditional techniques and strains. Second, Guttmann-Bond introduces climate change to the reader and stresses that it is a serious issue that the global community needs to address despite contrary claims found on many websites. Therefore, she highlights the importance of archaeology since it has allowed us to better understand these traditional methods that can be used to reduce and even remove greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The contents of the first chapter make it evident that Guttmann-Bond is writing to a general audience as she introduces many basic concepts critical for her discussion, including sustainable agriculture and environmental and experimental archaeology. In the second chapter, Guttmann-Bond outlines how wetlands have been perceived over time, how they can be used in food production through traditional methods like raised beds, and how government initiatives to reinstate wetlands can have a variety of benefits. The third chapter identifies the increasing desertification of the planet and outlines methods that have been used historically and in the present-day to store and transport water for farming purposes. The fourth chapter deconstructs some of the perceived benefits of industrial agriculture, as Guttmann-Bond maintains that smaller farms utilizing intercropping methods and growing local traditional crop varieties can be more productive, even if they are situated in areas with poorer soil quality. Chapter five examines the problems surrounding the degradation and erosion of the soil, which allows her to segue into a discussion of how traditional methods, including Terra Pretas, reducing tillage and creating terraces, can be used to minimize or prevent these problems. The sixth chapter promotes the benefits of vernacular architecture, which includes not only making a structure's interior more comfortable to live in, but also better able to maintain its structural integrity when certain natural disasters occur. In the final chapter, Guttmann-Bond (2019, p. x.) "brings it all together" by touching on some of the major ideas of the book regarding traditional knowledge and more recent technologies, and how using the two together in some fashion can create "efficient and cost effective" changes that make both the environment and humans healthier.

In her "Foreword," Guttmann-Bond (2019, p. ix) highlights the comment made by a reviewer of *Reinventing Sustainability*, who thought it "should not be written" since the field is too vast. She rejected this opinion. There is no doubt that the topics Guttmann-Bond tackles in *Reinventing Sustainability* are large, and this book is not a comprehensive study of these issues; nevertheless, her text brings some valuable ideas to the forefront and invites further discussions. One recurring

theme Guttmann-Bond (2019, p. 17) explores is the need to actively collaborate and seek input from locals to solve community problems: "we cannot march into a country and tell the people what to do." Through her discussion of the Green Revolutions, both new and old, and the aid work conducted around the world, Guttmann-Bond demonstrates that inclusive decision-making is critical in communities, and imposing policies upon them without taking into account local cultures, dynamics and input may prove to be detrimental. Furthermore, Guttmann-Bond (2019, p. 4) identifies that "in the 19th century West, modern technology was hailed as the cure for all human ills, and it was seen as the way forward to a better life," and this is a mentality that accompanied the Green Revolution. Guttmann-Bond's work outlines some of the problems that may accompany this line of thinking, particularly if traditional techniques are simply discarded because of natural assumptions that they are unprogressive or inferior. Lastly, Guttmann-Bond (2019, pp. 22, 42, 130, 144) repeatedly highlights the idea of humans "working with nature instead of against it," which can be used to segue into a broader examination of how people from different cultures interact with the natural world.

As mentioned above, the book examines a vast field, but Guttmann-Bond provides numerous examples to demonstrate how organizations, governments and experimental farms have been using traditional techniques or blending them with modern technologies to handle sustainability and other modern-day problems. Guttmann-Bond (2019, p. 2) notes that some people continue to "scoff" at her ideas and wants to show "the many ways that people have adapted to often very different environmental conditions." That said, this book is a survey of selected examples of sustainability and although she provides numerous examples, she fails to delve into some of the topics in great detail. This is not unexpected given the length of the book.

For example, Guttman-Bond devotes approximately four pages to qanats in her chapter "Farming the desert." Within these pages, she explores the history of qanat development and use, the reasons why many qanats have fallen out of service and the benefits that can be gained by restoring and improving on them, with a particular focus on how they can be beneficial to Oman. Within those four pages, she makes the point that qanats can still be useful, aligning with research conducted by Hussain, Abu-Rizaiza, Habib and Ashfaq: a source that is cited in the chapter endnotes and which presents a more comprehensive examination of qanats than Guttmann-Bond's text. Hussain *et al.* (2008) present a general overview of qanats in four countries, insights to

determine which qanats to restore, and note potential gains and problems for moving forward. The book therefore acts as a valuable roadmap to more comprehensive discussions of the particulars.

It should also be noted that the endnotes that accompany the chapters "Wetlands and wetland agriculture" and "Farming the desert" tend to come from older sources—very few of the sources listed for those two chapters were written within the last ten years. Although Guttmann-Bond wants to highlight that these traditional methods have already been employed with success, readers may want to see more updated information regarding their development and use. For example, the primary source for her discussion on the *aflaj* in Oman is Dutton's chapter in the 1989 publication *Qanat, Kariz and Khattara,* which Guttmann-Bond (2019, p. 65) believes can be a blueprint to "enable the ancient system to continue functioning." It would be interesting to see more updated research on whether Dutton's proposals were put into action and, if so, the effects they have had on the communities in Oman. Updated material is certainly available. Abulbasher Shahalam's (2001) literature review on *aflaj* reveals some of the research that has occurred in Oman since Dutton's 1989 publication. More recently, Grace Remmington's (2018) research illustrates that concerns over water management continue to exist in Oman outside of simply making the *aflaj* structurally functional and efficient.

It may have been beneficial to write a longer book that provides a more in-depth analysis of some of these examples of sustainability, but many factors could have influenced the decision to publish a shorter book. That said, Guttmann-Bond provides a solid survey of various projects that have been taking place around the world in an engaging and easy to follow text for the general reader. The book introduces the reader to many traditional agricultural techniques and vernacular architectural designs in a variety of different environments and provides a starting point for readers to engage in further research on their own**.** Although her ideas have been criticized as being "pie in the sky" in the past (Guttmann-Bond, 2019, p. vii), some of her conclusions about sustainable agriculture and using traditional methods align with those found within other research studies. One fundamental point that Guttmann-Bond (2019, p. 156) identifies in her discussion is motivation and the need "to understand what really motivates people." The question regarding motivation has been identified by Nelson, Scott, Cukier and Galán (2009, p. 240) within the context of sustainable agriculture in Cuba, and they believe it "should be the subject of further study." This is a crux of the field—some people will certainly buy into sustainable agriculture, and Guttmann-Bond

provides examples of people who have certainly been supportive of using more traditional practices. However, it will be a tougher sell for others.

Dr Brian de Ruiter has been a sessional instructor at Brock University since 2008, teaching in the Centre for Digital Humanities, Department of History, the Centre of Intercultural Studies, the Centre for Canadian Studies and the Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies. In 2018 he was awarded the Clarke Thomson Award for Excellence in Sessional Teaching for this work. He received his PhD in 2014 from Swansea University focusing on North American Indigenous Cinema.

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Academic Event Report

Éadaoin Regan

School of English, University College Cork

Symposium: Women and the Family in Ireland, 1550-1950

Venue: University of Hertfordshire

Date: 7th June 2019

On June 7th 2019, members and supporters of the Women's History Network gathered at the University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield, to present and gauge current research efforts in Irish women's history. The leading organisers, Dr Leanne Calvert, Research Fellow and Lecturer in History at the University of Hertfordshire, and Dr Maeve O'Riordan, Lecturer in the School of History at University College Cork, opened the symposium with an overview of the day's purpose. Considering the surge of research conducted in the area of Irish women's history in recent years, the importance of continuing this work was emphasised and encouraged. As the organisers pointed out, before the 1990s, there had been little to no acknowledgement of the potential and impact of women on the island of Ireland. In its efforts to continue the corrective work done in this respect over the best part of the last three decades, this symposium was a dedicated effort to network, trade and further promote research in Irish women's history from 1550-1950.

The symposium presentations were organised into panels by common themes: "Material Culture", "Institutions", "Law", "Political and Revolutionary Families", "Death and the Supernatural" and "New Family Relationships". These panels poignantly revealed elements of the obstacles faced by Irish women, both past and present. The impact that patriarchal society had (and continues to have) on women has evolved and changed throughout the centuries. The experience of Irish women has been no different in this respect. Thus, research presented at this symposium exploring the experience of women in Ireland is in keeping with the Oxford English Dictionary definition of crisis: "a time of intense difficulty or danger."

The first panel focused upon material culture. Although the communal aspect of charity,

trading supplies and upskilling was of course discussed, the overarching theme was the harsh realities faced by women. Eliza McKee (Queen's University Belfast) discussed the efforts of women to clothe their families in post-famine Ulster, 1850-1914. In contrast, Dr. Emma O'Toole (Irish Heritage Trust) provided a pre-famine Ireland account of similar issues, but detailed the crisis of women who were reluctant in, or ill-prepared for, motherhood. For example, O'Toole discussed how mothers who would not make clothes for their impending babies, an exercise that was perceived as crucial to the homemaking or nesting process, were forced to do so by other women within the community. Throughout the panel, there were consistent comparisons made between male and female dressmakers, with the former affording financial independence that their female counterparts did not.

In an appropriate transition, the second panel focused upon the lack of freedom for women, in a wider social sense, in the form of institutionalization: by either public or private means. As discussed, the archives relating to women were often neglected by early twentieth-century academics, and Judy Bolger (Trinity College Dublin) detailed the challenges she has faced in her research to acquire more specific death rates and cause of death statistics for pregnant women in the Irish workhouse at the close of the nineteenth century. For attendees, it was difficult not to marvel at the persistence of vague terminology in later records, indicating a continued disregard for the accurate accounting of women's lives, a phenomenon reinforced by Lucy Simpson (University of Liverpool) during her paper on the institutionalisation of 'fallen' women in early twentieth century Ireland.

Moving from the public to the private institutionalisation of women, Bettina Bradbury (Professor Emeritus, York University) introduced a panel on law, dealing with the efforts of families who were financially able to institutionalise women within the home. Such financial means allowed families to avoid the stigma surrounding mental health and thus also avoid a crisis of social standing if the situation was discovered by their community. The care taken by the family, and hardships they faced, was largely recorded in private documents that have provided a hard-sought insight into the reality of these women's experiences and the impact of and on wider society. Emma Dewhirst (University of Liverpool) also showed the value of well-preserved documents. Dewhirst traced the involvement of women and children within the Irish revolutionary period, which is reflective of the growing appreciation in both public and private spheres for the lesser-known women of both pre- and post-Rising Ireland.

Following this discussion, Aisling Shalvey (University of Strasbourg) discussed the invasive research carried out by Free State Ireland into eugenics on Irish children, an invasion of the private by the public which is a continuous theme for women's history in general. In a switch to the role of women in not only births, but deaths, Dr Clodagh Tait (Mary Immaculate College) provided an overview of the intricate and important position of women in the wake tradition. However, the wise woman aspect of this role was contrasted with a talk on the supernatural stigma of witchcraft, a stigma which persisted far longer than is often discussed. Dr Andrew Sneddon's (Ulster University) discussion about early eighteenth-century witches in Ireland was a welcome lesson in the varying perspectives of what constituted witchcraft. The penultimate discussion focused on the loyalty of siblings, displaying the potential positives generated by a time of crisis. However, Dr Maeve O'Riordan's (University College Cork) paper on the use of the term 'unmarried' rather than 'not yet married' demonstrated a poignant point about the 'sacrificial daughter' figure in many elite families, who were seen to better aid their families by staying at home as carer rather than seeking independence for themselves. This same lack of autonomy could also be found in nineteenth-century Irish literature, as argued in my own paper, which discussed selected short stories from George Egerton (1859-1945) and focused upon depictions of forced domestication, particularly regarding motherhood. Ultimately, the marked lack of independence afforded to women in the last five centuries, and the consequential crises they experienced, was a focus throughout the symposium for both historical and literary researchers.

This symposium was inspired by the impending thirtieth anniversary of the research agenda introduced by historians such as Maria Luddy, Mary O'Dowd and Margaret McCurtain. These researchers pledged to continue and encourage a resurgence into the exploration of the Irish women's experience—on both sides of the border. Before this declaration, Ireland's historical women—the political activists, the educators, the rarely permitted practising professionals, the nurturers and protectors of the men who are lauded by our history books—had largely been forgotten. The WHN's one-day symposium sought to evaluate the research that has been embarked upon since the recommittal of academics of Irish history to revisit these forgotten stories. It also served as an inspiring recommittal on behalf of the attending postgraduate scholars, independent researchers and established academics to continue to carry the torch for the women whose experiences continue to be, and for too long have been, considered inconsequential to the history of our shores.

Academic Event Report

Carolyn Howle Outlaw

Department of Archaeology, University College Cork

Conference: 40th Association for Environmental Archaeology Conference

Venue: University of Sheffield

Date: 29th November to 1st December 2019

The Association for Environmental Archaeology (AEA) Conference is hosted annually in the Autumn with smaller, themed meetings hosted in the Spring. The 2019 conference marked the 40th anniversary since the establishment of the AEA in Sheffield and it was the largest conference held thus far. The theme for the conference was "Living through change: the archaeology of human-environment interactions". "Living through change" was an inadvertently timely theme considering that, even as concern about Climate Change and world conflicts are ever present in the minds of the public, social change was stirring in the UK academic world with a nation-wide university strike. The latter meant adaptability for each individual and for the group as a whole, with one speaker opting to support her colleagues by striking through the conference and others choosing to give voice to the struggle during their sessions.

The conference involved eight individual sessions in which papers were presented along with a poster session. It began on 29th November with an enthusiastic keynote address from Gill Campbell of Historic England. Campbell raised the argument that we must understand how we arrived at where we are in order to understand where we are going. Understanding how past peoples acted as agents of environmental change can aid in understanding how we arrived at this point in human-environment interactions. This argument was also applied to the field of environmental archaeology, which has changed in the last forty years to become the multi-disciplinary, multi-proxy, and multi-national field of study that it is today. Closing remarks on the final day of the conference (1st December) were given by Prof. Umberto Albarella of the University of Sheffield who, again, reflected upon the changes undergone within the field.

Sessions—Day One: Humans are Adaptable

"Session A: Impacts on and of early subsistence" included four papers, two from Spanish researchers, one from an English researcher, and one from a Japanese researcher, reflecting the international growth of the AEA in the last forty years. The research projects covered study regions such as Northern Spain, the Levant region of Asia, the Atacama Desert of Chili and the Japanese archipelago. These studies ranged in date from 20,000 BP to 1000 BP. This session was a cross-border, chronologically diverse discussion of how humans have changed the ways in which they utilise different food resources, including animals, plants and fish from hunting and gathering, and through animal husbandry and agriculture. Humans, as a species, have adapted to climate changes, new lands and differing cultural pressures to continue utilising the natural world.

Session B focused on the idea that humans have adapted to climate changes before and that we have an ongoing relationship with the natural world in which we are a part, rather than a separate dichotomised entity. One paper in particular resonated with these ideas: "Wild wetlands and domestic drylands?" by Floor Huisman of the Cambridge Archaeological Unit. Huisman discussed how humans have moved in and out of the Fens from 4000 BC to 100 AD to utilise its resources and live among its waters, even as the area continuously flooded further inland. The people moved, changed tactics, and adapted, an ever increasingly applicable lesson as the world's climate continues to rapidly change.

Session C returned to the idea that humans are not separate from the natural world but have a long standing, ongoing interaction with it. Present day human-environment interactions can teach us about similar past interactions and learning about past interactions can better prepare us for the future. This idea was explored in the paper "Human-induced changes in upland landscapes" by Helen Shaw of Maynooth University. Shaw discussed issues within modern perceptions of 'naturalness' while looking at relatively biodiverse, human-managed upland landscapes, with specific reference to relatively modern uses of such areas. She reflected upon the applicability of this and similar studies to help build "policy and practice in future land management" (Shaw, 2019).

Reflecting a consistent theme throughout the day and, indeed, the conference as a whole, Session D concluded the first day of sessions with the idea 'humans are adaptable.' Humans

experiment with the use of familiar environments and are able to adjust when new problems arise or move to new environments and start anew. While this is more easily seen in smaller, less 'permanent' societies, one paper made it clear that even the largest of civilisations can adapt, if they are prepared to. In their paper, "Assessing environmental change at Indus Civilisation Valley sites in northwest India through geoarchaeology", Joanna Walker, Cameron Petrie, and Charly French of the University of Cambridge, Julie Durcan of the University of Oxford, and Hector Orengo of the Catalan Institute of Classical Archaeology addressed the long-held hypothesis that climate change caused the decline of the Indus Civilisation. Their research suggested that the Indus people were resilient to such change and had strategies in place to adjust as the rains increased and decreased across their hydrologically complex landscape. The assumption that climate change caused their collapse is perhaps based upon our own fears that we are not adapting fast enough, but the past teaches us that there is hope.

Sessions—Day Two: Interplay between Culture and Environment

Session E underscored the constant and ever-present human factor within our environments. We have always changed aspects of our environment: from hunter gatherers selectively, though perhaps inadvertently, spreading favoured plant seeds; to early farmers using fire to clear land; to modern man's ever-growing industrialisation. This constant adaptation of our environment has always had consequences—good (fire may revitalize a forest), bad (pollutants can destroy habitats), or otherwise. The paper "What's mined is yours" by Hannah O'Regan and Christopher Loveluck of University of Nottingham was a timely reminder that humans are polluters and have been for millennia, but that once humans mitigate their own affects, the land can regenerate over time. The paper analysed the Historic Ice Core Project at Colle Gnifetti, Italy which shows spikes in lead pollution due to the mining of Hope Valley in the Peak District, UK almost 1000km away. When the mining was known to pause or cease, the pollutants decreased, and the air became non-toxic once again, allowing for slow habitat restoration.

Session F centred around large scale societies and their expansion of resource exploitation beyond their local environment. As societies grow, so too does their effects on the environment. The papers from this session spanned from the Neolithic (the final part of the Stone Age), with the introduction of farming and its catalytic effect on social expansion, through to the Roman

conquests and their extended trade networks, to the Early Medieval Period, when evidence suggests that social change further influenced environmental use.

Session G focused on the interplay between environment and culture: how conditions in one can hinder or create change in the strategies applied to the other. The paper "Make yourself at home" by independent researcher, Ulana Gocman, emphasised this interplay during a time when humans were moving from Silesia into Lesser Poland, to the southeast. Environmental pressures, along with cultural considerations, influenced the implementation of the same economic model used in Silesia in Lesser Poland. A new landscape did not equate to new methods, but instead the old methods dictated how the land was used.

"Session I: People and commensal carnivores" explored the close relationship between humans and canines such as dogs and foxes, who may benefit from such a relationship. Humans affect wild and domestic animals with what we eat, how and where we settle, and what resources we exploit. These animals can also affect how humans react to their environment, with some animals receiving special treatment while others are subject to social norms, such as taboos.

Reflections and Conclusions

Prof. Albarella summarised the conference well with a reflection on its timeliness and its relevance. Though he does not believe that environmental archaeology should be considered its own discipline—all archaeologists look at the environment in one form or another—he was impressed with the multi-disciplinary approach evident in the papers, combining techniques from geology, geography, palynology, biology, botany, osteology, zoology and many other fields to bring about a holistic view of how humans have interacted with their environments through times of change. He also noted the increased internationality of the conference compared to 40 years ago. The field itself has changed to be more dynamic and inclusive, appealing to those in disciplines outside of archaeology and outside of the UK. The field has adapted to and aided in the scientific push for multi-proxy evidence and has grown because of it.

Change happens on many scales, and this conference was a refreshing look at how humans have adapted to and caused such change. The natural environment and human cultures are not separate from each other but cyclically affect one another to varying degrees at various times throughout

the world. We still have power to act as agents of change within our environments, whether that be the natural, social or, in the case of the contemporary University Strike, economic environment. We also still have the power to adapt to changes forced upon us through invention, interaction, and the choices we make together. The stated goal of the conference was "to [both] reflect upon the discipline's past, and debate its future" applicability in our ever changing world (Wallace *et al.* 2019). Environmental archaeologists have an unique perspective of these changes and, as has been evident in the papers presented at this conference, have an important part to play in helping the world understand how we arrived where we are by understanding how past peoples acted as agents of change.

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Creative Editorial

Matty Adams and Robert Feeney

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Given the journal's theme of crisis, we expected submissions that skewed towards melancholy, cynicism and a certain negativity. With environmental disaster no longer looming but occurring and extreme political ideologies becoming globally normalised, there certainly seemed crises-a-plenty to motivate, or perhaps demotivate, writers. Submissions to the journal gave us stories focusing on issues both local and universal, from homelessness and grief, to mental health and abortion. And at the deadline for submissions, November 2019, none of us yet had an inkling of the medical crisis that would eventually envelop the world and change our very way of living.

Yet it was difficult not to take away from these creative pieces a sense of hope and connection. The two submissions which we accepted dealt with differing issues; colonialism in Michael Kurian's poem "Into the Kalari", and war and abortion in Gráinne O'Hare's short story "Same Time Next Tuesday", yet each celebrated connection with a quietude and ferocity that was simply uplifting. With the successful repeal campaign in the Republic of Ireland two years ago, and less than one year ago for Northern Ireland, conversations surrounding bodily autonomy are topical. In "Same Time Next Tuesday", the friendship of two women dances around issues of sexuality while World War II rages in the background. Fighting colonialist rhetoric through a determined love for one's own culture certainly provides a pleasant counterpoint to some modern immigration policies. In "Into the Kalari", a young combatant celebrates the strength of their cultural heritage in the face of colonial power. These two pieces refuse to pull their punches when they speak of the cruelty and cost of crises, but, even more fiercely, they speak of the love behind grief and the pride behind resistance. In this time of social distancing, they remind us of the value of human connection, whether it is forged on a war-torn street in Belfast or a sacred arena in India, and what we all might look forward to when our current crisis has been overcome.

Same Time Next Tuesday

Gráinne O'Hare

Department of English, Newcastle University

Abigail first meets Kitty in the doorway of the old shoe factory, on the corner of Union Street, late one night in early April. The ashy light from a half-moon dangling overhead gives the shadows a sharper edge. Kitty is bleeding. She wears a beautiful coat that Abigail thinks would be a shame to see ruined. The tip of Abigail's tongue nudges the unlit cigarette between her lips; she has been searching her pockets in vain for a match, but feels that to ask the injured woman crouching in the doorway if she has a light would be perhaps insensitive. Kitty necks gin straight from the bottle in her hand and her face contorts briefly, demonically. The air-raid siren wails on overhead in a tone of almost boredom.

"Excuse me," ventures Abigail. "Do you need help?" She regrets asking almost immediately as she realises there's nothing she can feasibly offer by way of assistance. If the woman has suffered mortal wounding then there's no use blotting it clumsily with a pocket handkerchief. Abigail doesn't know Belfast well enough to be sure where the nearest hospital is, and Kitty seems in no fit state to walk anywhere; they can hardly hail a taxi. Furthermore, there's no telling whether the hospital will have been bombed to bits by the time they arrive there, and certainly no guarantee they won't have been bombed to bits themselves.

Kitty tried to get a cab an hour before the sirens started, but no drivers would take her; they thought she was drunk. She wasn't then, though she is now, not that it's helping. Pain, unblunted by the gin, screws tighter into her abdomen. Kitty's best friend Orla calls the private part between her legs her *gash*, which Kitty has always disliked for the violent visual it conjures; but now, with a crimson crust forming along the scalloped edge of her stockings and fresh blood leaching forth, Kitty considers it's probably an apt term.

She did think a tampon might at least cork the flow, but it overfilled within minutes. It sat discarded beside her in its own little pool of blood until Kitty, forgetting it was there, jumped at the sight of its tail and small body streaked with gore, thinking momentarily that it was some dead

or dying creature. Realising what it was, she kicked it into the gutter. Kitty's mother once warned her in an undertone against using tampons during her time of the month, at least until she was married, as they were widely known to cause accidental loss of virginity. Kitty reasons it is altogether too late for that.

The woman who's stopped in front of her wears a dark uniform and has a cigarette protruding from between her lips; Kitty's run out of matches, she wonders if the woman might give her a light, until Abigail puts it, unlit, back into her pocket and peers down at Kitty.

"Where are you hurt?" she asks, concern furrowing her brow.

Kitty doesn't really have a name she prefers for her private parts; she doesn't talk about them aloud if it can be at all avoided. At one extreme there's Orla's sharp, staccato terminology (gash, snatch, cunt), and at the other, the way Kitty's mother used to refer to it, her *special place that God made*. She starts laughing at the thought.

Abigail already regrets stopping; she should have known the woman was mad, nice coat or not. She looks young enough, perhaps only a few years older than Abigail's twenty-one; pale-faced and with bright blonde hair, spidery black smudges under her eyes, and a scar of red lipstick. Abigail doesn't wear makeup; she owns some face powder, and one lipstick in a daring purple shade, but as advertising for cosmetics tends to only show beaming white-skinned women, Abigail grew up under the impression that it wasn't something meant for her. She has only worn the lipstick once and it left a messy crayon smear across Nella's mouth. Nella had a movie star's mouth, lips pink and pouting, with a small mole at the corner like a dot next to a note in sheet music. When Abigail was little and used to sit next to her father while he played the piano, she asked what the dots meant and he told her that they added half again the value of whatever they were placed next to. Abigail once told Nella that the mole added half again the value to her already pretty smile, and Nella looked pleased.

"You're not from round here," Kitty slurs suspiciously; Abigail thinks it a reference to her dark colouring until Kitty adds, "Is tharra Scouse accent?" in a very poor imitation of a Scouse accent.

Kitty, apparently reluctant to sit fully on the ground, keeps shifting her position from squatting on her haunches to leaning crookedly against the door frame, and now she's standing bent over at the waist with her hands gripping her hips, a rivulet of blood skating down the full length of her

stocking and into her shoe.

"Yes, I'm from Liverpool," Abigail replies, pushing on, "Listen, can you walk? Is there somewhere I can take you? It's not safe out here."

"Then why are *you* out here?" accuses Kitty. Abigail doesn't reply, and Kitty asks, "What's your name?"

"Abigail French. And you?"

"Kitty Murphy." Kitty puts out a hand as if to shake hers but they both notice at the same time that it's grubby with crescents of blood under the nails, so she draws it back and performs a kind of half-salute instead.

"Come on, look at the state of you. You can't stay here. If some unsavoury character doesn't find you then a bomb surely will."

"And how do I know you're not some unsavoury character?" challenges Kitty; but she winces furiously as pain needles into her belly, so doesn't push for an answer. She lowers herself into a sort of squat with her knees up and her pelvis slightly tilted towards Abigail, and Abigail suddenly wonders, horrified, if Kitty mightn't be in labour. Or, perhaps more likely given the amount of blood streaking her thighs, she might be miscarrying. Abigail doesn't know how one might deliver amateur medical attention in either scenario. Her own mother died from infection shortly after giving birth to Abigail; and while Abigail doesn't know what might have improved her odds of survival, she's fairly certain that sitting outdoors during a German air raid isn't widely medically recommended.

"You've got to see a doctor," Abigail insists, bending down to Kitty's level. "You're losing a lot of blood - we'll find someone to help, get you to hospital…"

The corners of Kitty's mouth turn down and her eyes glisten suddenly with tears.

"I'm sorry, I know you're trying to be kind," she wobbles, "but I can't see a doctor, I can't go to hospital. I'm sorry, but they'd know at once what's happened to me and I'd rather die in a doorway than a prison cell."

Kitty doesn't know how Lawrence would respond if she told him, not that she's going to. His upstanding lawyerly principles would surely have him feeling duty-bound to report such a crime;

first to her father, then to the police. But then her father would demand in a blazing roar how Kitty got herself in trouble in the first place, something Lawrence (as her father's fellow crown prosecutor and long-time friend) would surely want to avoid. Lawrence's own daughter is, at twenty-four, just two years younger than Kitty. Kitty ran into her in a department store queue a few weeks ago, and they laughed at the realisation that they were both buying the same dress. Kitty doubled back on herself an hour later and returned the garment, feeling that any resemblance she bore to Lawrence's daughter would cast upon their already problematic relationship an uncomfortable layer of transgression that would be difficult to ignore.

Perhaps, Kitty's considered, any horror he might feel at what she's done, or what a dubious surgeon in Rosemary Street smelling of chemicals and clove sweets has done *to* her, might be subsumed at once by relief. What an efficient secretary she's been; she has managed to take care of the problem without having to ask him for help at all, and outside of office hours too! He'll owe her a glowing letter of reference if she ever decides to get a job elsewhere.

She did think about keeping it, making up a story about how it happened. *A man ambushed me in the street, Father, I didn't see his face, it was all over so quickly!* Or perhaps she could blame the whole affair on the machinations of the Holy Spirit. But Kitty worried she and the infant might be parcelled off to a home like Mary O'Donnell was after falling pregnant when they were fourteen, and she didn't much fancy that. Mary hasn't kept in touch since then.

Abigail wonders if she has the sort of face that naturally invites confidence, or if Kitty would have disclosed her misfortunes to any passing stranger; a singularly foolish thing to do, Abigail thinks, since for all Kitty knows she's a staunch puritan who'll go straight to the nearest constable. Kitty seems to realise this at the same time, and her eyebrows snap desperately together.

"Oh, *please* tell me you're sound and won't tell anyone," she moans, her head rolling back against the door momentarily before it lifts upright again, and she adds, "Although actually, I wouldn't make it to prison; my da would throttle me with his own hands if it all came out."

"I won't tell anyone," promises Abigail. A plane drones by overhead and they both look up. "Come tomorrow, there mightn't be anyone left to tell."

"Why're you out walking the streets anyway?"

Abigail takes the cigarette out of her pocket again. 'You haven't got a light, have you?'

“Bugger, I was going to ask you the same. I’m all out.’ Kitty swigs again from the gin bottle and, gurning, offers it to Abigail. Abigail pauses, before accepting the bottle and sitting down on the doorstep next to her. Kitty has lowered herself onto the ground where she rocks with her knees drawn up to her chest. “So, come on,” she presses in a strained voice. “You should be down in a shelter. Why’ve you a suicide wish? You might as well spill; you’ll never see me again, if you’re lucky. Or we’ll both die in this doorway. Either way, there’s no point being secretive. I’ve told you my troubles, and I’m one whole minute less of a stranger to you than you were to me when I did that.”

“You’d also had a whole lot more gin than me,” points out Abigail.

“Fair. Drink up, then.”

Kitty sleeps through the bombs. When her head first slumps against the door frame Abigail wonders if she’s died; but no, a pulse still jumps at her throat. The blood staining her skirt and legs is no longer sticky, but instead a dry rust. Abigail doesn’t sleep. She wonders where’s been hit, whether they’ll emerge at dawn to find the city in splinters and the docks dissolved into the sea.

“How do you feel?” Abigail asks when Kitty wakes up.

“Perfectly horrid,” she replies, “but I think that’s mainly the gin.”

Kitty’s coat (which in the light Abigail realises isn’t black, as she’d thought, but a very dark green) covers up most of the carnage, although a few errant seams of crimson are visible on her stockings.

“You should take those off,” advises Abigail, “or they’ll give you away.”

“They’re good stockings,” grumbles Kitty, examining them crossly. “It seems such a waste.”

“You could always try scrubbing them with baking soda. If it works for red wine stains…”

“There’s a thought. Thanks!” Kitty strips off her stockings and balls them up in her pockets. “Anyway, what’s the damage?” The buildings around them are still standing as before. Kitty peers around the corner as though half-expecting someone to reveal it's all been a grand joke to put the wind up them.

“I don’t know yet.”

Kitty folds her arms to keep her coat closed around her. “Well, I suppose I’d better get on. But, here, it was kind of you to stop for me. Plenty wouldn’t have. Let me buy you a drink.”

Abigail looks sideways at the now-empty gin bottle sitting on the pavement, and Kitty lets out a throaty cackle. “A proper drink. By way of thanks.”

“There’s really no need, I didn’t do anything.”

“But I want to. Humour me.”

Abigail shrugs. “All right, then. But you should have a few days to recover first. And it’s Easter this weekend coming; let’s give it a week.”

“Deal! One week from today, say, eight o’clock? Where?”

Abigail nods at the Tavern, the bar visible on the corner a little way down the street. “There.”

“Perfect.”

“Will you be all right?”

“Oh, grand. A hot bath and a proper rest, that’s all I need.”

“Well, if you’re sure. Take care.”

“And you! No more bomb-strolls till I see you next.”

“If you insist.”

The news of the casualties and the shipyards desecrated during the air raid is of course upsetting, but Abigail feels a particular twinge of sadness hearing about the zoo. Fearing that a direct bomb hit might result in polar bears on the loose up Cave Hill, the authorities have had most of the zoo animals killed. Abigail wonders (not without distaste) what will happen to the bodies, whether there’ll be a newly-stuffed wolf’s head hanging in a Glengormley pub by the end of the month, whether one of the zookeepers now has a majestic bearskin rug that he claims at dinner parties was stripped from a wild bear he once shot in Siberia.

Nella was draped in an oversized fur coat like a barbarian chieftain when Abigail first met her. She introduced herself as Petronella, followed by whatever stage surname she had taken a liking to that week. She spoke with a mid-Atlantic accent, despite being from Stockport, and didn’t like

to be challenged on this. She was singing two nights a week at the Grafton, with a band that included Abigail's father on the piano. *Your father is a master of the ivories*, she told Abigail imperiously, adding in the same tone, *I think you and I are going to be very good friends*. And so they were, and more, for a time.

Abigail hopes Kitty won't probe, when they meet. Hopefully she'll just gas on about herself. Abigail found Kitty's candour endearing, whether it was drink or distress that had prompted it, or whether it was simply her natural manner. Nella behaved with exuberant over-familiarity but was on the whole evasive, changing her name and affecting her accent and neglecting to mention her husband back in Manchester.

Abigail's drink is a gin and tonic; Kitty has a neat vodka with ice.

"Gone off the gin?" asks Abigail.

"Balanced diet," Kitty replies, tapping her glass against Abigail's. "Cheers."

Lawrence suggested a drink in his office yesterday evening, but Kitty refused, delicately implying menstrual cramps about which he did not interrogate her further. She is no longer in pain but fears what might be the consequences of exerting herself again too soon. Kitty hasn't so much walked this last week as glided from place to place, anxious that any energetic movement might dislodge something fragile inside her. She's worn tampons just in case, but these have remained unspotted by blood. Still, Kitty worries that letting Lawrence hoke around in there might set off some kind of bodily reaction that could incriminate her, or even that he'll somehow be able to tell just by the feel of it that the equipment, so to speak, has been tampered with. She can't keep him waiting forever, though, or he'll no doubt tire of her. Kitty wonders if she'd even care. Perhaps she ought to seek a new job, just in case. She could get a job with the war effort, like Abigail, wear a smart uniform and do some good in the world instead of answering the telephone and making endless cups of tea and being bent over a desk by a rich man with a red pocket square. She's better than being someone's secretary for the rest of her life, she thinks. Or is she? Who can say.

Kitty unloads the lot of this to Abigail without pausing between thoughts, a spatter of staccato words like typewriter hammers beating meaning onto a blank page. She hasn't been able to tell any of her other friends about the whole sorry predicament for fear they would report or, worse, judge her, and it's cathartic being able to vent.

Abigail had a few close girlfriends in Liverpool who would chatter away to her about their jobs and lovers, but their conversations became more muted and infrequent after Abigail told them she'd been in love with a woman. They did not express any open distaste but developed a strange habit while talking to Abigail of looking at her as though she was an impostor who was holding the real Abigail hostage, and they wanted to convey a message to the real Abigail, without her captor knowing, that they were deeply concerned for her welfare. When her father died a year ago and she went directly from the funeral to booking her ferry passage away from Liverpool, Abigail's friends promised to write, but she's had nothing. They might have died, she supposes. Things like that do make one a poor correspondent.

The WAAF girls are good sports, but Abigail's got very little in common with them. Most of them are married with a small litter of beaming infants and a parade of in-laws and they'll talk often about how worried they all are that so few children have been evacuated and fret over their vast extended families and how everyone can possibly be safe when there aren't enough shelters for when the siren sounds. Abigail has nothing against this kind of chat but she has nothing to contribute; she has no-one to shepherd into an air-raid shelter, no-one to seek out once she's down there.

"It's a terribly lonely thing," Kitty's saying, though not about Abigail. "Strange to think that the only people in the whole world who know about it are me and some dire back-alley surgeon. Surgeon my hoop, by the way, that man was *not* a qualified medical professional, but that's another story. And *you* know, of course. And God, I suppose, if he's still watching this disgrace, although I doubt that." She swallows the last of her drink and sighs. "I mean, I complain that no-one can know, and yet I don't know what to do with the fact that *you* know. I'd like to think I could trust you not to say anything but then I don't know a thing about you. It's my own fault, of course, I've been rabbiting all this time without letting you get a word in. Look, I'm still doing it! It's terribly annoying, isn't it?"

Abigail opens her mouth as the air-raid siren begins to caterwaul.

"For the love of Jesus," curses Kitty, crestfallen. "Not *again*."

"At least you can walk this time," reasons Abigail. "Better get on, then." The stool legs protest against the stone floor as she pushes it back to stand.

"I'm sorry, I've rattled on for absolutely hours," Kitty says, getting to her feet as well. "I've learned absolutely nothing about you and all you've really learned about me is that I'm *completely* mad. Can we rectify that in another week? Not the thing about me being mad, that's beyond help, but I want to hear more about you, I do. If you like."

"If you like," echoes Abigail. "If we're both still knocking about after *this*," she points skywards, where there are presumably angry airborne Germans zooming about overhead, "then same time, here, one week?"

"Agreed!" Outside the pub, Kitty puts out her hand, this time clean and bloodless. "Same time next week."

Abigail shakes it with a stout nod. "All the best."

"And to you!"

When Kitty was a child she always liked the tidy uniformity of the market; meat fillets fanned out across a bed of ice, brightly-coloured fruit stacked in crates, cakes freckled with icing sugar and served in neat slices. She fancied at one stage that her future might be in one day owning a stall of her own, imagined herself perhaps selling sweets, separating them into jars and arranging them by colour on display to make for a charming, orderly aesthetic.

The marketplace is so familiar Kitty almost expects to walk through the arched gate and be greeted by the tang of fresh fish and the bustling of industry. She stops three steps inside, her heart walloping her chest. Everything is laid out in neat rows but it's all wrong.

She overheard her father yesterday saying that the market was being used as a morgue after the raid; some two hundred dead have been brought there, he said, though it might well be more. Some have been identified, others not.

How silly she'll feel, Kitty thinks, when she arrives at the Tavern on Tuesday evening to see Abigail sitting exactly where she had not a week ago. "You'll never guess," Kitty will most likely gush, swinging into the seat opposite. "I wondered if you mightn't be dead." But she mustn't go off rambling about herself for hours again, that's partly to blame for why she's come here in the first place. Kitty knows Abigail hails from Liverpool but she doesn't know what family she has, or friends, or where they are. She doesn't know how long Abigail has been here or who she knows,

who might miss her.

Kitty tiptoes along the rows as though she's in a library and trying not to cause disruption. Abigail isn't there. The rest of the unclaimed are buried the following day.

She might just be late, Kitty thinks, draining the end of her first drink.

Or perhaps she lost someone in the bombing and she's grieving with her loved ones; she doesn't have time to spend being talked at by some gowl she barely knows.

She might have realised the fragility of life and gone back to be with her family in Liverpool before enemy fire tears through them all. Kitty hasn't a clue where Abigail's people are, be they family, friends, lovers... like a fool, she didn't ask.

Kitty's got tomorrow morning off work; she told Lawrence she has a number of important errands to run, but she's going for a job interview. She doesn't want to arrive smelling of vodka with shadows hanging under her eyes.

Abigail was awake when Kitty woke in the doorway that morning a fortnight ago. Kitty wonders if she slept at all that night. Perhaps she doesn't sleep well generally; perhaps that's why she takes late-night walks. Kitty doesn't know. She wants to find out.

Kitty asks for an orange juice at the bar and settles in to wait.

Into the Kalari

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My mother and I begin our journey back,
carrying tonight's meal of *brinjal* and okra,
joking, chiding each other, we walk to

the British checkpoint.

Those pale, stern men
guard their post ever so diligently; day and night.
My baby brother waits at home.
We leave him because, with his innocent mouth he might say,

"When will it be safe enough for you to leave?"
"Who are you protecting us from?"

These questions would be found quite funny.
Rather than answer, and with demonic smiles,
they would complement his proficiency with
"The Queen's."

I refuse to speak it,
that unnatural language,
their treasured, posh, English.
When we practice in school
I can feel it

colonizing my teeth,
taxing my tongue,
stealing the labor of my gums.
Beaming at their progress, my schoolmates say just learning it makes them
prettier and smarter and richer.
They go home to drink saffron tea, doctors promise it lightens their skin.

Seated in rows of ten, we await a lesson that can never come.
"You'll see," they turn to me and say,
"One of these days, they will teach us how to be white and beautiful like them."

I have yet to hear their native word for one who hails from our sacred land.
I only hear
street dog, curry-eater,
jungle trash, river monkey.

With jeering, pompous voices,
'proper' accents,
these men say to me,
"Kerala was created with the rest of the world."

I do not listen when they say such things.
I rush into my brother's room
and remind him of the truth,
what Guru Ahimkara taught to our village, while calling us
Ende Ponne Kuttikal,
"my precious children".
Our land was gashed out of the ripe Indian earth
by Lord Parashurama, the incarnation of God Vishnu,
who flung his axe in an act of wild emotion, splitting the sea itself!

My brother gasps, but not from amazement.
He has, after all, heard this story before.
He gasps on purpose,
to remember what it feels like to be
amazed by his identity,
loved by his flesh.
This feeling fades like lunar ambience.
The moon seldom rises on the British empire.

When the daylight is gone
I leave our quiet home, kiss my sleeping father,
and disappear into the night.
When I have arrived at the training room
Guru Ahimkara stands at the door,
waiting to begin our lesson.

My family is indeed poor, and yet
I still have an inheritance.
My birthright is the sacred art
Kalaripayattu,
Kerala's own battlefield strikes.
The World's first martial art.

I walk into the *Kalari*.
The topsoil is removed three meters.
The walls are decorated with blades, daggers, staffs.
A steel whip called an *Urumi*.
A curved sword, a *Talwar*, a blade with which I share a name.
"Talwar-*mohne*," Guru calls me.
Talwar, the loved.

We begin with the hot oil massage,
a tradition passed down for centuries.
My joints turn mobile.
My spirit becomes free.

My opponent, Ramil, has been here since sunset.
Coming here is no secret for him.
He lives on the other side of the checkpoint.
His family is rich; his caste is holy.
I am told the Gods have made him better than me,
that he is made of gold.

We bow, and he shoots me a taunting grin.
I smile back.
I know that in this room, there is only one God.
The *Puttara.*
The deity of my ancestors.
The God of Kalaripayattu.

The British pray to a strange God,
who grants wishes like a genie,
and gives men strength for free.

Puttara does no such thing.
He watches us silently.
He gives us only cuts, bruises,
but his judgement is unspoken,
wordless,
fair.

Ramil selects the dagger.
He is three years my senior and this is his most skilled weapon.

The British Churches call pride a sin,
but I pick the dagger too.

Guru Ahimkara stands to the side.
He utters a brief incantation.
The room is filled with all the ancient magic of war.

There are few things more illegal than what we do on this golden night.
Our battle, our Kalaripayattu,
is banned by verdict of strange bureaucracy.
My culture is illegal in its own land.
Still, in this Kalari there is no law but ours.
Ramil and I lock eyes.
He mocks me with his gaze.
We await the order from Guru.

…
…
…
SHIKAT!
BEGIN!

Ramil rushes my side
my defense is strong
Cling, Clang, Tish, Dwang
our blades collide a hundred times
we each have seven hands
I feel within me the rage of Shiva, The Destroyer.

Alas, I remember too late what Guru taught me,
that anger is a poison to the composed mind.
My duel is not destined to be long.

Ramil casts two slices to the bottom of my thigh.
How could I expect him to go that low?
He finishes with a kick to my stomach.
Hitting the ground
my skin and the dirt embrace each other.
Watching my fall, you could not tell where
body ends and where
ground begins.
I love the color of my skin.
It reminds me that I will return to this harvest earth
and become the soil my children will till.

I stand and look at Ramil.
He does not smile now.
His face bears a few licks and scrapes.
He is frustrated with the effort it took to finish me.
I have taught him a lesson.

Though he is made of gold, he still bleeds red.

Guru Ahimkara smiles at me.
It is time to go, and there is much training left for other nights.
My feet are calloused like those of the sages
who, even now, march for our freedom.
As the chariot of Surya, the Goddess of the sun,
makes its way across the horizon,
the hummingbirds practice their songs
adorned with wings of silk,
wings that shimmer twilight-pink and emerald.
I thank these first musicians,
who provided morning anthems to mythic warriors.

I envy their natural tone and effortless, honed craft.
These tiny avian virtuosos
who never doubt or notice their mastery.