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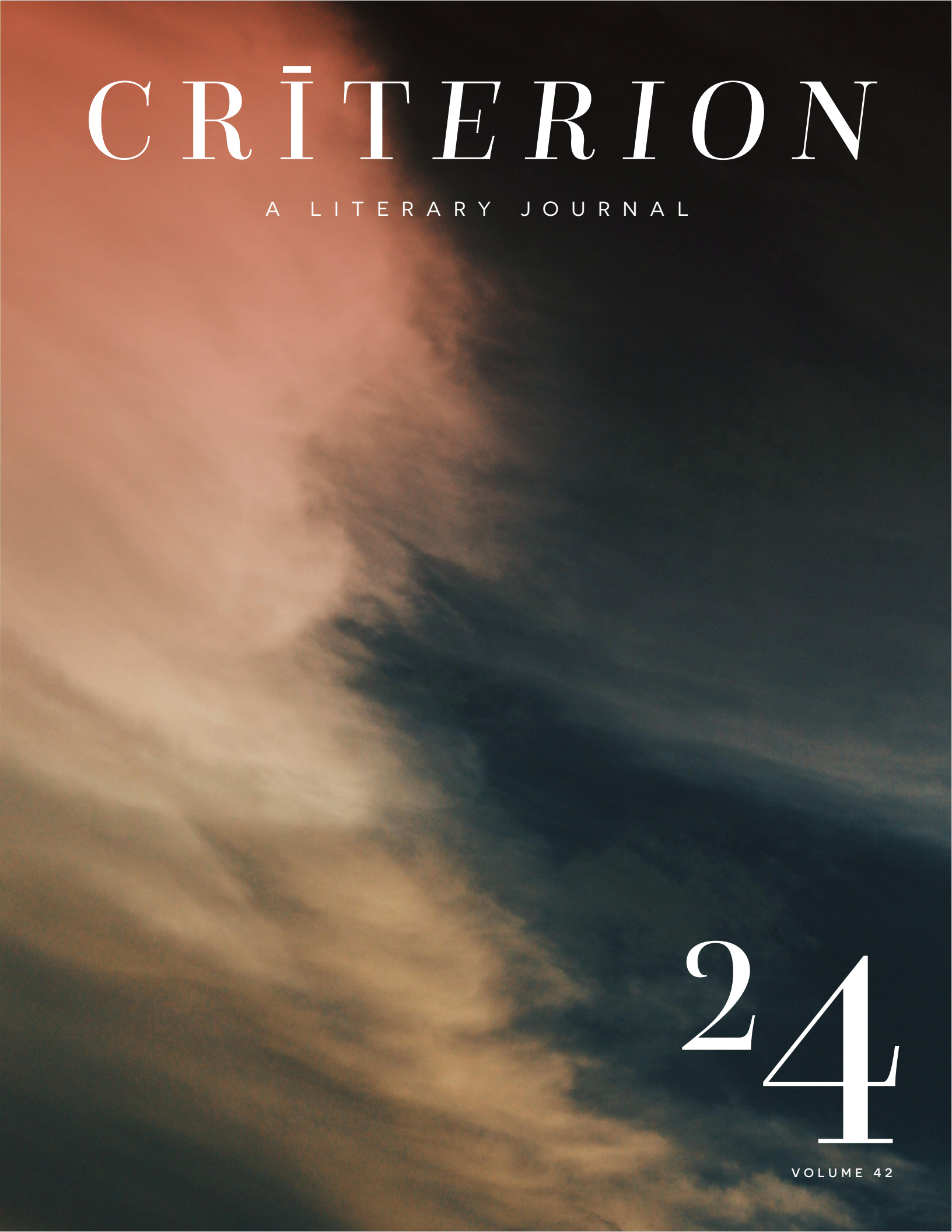
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A LITERARY JOURNAL
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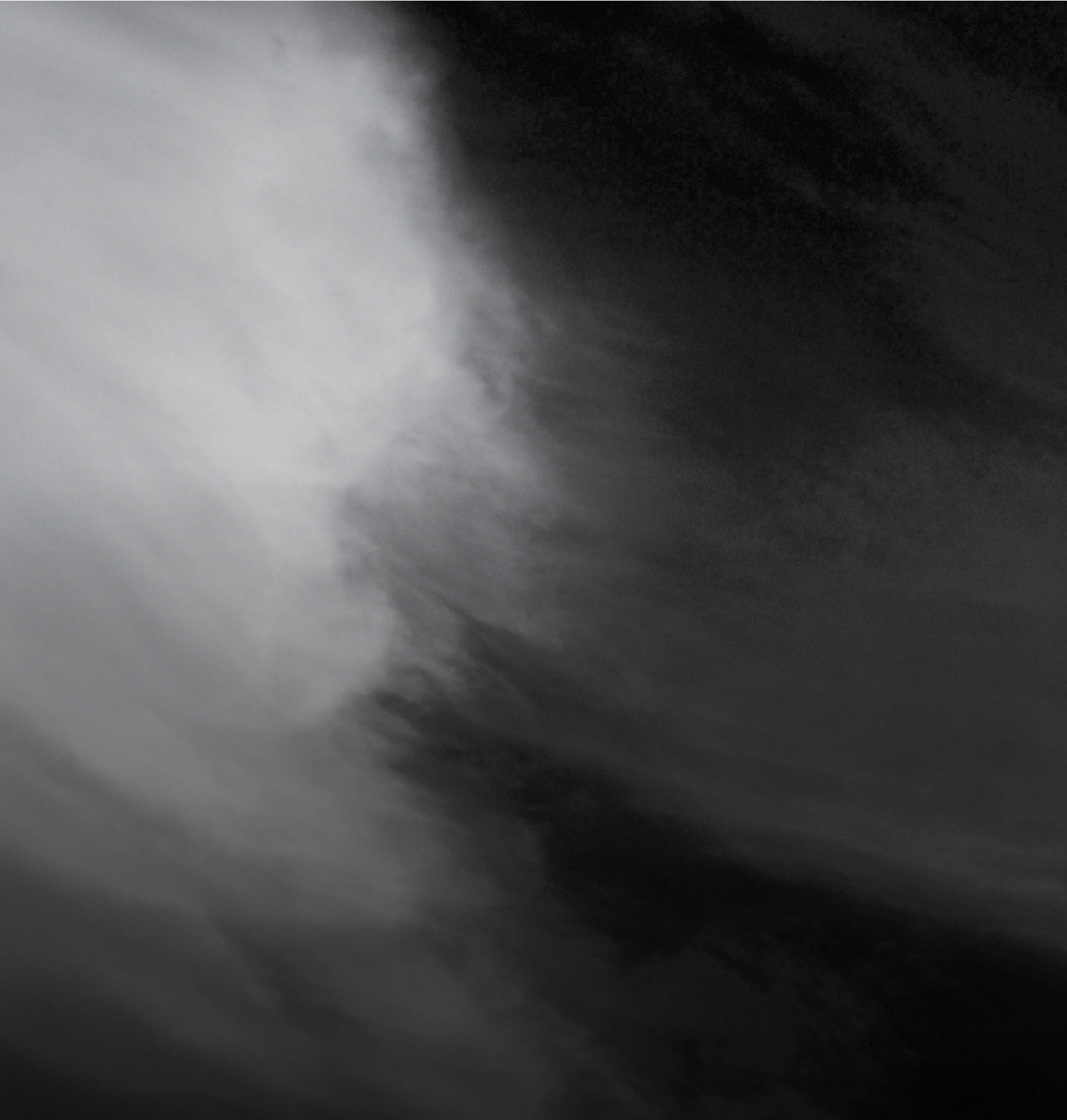

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CRĪTERION

A LITERARY JOURNAL

VOLUME 42 | 2024

LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Contents

24

VOLUME 42

CRĪT*ERION*

A LITERARY JOURNAL

Dear Reader,

WELCOME TO THE 2024 EDITION OF CRĪT*ERION*, a literary journal dedicated to publishing the best of student literary criticism. The ten essays selected for this edition have a particular focus on putting forth perspectives often overlooked or lost within the American politic. Combined, these essays share a sentiment toward shifting how we perceive literature and challenging the practice of literary criticism to be more inclusive and thoughtful. In spirit with the resilience and hope of our talented authors, we would like to begin with a land acknowledgement, acknowledging our privilege as settlers on this stolen Tongva land—a practice in bearing witness in hopes to honor past wrongs and create a space for future rights.

A lot of individuals came together to produce this collection. We would like to thank and congratulate our writers for putting forth excellent work for publication and our editorial team for working overtime to make sure the selection process and finalized drafts were submitted in a timely manner.

We also want to thank our faculty advisor, Sarah Maclay, for her support and helping to organize this edition, and our graphic designer ash good, who has helped with the design of and covers for the *Crīterion* for the past few years.

Lastly, we would like to thank the English Department and Department Chair Dr. K.J. Peters for providing the opportunity for this magazine's publication. We would also like to extend a thank you to Ms. Maria Jackson for her many modes of support.

We hope you enjoy this collection as much as we enjoyed putting it together. Keep on reading, but most importantly, keep thinking critically about literature and the world which it inspires in all of us!

Izabel Mah y Busch & Chet Mlcek

CO-EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

Lessons on Justice Between the Lines of "Coffee"

IZABEL MAH Y BUSCH

IN HER POEM "Coffee," Lorna Dee Cervantes chronicles moments of interpersonal violence centered around U.S. intervention in Latin America. While her poem centralizes on the collection of coffee and cocoa beans from Latin America, her message is timeless and moves throughout various borders. This poetic movement of her message exposes the importance of forms of justice, centered around global and intergenerational justice. It is through the combination of the two that the victimized in her poems can receive true justice and recognition for the violences endured through U.S. globalized capitalism. As Cervantes advocates for global and interpersonal justice, she exposes the pitfalls of retributive justice and the ways it is dehumanizing. Cervantes, first, centralizes the individual, especially Mícaela, in vignette in section V., then opens up notions of borders, especially the temporal, allowing justice to take a fluid form. Finally, Cervantes fragments the linear timeline as if justice is a never-ending process and is never bound to a single fix. Therefore, retributive justice proves to be inadequate, as it assumes injustice to be a moment, as opposed to a continuous process.

Throughout the entire poem, and more specifically in the vignette-like sections I. and II., Cervantes explores themes of justice through the sphere of global justice in her reference to various governing bodies. Her focus, however, is on those victimized. Global justice "inquires to take individual human beings as of primary concern and seeks to give an account of what fairness among such agents involves. . . . Global justice analyses are not precluded from yielding state-level obligations; indeed, they typically do" (Brock 2). This is different from »

IZABEL MAH Y BUSCH is a double major in English and Chicana/o-Latina/o Studies and is graduating in 2024. She has always had an interest in topics concerning race and power. This piece allowed her to explore these topics while also delving into her other passions of English and writing. It was written for a tutorial on prison literature with Professor Rubén Martínez.

international justice. International justice focuses on governing bodies, not the people (2). In global justice there is the opportunity to do both, but with a focus primarily on specific people. This move to focus on the people, those victimized, negates the practicality of retributive justice in two pivotal ways. First, the retributive nature focuses on finding a solution to a singular and finite problem, often leading to scapegoating to place blame and find a culprit, and not the victim. Second, the implied finiteness of the problem, through retributive justice, means that the justice itself is finite and often insufficient means are gifted back to the victimized and their communities, if any are recognized.

In Cervantes's work, she does not ever mention governing bodies to discuss injustice, but the people affected and how the "Bloodied / mud sucks the plastic sandals of a child" (II. lines 1-2). Cervantes is more concerned about the texture of the grief, the way the violence is stained into the ground, and the moments of grasping for life, no matter how futile. The poetic narrative is written from the eyes of "The first woman in line" and her gaze up, "into the coked-up eyes / of her assassin projecting his automatic weapon / into her ear of the whimpering baby at her breast" (Cervantes II. lines 23-26). The various governments of Latin America did not sit in a line, fearing the lives of their children; this woman did. And when discussing notions of justice, she and her child should be the focus, not the government. Cervantes is exposing international justice through the eyes of those most violated in the process; these people are not numbers that a government can catalogue, but names, faces, and bodies. Cervantes is looking at justice through the people and their respective communities to demonstrate the ways in which violence is targeted and patterned, not individualized. Rarely does Cervantes actually reference direct international interference because she is simultaneously exposing the illusive ways in which international governments *do* interfere. Her first section introduces the duality of before and during imperialism and how, "In Guatemala the black buzzard / has replaced the quetzal" (Cervantes I. lines 1-2). The black buzzard is a vulture type of bird, and the quetzal is the national bird of Guatemala. The contrast in colors alone is striking, but the replacement aspect introduces the idea of international intervention. A bird native to the US, the black buzzard, replacing a native bird in Guatemala touches on how the land was permanently affected; "the black buzzard / has replaced" and continues to replace "the quetzal" (I. lines 1-2). The black buzzard, a vulture type of bird, a bird of death, replaces the color, the vibrancy of the small and indigenous-to-Americas quetzal. Towards the end of the first section, she finalizes the notion of duality by taking it outside of the warring Guatemala, stating, "While on Wall Street, / the black sludge of a people trickles through / cappuccino machines like hissing snakes" (I. lines 20 - 22). Cervantes intentionally mentions the root of the international intervention at the end because the interpersonal violence done onto the Indigenous of Guatemala is not always rooted in collecting coffee. The violence started with the capitalist desire for collecting coffee and it allowed a space for violence to run rampant and stray from coffee. It resulted in the

Acteal Massacre that the reader encounters in vignette II. As mentioned earlier, Cervantes never reduces the people to a number, writing, the "Forty-five pair of shoes" connote the lives lost (II. line 30). She also writes on the unnecessary, unbridled violence, demonstrating the ways in which the imperialist action was more than collecting beans; it was a demonstration of control and power over Indigenous bodies of Guatemala. The bodies of the massacre did not have to be "hacked into pieces the size of a bat" (II. line 50). Global justice looks at the people receiving the violence and attempts to articulate justice through their eyes, their needs. It also allows justice to consider systems of power that created the interpersonal moment.

Cervantes expands on this notion of global justice in her fourth section, which explores poet Hans Sahl in "Marseilles. Summer of 1940" (IV. line 1). This section departs from the theme of Latin America by shifting geographically to Marseilles, but it also starts to break up the time period—that is, the poem's presumed historical location. The Acteal Massacre was noted as having happened in "December 22, 1997"; whereas, the fourth section begins in 1940. Intergenerational justice is theorized in three ways: "first whether present generations can be duty-bound because of considerations of justice to past and future people; and second, whether other moral considerations should guide those currently alive in relating to both past and future people" (Meyer 1). The third theorizing argues for including consideration of "lasting significance of past injustices in terms of what is owed to the descendants of the direct victims of the injustices" (1). This is important in Cervantes's work because her opening of the timeline and making it nonlinear exposes the pitfalls of retributive justice, which is bound to a particular moment, the moment of the crime, and is strictly defined through direct punishment. But the nature of injustice is fluid and continual and felt by present and future generations. The justice needed cannot be satiated by a moment or static monetary sum because that sum needs to be compounded over time and given back to heal what was and continues to be taken. An absence within a family due to a massacre is an absence that never gets filled; retribution falsely attempts to fill the unfillable. Cervantes articulates this idea most directly in her fifth section, through the eyes of Mícaela. There was gunfire and:

> The only way out was the steep
> embankment. Her mother took her by the hand
> and carried the two youngest. The bullet
> entered her mother's back. They were found
> by the children's cries. First they shot her
> mother, then the babies. [Mícalea] made no
> sound . . .
> Where once she worked to silence her siblings,
> at 11, Mícaela's work is to be the mouth
> of a people. Behind each of the names
> is a life, lost between the reporter's lines
> (V. lines 3–37, 47-50).

Mícaela survived. Technically, no harm was done to her and her body; and yet, so much of her, that day, was violated. She hid under her dying mother, and as the eldest child had to sit quietly while her siblings cried and heard the moment they passed from this life to the other. She, being the eldest, then has had to forgo her

responsibility as the eldest in order to survive. The massacre has not only taken her family from her, it has forced her to make an impossible decision at the age of eleven. Mícaela gets to relive that moment throughout every day of her life forever, and yet her body is unscathed. The violence is invisible, bodiless. How can a corpse articulate violence done to them if not through the living relatives and friends, if not through the community that witnessed the massacre, if not through a stranger passing by the space who witnessed the violence?

Retributive justice is the tacit US dominant discourse's privileged form of justice that everyone takes for granted, but this form of justice is reductive and ignores the humanity in the interpersonal moments of violence. Retributive justice is defined in three principles as:

> 1) that those who commit certain kinds of wrongful acts, paradigmatically serious crimes, morally deserve to suffer a proportionate punishment;
>
> 2) that it is intrinsically morally good—good without reference to any other goods that might arise—if some legitimate punisher gives them the punishment they deserve;
>
> and 3) that it is morally impermissible intentionally to punish the innocent or to inflict disproportionately large punishments on wrongdoers. (Walen 1)

Retributive justice argues for justice that is morally equal by a proportionate punishment. How do you proportion the loss of life, the position Mícaela was put into and the emotional violence of silence she had to take on in order to survive? To kill or punish the soldier that murdered Mícaela's family would not be adequate justice because there were international governments involved that legislated the soldier's presence; there was a commander that okayed the massacre; there was a bias already there against Indigenous Latines. How do you apportion all of the power dynamics at play that had to happen before the interpersonal moment? The soldiers were there for coffee and cocoa beans and yet, "310 kilos of cocaine are found in Mazatán, / the municipality where the governor, Julio César / Ruíz Ferro, has two large mansions," and the list goes on (Cervantes VI. 34-36). Retributive justice would not scratch the surface of collusion, bribes, and murders in the name of a bean. And retributive justice does not look at the people; in fact, it attempts to negate humanity and to strip the moment of violence into an objective piece. The act of finding an equivalent price is dehumanizing because it assumes that the people afflicted by the violence don't have a memory, don't continually experience an absence in their family, and that mourning isn't a lifelong process. Cervantes demands justice through the frameworks of global and intergenerational justice to ensure that the individual, the person, is seen and is the focal point of the justice. Retributive justice privileges the perpetrator, the big business, and the governments, as they are often not living entities and are satiated with monetary sums.

In her poem "Coffee," Lorna Dee Cervantes explores notions of justice by first centralizing the individual, opening up notions of borders, and breaking up the timeline in order to criticize retributive forms of justice,

the assumed form of justice, as inadequate. She particularly describes situations that could only find real justice through a combination of global and intergenerational justice which should replace the current practice of retributive justice because it is dehumanizing. Cervantes additionally implies the ways in which retributive justice allows for capitalism, the US, and other foreign governments to profit from violence without there being a framework in place to ever articulate these particular instances of violence, but especially those done to marginal communities. Justice for the people described in Cervantes's poem must be continual because the injustices they have faced at the hands of US imperialism are continual and forever. **«**

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Chosen Ones, Outcasts, Basilisks, and Masquerades: Why Nnedi Okorafor's *Akata Witch* Is So Much More Than "The Nigerian Harry Potter"

BENNETT MEYER

IN THE WORLD of young adult fiction, few works are as prolific as J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. Following the release of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* in 1997, myriad imitators and books that took inspiration from the Harry Potter series entered the young adult fiction landscape. Nnedi Okorafor's *Akata Witch*, often described as "the Nigerian *Harry Potter*," is not one of them. While *Harry Potter* and *Akata Witch* have some surface-level similarities, they differ significantly in how they utilize young adult fantasy genre tropes, portray discrimination in their magical worlds, and take inspiration from real-world mythologies and cultures. *Harry Potter* and *Akata Witch* are so profoundly different that comparing them does *Akata Witch*—the more important and relevant story for young adult audiences today—a disservice.

The *Harry Potter* series and *Akata Witch* both feature "chosen one" protagonists, a common trope in young adult fantasy stories. While Rowling and Okorafor utilize many of the same genre tropes in their stories and The *Harry Potter* series was written years before *Akata Witch*, it is important to note that these

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tropes existed long before *Harry Potter*. *Akata Witch* was not inspired by the *Harry Potter* series any more than by other fantasy stories, such as J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of The Rings*, a massively influential work also featuring a chosen one protagonist. The *Harry Potter* series' eponymous hero, Harry Potter, was chosen to defeat the series' primary antagonist, Lord Voldemort, in a prophecy, leading to his parents' murder, his attempted murder, and his iconic lightning bolt scar. In many ways, Harry's connection to Voldemort defines his character and is why he is seen as the chosen one in the first place, permanently marking him as "the boy who lived" with the scar on his forehead. Similarly, Sunny's importance in the Leopard world is heightened by her connection to *Akata Witch*'s antagonist, the serial killer Black Hat Otokoto. Unlike Harry, whose fate was tied to Voldemort through a prophecy for unknown reasons, Sunny is linked to Black Hat because of the direct and traceable actions of her grandmother, who was his teacher. Because of Sunny's connection to Black Hat, she is chosen to be part of an Oha Coven: the group that will attempt to defeat him. Neither Harry nor Sunny chose to fight their story's antagonist; they were chosen by forces beyond their control.

In their book *Young Adult Fantasy Conventions, Originality, and Reproducibility*, author Kim Wilkins examines the purpose of chosen one narratives in young adult fantasy stories. Wilkins explains, "[The] chosen-for-greatness fantasy narrative has an intensified function when coupled with YA. Michael Levy and Farah Mendlesohn suggest that YA texts are 'intended, in part, to support young people in the belief that their lives *really are important*'" (Wilkins 20). Harry Potter and Sunny are characterized as chosen ones because Rowling and Okorafor want young readers to insert themselves into their stories through their chosen-for-greatness protagonists. Wilkins continues, "Adolescence is generally recognized as a period of identity formation, self-fashioning, and self-reflection, which adults may well interpret as self-obsession" (Wilkins 20). Like Harry Potter and Sunny, adolescent readers are going through a transitional period in their lives. For many children, transitioning from childhood to adulthood feels just as jarring as Harry's transition from a nobody to a famous wizard or Sunny's transition from an outcast to a valued member of the Leopard world. By imagining themselves as chosen ones entering a strange new adult world, young readers can better connect with protagonists like Harry and Sunny while developing a framework to understand and cope with their changing lives.

In young adult fantasy stories, being the chosen one often has an othering effect on the chosen hero, making them an outcast in their world. Rowling and Okorafor utilize their chosen one protagonists differently to present differing ideas about the transition from childhood to adulthood and the reality of being an outcast that are characteristic of the *Harry Potter* series and *Akata Witch*'s core differences. For Harry, finding out he is not only a wizard but also the chosen one comes as a shock, but he soon acclimates to his new magical reality. Of course, not everything for Harry is easy—learning the ins and outs of being a wizard takes time, and he discovers that there are people at Hogwarts and in the larger world that wish him harm, but

the magical world that Harry enters is one that values him. In many ways, being the chosen one who must carry the weight of having to defeat the most evil wizard in the world makes Harry's life easier. Before he attended Hogwarts, Harry was an orphan who was abused by his aunt and uncle and ostracized because of the scar on his forehead. At Hogwarts, Harry's scar draws the people who become his closest friends to him, and those friends are what define both Harry's transition to adulthood and Rowling's views on growing up.

In an article about the *Harry Potter* series' portrayal of adolescence, Shauna Van Praagh explores the effect Harry's friends have on him as he grows up. Van Praagh says, "It is with [Ron and Hermione] that Harry not only navigates his way through school and the magical community but also develops his capacity for care and sharing" (6). Like Harry, Ron and Hermione are also outcasts. Hermione was born to muggle parents, and in the world of the *Harry Potter* series, wizards with muggle parents, derogatorily referred to as "mudbloods," are often seen as outcasts. While Ron comes from a long line of wizards, he is also seen as an outcast because of his family's low economic standing. Ron and Hermione are drawn to Harry because, as the chosen one, he is also an outcast, and the three of them help each other through the uncomfortable transition from childhood to adulthood. Rowling suggests that, while growing up is difficult, especially for outcasts, it can be better navigated with the support of friends who share similar experiences.

However, the *Harry Potter* series' portrayal of growing up is fundamentally flawed. Going to a school with other children who want to be your friends and teachers who care about you is an ideal—a luxury far from universal. Harry is only an outsider because he is the chosen one and an orphan. In every other way, Harry is just as privileged as the spoiled Draco Malfoy. Unlike Ron and Hermione, Harry's parents were both wizards and well-off financially. Not to mention, Harry is also a white European like the majority of Hogwarts students. Beyond his scar, Harry Potter is similar to other Hogwarts students who are, by and large, very privileged. In writing through Harry's eyes and expecting readers to relate to him, Rowling assumes that they share Harry's privileges, but by doing so, she limits her story's accessibility and presents a narrow view of the world that fails to challenge young readers.

In *Akata Witch*, everything about Sunny marks her as an outcast. Outside of the Leopard world, Sunny is an albino child from America who lives in Nigeria. In the Leopard world, Sunny is a Free Agent whose grandmother was Black Hat's teacher. Harry is an outcast in the muggle world but quickly finds his place at Hogwarts. In stark contrast, Sunny was an outcast before entering the Leopard world, and her life only becomes more challenging once she awakens to her potential as a Leopard person. Unlike Harry, Sunny has a family and parents who are actively involved in her life, and once she becomes a Leopard person, she has to hide her identity from the people closest to her, all while balancing non-magical school with lessons in juju. After entering the Leopard world, "Sunny spent the next month deep in books. She was doing homework for two schools" (Okorafor 173).

Nothing ever comes easy for Sunny; being a Leopard person does not solve her problems like being a wizard solves Harry's.

Even the process of learning juju is more difficult for Sunny because she is an outcast. While Harry is not part of the group that is discriminated against in his magical world—a "mudblood"—Sunny is. As a Free Agent—a Leopard person who did not inherit their powers from their parents—Sunny is discriminated against and talked down to by other Leopard people, and the book that is supposed to teach Free Agents like her about the Leopard world. Shortly after she starts reading it for the first time, we see that "Sunny threw the book across the room. How am I supposed to read this? she thought. What a pompous, discriminating idiot of an author. If they have racism in the Leopard world, this book is so "racist" against Free Agents" (Okorafor 97). While she works through her frustration of learning about the Leopard world as a Free Agent and being an outcast, Sunny's friends Orlu, Chichi, and Sasha support her even though they are not outcasts in the same way she is, at least in the Leopard world. Like Rowling, Okorafor suggests that the challenges of growing up as an outcast can be overcome with the help of supportive friends, but she does so much more inclusively.

In *Akata Witch*, Sunny's story is that of an outcast—something that is deeply personal to Okorafor. Sunny's friends did not come to her because she is a Leopard person, a Free Agent, or related to Black Hat's teacher; she had to work hard to form relationships with her friends and become accepted into the Leopard world. Sunny only discovered that she was a Leopard person in the first place because she befriended Orlu, who introduced her to Chichi, the one who saw the potential in her. Okorafor makes no assumptions about where her readers come from or what privileges they have. Instead, Okorafor treats all of her readers like they are outcasts, just like Sunny. For the first half of *Akata Witch*, each chapter is prefaced by a short section from the fictional book that Sunny has to read to learn about the Leopard world. These sections provide integral context about the Leopard world that readers will need to understand *Akata Witch*'s story, but they also give the reader direct insight into how Sunny feels as an outcast through the language they use. For example, the book says, "After your initiation [into the Leopard world], make sure someone is there to help you, for you will not be able to help yourself, so new the world will be to you and so fragile. You're like an infant" (Okorafor 96). Okorafor's use of the second person in these prefaces challenges readers by making them imagine themselves as outcasts regardless of who they are or where they come from.

The idea of being an outcast is central to *Akata Witch*'s story. The word "Akata" itself is a derogatory term in West Africa for Black Americans, labeling them as outcasts and othering them. In an article for *Brittle Paper*, an online literary magazine for African literature, author Chukwuebuka Ibeh quotes an interview that Nnedi Okorafor gave for *The New Yorker*'s Radio Hour where she discussed her experiences with the term Akata: "Anyone who has been called that term and fits into the category of the definition knows that it is not a nice word. It's a derogatory term for Black Americans, but

that also includes Nigerian Americans as well. This is a word that I have grown up hearing and being called and grappling with and yelling about" (Ibeh). Like Sunny, Okorafor was born in the United States to Nigerian parents, and while she was not able to return to Nigeria like Sunny did because of the Nigerian Civil War, she had to grapple with many of the same challenges that Sunny faced as an American and a Nigerian. While Rowling touches on what it is like to be an outcast in the *Harry Potter* series, being an outcast—being Akata—is a core part of *Akata Witch*'s and Okorafor's identities.

Akata Witch is free to treat its readers like outcasts because Okorafor takes inspiration from real-world cultures and mythologies that are less exposed than the European mythology and culture that inspired the *Harry Potter* series, and the majority of young adult fantasy stories. In an article about the *Harry Potter* series' mythological influences, author Peggy Huey says,

> "J.K. Rowling's mythical world of Muggles and Wizards found in the Hany Potter series introduces today's readers to a world grounded in mythology that dates back to the ancient Greeks. In doing so, she follows a tradition of other great British authors through the ages as varied as Edmund Spenser (who created the mythical kingdom ruled by *The Faerie Queene*) and J. R. R. Tolkien (who created Middle-earth, populated by hobbits, elves, and orcs as well as humans)" (Huey 65).

So much of the *Harry Potter* series and other predominant works of fantasy like *The Lord of the Rings* are heavily rooted in European mythology, which itself draws from ancient Greek mythology in many ways. Magical creatures like elves, phoenixes, and basilisks, which play an important role in the story of the *Harry Potter* series, are all common in European folklore.

Even the setting of Hogwarts draws heavily from European mythology and culture. Beyond being inhabited by wizards and magical creatures, Hogwarts strongly resembles real-life British boarding schools, a type of setting that may be unfamiliar to many readers. Huey touches on this in their article, explaining that, "Unfortunately, not everyone reading any of these works today understands the significance of choices these and other authors have made when alluding to [European] myths" (Huey 65). While the *Harry Potter* series' mythological and cultural influences may be familiar to many Western readers, they also make the story unapproachable to readers unfamiliar with the hallmarks of Western fantasy or those who hail from other cultures. Rowling expects readers to understand European culture and mythology in the same way she expects them to understand Harry's privileges, making her story inaccessible to readers from other cultures and unchallenging for readers familiar with those influences.

Like Rowling, Okorafor draws from mythology and culture to create *Akata Witch*'s magical world. However, unlike Rowling, Okorafor does not expect readers to be familiar with the Nigerian culture or mythology that inspired *Akata Witch* to understand it. Though *Akata Witch* is told from the perspective of a character who comes from America and

understands Western culture, Sunny's perspective only serves to aid Western readers and does not exclude readers unfamiliar with Western culture. A notable example of Nigerian mythology and culture in *Akata Witch* is its masquerades. Masquerade ceremonies—ceremonies involving the use of masks—are a long-standing Nigerian cultural tradition. In his book about Nigerian masquerades, author David Griffiths explains their importance in Nigerian culture: "Masqueraders are regarded as special people in their communities forming a crucial and fundamental link between past and present generations" (Griffiths 2). The masks used in Nigerian masquerade ceremonies are said to form a connection to the spirit world of ancestors and appear strikingly similar to how spirit faces are described in *Akata Witch*. While the masquerades and spirit faces in *Akata Witch* are not necessarily connected, spirit faces are similar to real-world Nigerian masquerade ceremony masks because they form a connection between Leopard people and the Leopard world: an ethereal place that is strongly connected to spirits and the ancestors. The masquerades in *Akata Witch* are more similar to magical spirits connected to the ancestors rather than real-world Nigerian masquerade ceremonies, showing how Okorafor loosely ties real elements of Nigerian culture and mythology together to create something wholly original.

By using Nigerian culture and mythology to create an entirely new kind of magical world, Okorafor distances *Akata Witch* from the whiteness of the young adult fantasy genre and challenges readers to learn about an unfamiliar culture from an outsider's perspective. Since its inception, the fantasy genre has been dominated by whiteness. In their article *Can Fantasy Free the Fantastic?: Whiteness, Marginalization, and the Productive Potential of the Fantastic in Nnedi Okorafor's Akata Witch*, author Bevin Roue explores whiteness in fantasy and how *Akata Witch* distances fantasy from whiteness. Roue says, "Many of the [fantasy] genre's more popular works nestle themselves in white, European, medievalesque worlds—from J. R. R. Tolkien's Middle Earth to C. S. Lewis's Narnia to Terry Brooks's Shannara to Lloyd Alexander's Prydain to J. K. Rowling's Hogwarts. These worlds, predominantly populated by white people saved by white heroes, cast whiteness as pervasive yet leave it unnamed and uninterrogated" (Roue 81). While famous fantasy stories like the *Harry Potter* series are rooted in the whiteness of European culture and mythology, they refuse to challenge readers by exposing them to other cultures or asking them to question or even acknowledge the whiteness of the genre. The pervasive whiteness of stories like the *Harry Potter* series also makes them inaccessible to readers unfamiliar with European culture and mythology, often expecting them to be already familiar with the genre's mainstays.

By treating all readers like outcasts and expecting them to learn the ins and outs of the Leopard world from the same starting point, Okorafor creates a magical world that decenters the whiteness of the fantasy genre and treats everyone equally. Roue further examines the inclusivity of the Leopard world, explaining that,"Nigerian Leopards are able to practice juju across boundaries of language, ethnicity, nationality, and religion" (Roue 88).

Like Okorafor does not expect her readers to come from any particular culture or social status, the Leopard world does not either. Even the term "Leopard people" is used to step away from the whiteness of the fantasy genre, exchanging "witch" and "wizard" for something more general and inclusive. This inclusiveness symbolizes *Akata Witch* and the *Harry Potter* series' core differences. Rowling expects readers to be familiar with European culture and mythology, accepting them if they are and othering them if they are not. Okorafor makes no such assumptions, putting all readers in the place of the outcast yet welcoming them into the world of *Akata Witch* anyway. By learning about the Leopard world from the perspective of an outcast, *Akata Witch* challenges readers to put themselves into the shoes of someone who must enter into a culture that does not accept them, creating empathy and nudging them to question the ubiquitous whiteness of other fantasy stories.

Akata Witch and the *Harry Potter* series share some surface-level similarities—they are both young adult fantasy stories with protagonists who enter a previously unknown magical world and discover they are chosen for greatness. So what? Comparing *Akata Witch* to the *Harry Potter* series does Okorafor and her story a disservice. *Akata Witch* is more important and relevant than the *Harry Potter* series for readers today. Okorafor teaches children valuable lessons about growing up and discovering identity, but she also challenges them to understand a new culture from the perspective of an outcast while telling a story that is accessible to everyone. Most of all, *Akata Witch* is a deeply personal story inspired by Okorafor's experiences as a Nigerian and an American—of being an outcast—of being "Akata." It is not "Nigeria's *Harry Potter*"; it is Nnedi Okorafor's *Akata Witch*, and that is what makes it special. «

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The Photographic Femininity in André Breton's *Nadja*

ANTONIO RADIC

ANDRÉ BRETON, the Pope of Surrealism, rejoiced in the light of the unconscious mind, claiming such a transgression against modernity and rationality would lead to a new age of free expression. Influenced by Sigmund Freud's The Uncanny (1919), Breton defined Surrealism as bringing to fruition the "actual functioning of thought" through any expressive medium (428). The movement emphasized the superior source of this pure existence as being dreams portrayed through art and literature. However, Breton's motivations were actually not to encourage the commodification of surrealism but to unleash the realm of the unconscious mind as a way of life. Surrealism, in Breton's initial concept, was to be a process of practicing automatism, which would revolutionize the power of individuality against modern society and all its oppressive and divisive structures—including reason. Breton's book *Nadja* (1928) is one attempt at navigating the real world through automatic perspective and means. The book is a retelling of everyday life and the mundane chance occurrences that Breton experienced in his native Paris, France. Based on real events, the book includes many images, such as photographs of an urban landscape of Porte Saint-Denis in France, a portrait of a clairvoyant named Madame Sacco, and a surrealist portrait drawing made by Nadja of herself and Breton, to help corroborate the events described and add to the narrative in a way prose can't.

In Breton's book, his treatment of Nadja as initially a real-life, active person to a passive, literary afterthought is representative of a central point in the logic of Surrealism. The role of Nadja, and women and femininity in »

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general, is thus laid out as an ideal body able to carry out the shift in cultural and social politics. However, when considering the three photographs mentioned above, the negation of women as individuals with autonomy appears subtly but violently, presenting a traditional reflection of gender roles instead of a true revolutionary, superior existence against the Enlightenment values of reason.

In the scholarship on *Nadja*, Surrealism, and photography, what has been found is a mindful connection between Breton's book and the cultural reality of gender and power dynamics. It is to the point that the connection is not only unsettling but also, in its inclusion of certain photographs and their implications, plainly visible. To start, the origin of Surrealism's introduction to the world and its source of influence seem the obvious preliminary points of focus. In short summary, Breton's First Manifesto of Surrealism (1924) espouses the magnificent light of the unconscious, praising the dream world as a freeing state of authenticity based on Freud's findings on the unconscious mind and its dealings in psychoanalysis. More importantly, Breton starts his argument by claiming that the imagination is the way to a "freedom" of possibility, standing against a reality that is unjust and manipulative at its core (433-34). Thus, if Surrealism is a morally good ideology that is to be adopted, it is imperative to turn to Freud's "The Uncanny" (1919)—the inspiration behind the manifesto. Freud theorizes that the experience of the uncanny is psychologically linked to the return of the repressed (225), hence Breton's praise of the unconscious. Freud also categorizes this phenomenon under a 'dark' aesthetics concerned with feelings and perception of the world (219-20). Though he later focuses on the uncanny in literature, his theory on the relationship between the two can be applied to other mediums such as art and photography. Vincent Kaufmann's article, "What are (Breton's) Women for?" (1987), a secondary source on the use of female characters in Breton's surrealist writings, touches upon the main contradiction of the whole movement. It is indeed the subtle "symbolic" violence of Breton's treatment of Nadja, who is based on a real woman he encountered, that Kaufmann sees as a clear attempt or result of "domination" of and "fascination" (64) with the female body and soul. Andrea Loselle's study of photographs, "André Breton's and Eugène Atget's Valentines" (2009), meanwhile, leads to a more technical understanding of the relationship between surrealist photography and anecdotes.

Though acknowledging Kaufmann's argument, Loselle expresses the "inscrutability" of the automatic form—whether it is revealed in writing or visual media (80). However, in Rosalind Krauss's thorough analysis, "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism" (1981), the specific differences of automatic writing and photography are explored as they are defined by Breton himself, who had an initial preference for textual perception of the world over mechanically rendering it. Thus, her examination of Western culture's conflict with the processes of seeing and human visualization and how they specifically impact surrealist photography and writing is included in the analysis of the photographs from Nadja in this essay. Lastly, Mario Vargas Llosa's review of Breton's Nadja and surrealist beliefs, "Nadja as Fiction"

(2000), opposes what the movement claims to be true. It is the passage of time and the way in which literature and fiction has evolved to a self-sustaining universe that have ultimately betrayed Breton. Of course, Llosa's argument remains too thought-provoking to remain left out as it not only critiques Breton's work in the contemporary era, but it also claims that what Breton was pushing for, such as automatism, in *Nadja* is what brought about his own contradictions on Surrealism and fiction writing (53-59).

Nadja begins with Breton gathering up his ideas of the Surrealist way of life, of questioning his own identity and his blurred relationship with others. He describes his day-to-day life and the random encounters he has with strange yet interesting people. Though the first image discussed here is introduced in the book well before Nadja's introduction, it is important to note that eventually, plot-wise, Breton's ramblings and accidental meetings lead to him coming across the peculiar yet captivating woman on the street and saying hello to her. However, his interactions with Nadja gradually dissolve in meaning, and Breton ultimately lets her fade into a fictitious, perhaps subjective and introspective, existence. The first image of interest is the urban landscape of Porte Saint-Denis, a triumphal gate, similar to the Arc de Triomphe, that is in Paris (see Fig. 1). The caption calls it "Plate 8" and it includes a quote of the book's text with a reference to the page where the full excerpt can be found (Breton 34). The full excerpt reads:

> Meanwhile, you can be sure of meeting me in Paris, of not spending more than three days without seeing me pass, toward the end of the afternoon, along the Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle between the Matin printing office and the Boulevard de Strasbourg. I don't know why it should be precisely here that my feet take me, here that I almost invariably go without specific purpose, without anything to induce me but this obscure clue: namely that it (?) will happen here. I cannot see, as I hurry along, what could constitute for me, even without my knowing it, a magnetic pole in either space or time. No: not even the extremely handsome, extremely useless Porte Saint-Denis. (Breton 32)

PLATE 8. No: not even the extremely handsome, extremely useless Porte Saint-Denis . . .
(SEE PAGE 32)

FIG. 1. ANDRE BRETON, PARIS, PLATE 8, 1928, *NADJA*.

Breton continues this passage by explaining that not even the movie *The Grip of the*

Octopus, presuming he also means the theater that premiered the film, serves as a "magnetic pole" for him—though, ironically, he goes on to explain the plot of the movie and then devotes a tangent to movie theaters and French cinema (32-37). According to Loselle, Breton's photographs in *Nadja* are provided to reinforce the retelling of events, to establish credibility and proof that the places he mentions exist, or to simply recreate the feel and atmosphere of his past for the readers (80). While looking at the photograph of Porte Saint-Denis, though clearly old, it doesn't necessarily take readers back to the past. Even the closest figure standing in the midground is still too small and blurry to reveal clues of a different time (Fig. 1). Perhaps a more recent photograph in the same position would show the development of streets and thus more automobile traffic, but with that said, as also pointed out by Loselle, it is "banal" (80). Many photographs in the book are uninteresting, whether it is due to the content or how the camera captures it. Indeed, the camera captures reality and proves that the people or locations Breton talks about existed at the time of publication. However, this objective proof does little for the reader—in fact, it produces the opposite effect. Just like a more recent image of Porte Saint-Denis would include cars and other vehicles, the photo provided by Breton shows what it lacks, and therefore photography's own limitations. Loselle affirms this, explaining that it "gives us no privileged access to the personal meaning of events recounted" (81). The photo might partially take the viewer back in time, but the way the subject is captured provides an objective reality that ultimately disrupts the connection between author and reader. It is almost impossible to discern why Breton felt uninspired by Porte Saint-Denis or what compelled him to include a photo of it.

The disconnect between author and reader in terms of conveying significance is tackled by Kaufmann and his focus on the book's feminine presence. Breton and Nadja's relationship in the events of the book are parallel to the relationship between Breton and all his readers. Since Nadja is based on a real person, Breton, to convey her as a symbolic, metaphorical element of the surrealist anecdote, slowly diminishes her ethos and, thus, her agency. She becomes crazy and unwanted by Breton, and though he increasingly gets disturbed by her real-life experiences, this isolation is expressed as self-inducing. Nadja grows from being a distinguished woman to Breton's personal reader, an entire audience, of his personal writing and ideas (Kaufmann 59-60). What this plot point of gaining control over Nadja exemplifies and mirrors is the way every reader must react to Breton; somehow, conformity to his writing is the way to gain understanding. Looking at the image of Porte Saint-Denis, it is obviously a site of archaic architecture set in France. A more critical examination might focus on the striking geometry and the contrast between flat, smooth textures and undulating decorations and carvings. While not surrealist at first glance, the photo does produce an uncanny feeling of a face, or some other familiar ancient shape—the three orifices are strikingly bright on the other side (Fig. 1). The light and shadows in the two rectangular walkways at the bottom of the obelisks appear like eyes while the upside-down, pear-shaped opening from the main rounded

arch may indicate a cartoonish nose. Nevertheless, the rounded shape and appearance of light contained in the central arch connote a female characteristic since it is contrasted by, and situated between, two phallic-like obelisks (Fig. 1). Of course, this might be conjecture, but it is in the spirit of Breton's surrealism to act as a reader and discover meaning, a role he thought vital to the movement. The reader must transport themselves to Porte Saint-Denis in the 1920s and be uninterested in the monument. The reason for it being both "extremely handsome" and "extremely useless" is something to contemplate (Breton 32). Perhaps "handsome" is foretelling, or it is the arch's hybrid anatomy that makes it "useless." In any case, gender is at play in the Parisian urban landscape photograph, accounting for Breton's underlying "fascination" with and "domination" (Kaufmann 64) of the female identity.

Concerning the previously mentioned contrasts of geometrical shapes and textures of the Porte Saint-Denis photograph (Fig. 1), the simultaneous dualism that perhaps fascinated and bored Breton is an example of his theory of Convulsive Beauty. This theory is mentioned, in fact, in the very last sentence of *Nadja*: "Beauty will be CONVULSIVE or will not be at all" (Breton 160). Indeed, Loselle claims that Breton's photographs, apart from their "inscrutability," illustrate Convulsive Beauty (80-81). When looking at the second photograph (see Fig. 2), the most striking element is the androgynous face of the portrait subject, a clairvoyant named "Madame Sacco." She is brought up in one of the very few footnotes of the book, which explains the significance of Nadja assuming the identity of "Hélène," a

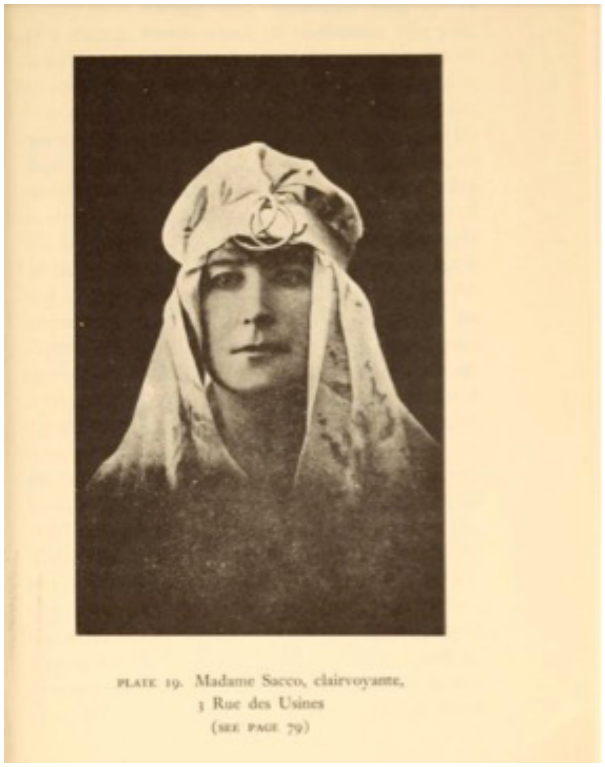

FIG. 2. ANDRE BRETON, PARIS, PLATE 19, 1928, *NADJA*.

character in one of Breton's other writings. The footnote specifically details the rarity of anyone named "Hélène" in Breton's life and the reliable prediction from Madame Sacco that a "Hélène" will "greatly [occupy]" his mind (Breton 79). Nadja turning into Hélène, as random as it is, showcases the uncanny subject of the double. As mentioned in Kaufmann's article, Nadja slowly loses her agency and identity as a real woman. Thus, her inclination to mix up her own name reoccurs not just in the main text but also in the footnote. One of Freud's examples of the uncanny is the double, the primal human instinct of escaping death which develops in the infancy stages of human life, and its uncanny effect is due to its return when this human instinct is no longer needed (234-236). Nadja is experiencing her

double in Hélène, whether she knows Madame Sacco's prediction or not. The only other substantial aspect of this emergence of the double in Breton's writing is Nadja's connection to Madame Sacco. The footnote additionally mentions another female clairvoyant named "Hélène Smith" (Breton 80). Through all these connections, most importantly Breton's supposed preoccupation with a "Hélène," it is not ridiculous to argue that Breton himself is also experiencing his double. The addition of the footnote, something that, contrary to Surrealism, is a tool of reason in literature, is significant because it is a textual area where Breton can be brutally honest—even more than he claims to be by simply writing an autobiography. Moreover, the physical evidence that Breton may consider Madame Sacco as his double, in this already complex web of doubles, is his own face. He includes a self-portrait near the end of his book (149). If it is not enough that Breton also has androgynous features, the way he is photographed is very similar to Madame Sacco. In fact, there are only six photographic portraits in the book—all the men, except Breton, look straight at the lens while all the women, in addition to Breton, look off to the left (Breton 26; 30; 47; 81; 137; 149).

The second most striking element of Madame Sacco's portrait is the headdress and its illumination against the third striking element, the dark background. These last two elements make up surrealist manifestations of the clairvoyant's significance, both in the book and to the movement in general. Krauss correlates Breton's Convulsive Beauty to the representational ways humanity visually interprets the world. Her distinction between "perception" and "representation," the former being the way reality looks and the latter being abstract depictions of the world, and her discussion of which one lends itself better to Surrealism, lead to a paradox.

Because Breton favored automatic writing to tap into the unconscious mind, any visual medium was criticized as representational, fraudulent. Krauss then points out that, contrary to his views, Breton grew fond of photography, which is the art of capturing the light of the bad reality he aimed at revolting against (Krauss 10-13). Breton simultaneously accepted writing as the true expression of the mind and the representational aspects of visual media because Convulsive Beauty signifies the surreal. The mind, according to Surrealism, is the pure state of truth but it is also meant to defy the social reality that praises reason and hierarchical visibility. Thus, the notion of a clairvoyant, though absurd in the realm of science, fits perfectly well with Surrealism—the powers of the mind are mastered and channeled. Madam Sacco's portrait includes the headdress and the mysterious dark background because it is the only way for the reader of the image to understand the psychic's deeper significance behind the realistic limitations of the camera lens. It is fiction coming to life. The caption, which includes the word "clairvoyante," is not the sole determinant that the image is of a psychic medium. The written word and the image work together to create a reality, a familiarity, in the reader. Of course, Madame Sacco's picture, the only spectacular and truly uncanny portrait in the book, is a woman, Breton's representation of Surrealism itself.

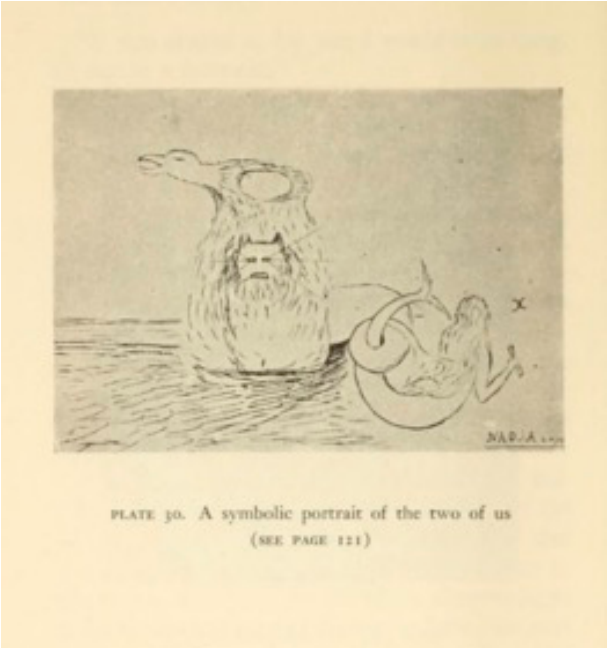

FIG. 3. ANDRE BRETON, PARIS, PLATE 30, 1928, *NADJA*.

The last photograph is of a drawing created by Nadja (see Fig. 3), one of nine such images reproduced in the book. It is best described by providing the excerpt to which it is referenced:

> The drawing, dated November 18, 1926, consists of a symbolic portrait of the two of us: the siren, which is how she saw herself always from behind and from this angle, holds a scroll in her hand; the monster with gleaming eyes has the front of its body caught in a kind of eagle-head vase, filled with feathers representing ideas. (Breton 121)

When comparing the description to the actual drawing, however, the narrator's choice of words is questionable. The "monster" though correctly labeled, is an underwhelming word. Though, if it is indeed an abstract portrait of Breton and Nadja from Nadja's point of view, describing precisely what the monster looks like might be useless in terms of the purposes of Surrealism. The only way to realistically describe the monster is that it appears to be a feline sea creature with a tail—except it is not a sea lion. The "eagle-head vase" is also an uncanny rendering of the drawing, since in the reality of Nadja's creation, it is too large to be an actual vase and it also has feathers. Furthermore, whether or not it was Nadja's intent for the feathers to be "representing ideas," readers are limited to Breton's description. He could be intentionally withholding these "ideas," leaving them vague, or whatever they may be, they are, if only partially, informed by him and not by Nadja. It is not visually clear what these ideas could be but, remembering that Breton is represented by Nadja in the drawing, the true meaning is probably concealed from him, as well.

This loss of meaning between words and sketch drawings, from definitions and representations, is the context in which Llosa, in his review of *Nadja*, prescribes the book as a work of fiction. Fiction is defined as the blend of "words and fantasy" that creates a "separate world." While fiction can be rooted in reality, it can never bring reality to life, and it always seeks to contain a fabricated universe. Evidence of this is Breton as his own narrator, which doesn't necessarily reflect reality the way photography objectifies it, but it instead brings all elements of his story to his mercy (Llosa 55-56). It is this "mercy," this power, that Breton realizes he possesses during one of the meetings with Nadja, thus bending her will and reality to his own (Breton 91; Kaufmann 60-61). Furthermore, Llosa makes several points on

how the passage of time has treated *Nadja*, Breton, and Surrealism, as well as the changes in the definition of "fiction" (53-55). Though his discussion might veer towards a technical complication with Surrealist concepts, such as a focus on the automatic process rather than the end-product and the everlasting name or phantom that is the ultimate, undeniable side effect of Breton's revolution, the contradiction still stands in the reality of Nadja and the inception of her character. From the moment Breton wrote the first sentence of the book, "Who am I?" (11), his questioning of his own identity instead of Nadja's is a sign that he knew all along the problem of his rendering of reality. Mixing the realms of literature and writing, visual arts, and reality is impossible. Thus, Nadja's drawing is undoubtedly a window into her mind, a photographed thought, but its accessibility and its meaning are dulled by Breton—killing her reality.

In his manifesto, Breton claims that "there remains a madness" among individuals who already "derive a great deal of comfort and consolation from their imagination," despite all the restrictions of a logical society that inhibits human freedom (433). While it seems that Breton attempts and even claims to capture reality in writing and various forms of photography, he does so via an intrinsic avenue of thought. Of course, this is how he defines Surrealism, as the unmistakable evidence of the "function of thought" (Breton 438). Though photography is inherently incapable of producing a surrealist work of art, it is the return of repressed images, feelings, and actions, of natural and psychological human phenomena, that induces a recognition or comprehension in waking reality. This is the theory of Convulsive Beauty and Surrealism. After reading Breton's *Nadja*, the only thing then that can be determined is a clarification of what he objectifies in his mind and how he chooses to represent his cognition of the mundane and marvelous beauty. Nadja, as a woman, is his exemplar. As the exemplar for the entire movement and its principles in general, she cannot be, unless the Surrealist revolution depends on irrational, but what was then considered mostly rational, notions of gender. «

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Questions of the Spiritual and Secular in Hadewijch and Newsom

CONNER WILSON

IN CONSIDERING the history of poetic writing on religious and metaphysical matters by women, we would be well-served to think not only about how religious themes have been expressed in secular imagery, nor only about how the secular is expressed through the religious, but about how the lines between these two grand realms can become blurred through the nature of the poetic form. The boundary between the sacred and the mundane, or the devotional and the heretic, is never clear, and is made even less certain through the usage of metaphor, allusion, personification, and other state-altering literary techniques. Illustrations of these concepts can be found in the writings of the Medieval Brabantian mystical poet Hadewijch and the contemporary American singer-songwriter Joanna Newsom, both of whom write evocatively about the metaphysical nature of reality, with particular focus on Love and Death, and who blend spiritual and secular traditions in manners that seem exceptionally well-attuned to the spiritual and social currents of their respective times.

Hadewijch lived in the early thirteenth century in the area around Antwerp in modern-day Belgium (Spearing xvii). Although many details of her life are unfortunately unclear due to a lack of documentary evidence, one of the few details which has been firmly established is that she lived as a beguine—that is to say, a woman living as part of a religious community which was not bound by a permanent vow, in contrast to the lifelong commitments made by sworn religious sisters (Spearing xvi). In the centuries since her death, her work has attracted increased attention, and is now regarded as among the finest

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exemplars of Dutch language poetry from the Medieval period (Spearing xvii). Hadewijch's writing, while squarely within the long heritage of Christian mystic poetry, is also connected to the more distinctly Medieval strain of *fine amour,* which arose from the "secular poetry of the troubadours" (Spearing xvii). More specifically, *fine amour*—also spelled *amor*—refers to the body of conventions which was commonly called "courtly love" by nineteenth century scholars, although the latter term has fallen out of favor due to its anachronous rigidity (Burnley 129). At its core, the phrase *fine amour* denotes a sort of love that is supremely pure and supremely committed (Burnley 134–35), working as a psychological process beyond and sometimes at odds with reason (Burnley 139–40), while being paradoxically understood as something which necessarily must be "a motion of the will" (Burnley 141–42), and, therefore, in perfect alignment with reason in both moral and mental terms (Burnley 141–42). Hadewijch is not only concerned with love as a process and an emotion, but as a force working upon the human mind and soul.

In Hadewijch's "Poem 6," Love is personified as a woman (Hadewijch line 5), with the narrator occupying the traditional *fine amour* role of the pursuing knight (Spearing xvii). The scenario is not that of a passive lover, waiting for her romantic partner on the marriage bed, but of a frustrating tease:

> Love makes me wander outside myself...
> Although I follow her, she files;
> Although I attend her school,
> She will not agree with me in anything...
> Alas! I speak from heart's distress;
> My misfortune is too great,
> And for me, to do without Love is a death,
> Since I cannot have fruition of her
> (Hadewijch lines 1, 5–7, 9–12).

Hadewijch's knight is jilted and unfulfilled, faced with a love that he cannot reach, and yet which consumes his thoughts. The path to Love is unclear, and even commitment to following the paths which Love seems to lay out for her beloved ("her school") does not seem to guarantee access. Love, instead, remains elusive.

Further complicating matters is the question of what we are talking about when we talk about Love. There is a definite tension that emerges when we try to reconcile the commonly accepted metaphysical interpretation of Hadewijch's Love poems as instruction manuals on how to become united with God through the abandonment of expectation and ego (Spearing xviii) with the literal context of the text: a knight seeking a lady. The spiritual quest is represented as courtship, which perhaps risks conflating the romantic and Divine. That tension is not unique to Hadewijch's work; literary scholar J. D. Burnley notes that "the figurative exchange of the vocabularies of religious and secular love is a pervasive feature of medieval literature (Burnley 136)." He also notes, in discussing the work of the troubadour Gace Brulé, who wrote about his beloved's infinite capacity to receive love, that "[Brulé] is treading on tricky theological ground, for strictly speaking virtue lies in moderation in all love except that of God (Burnley 141)." This concern that the *fine amour* approach can easily fall into a deification of human love

at the expense of the Divine is not automatically a strike against Hadewijch or the clarity of her messaging, since her work seems to consciously ride the boundary of the holy and the profane. Personified Love—which may be Divine, or may be mortal, or may move between both modes over the course of a stanza—is at once constant and fickle, at once desirable and unapproachable. Through her melding of the two worlds of the troubadour and the beguine, Hadewijch is able to write poetry that is not just about Love, but that is about how we understand Love: how it acts upon us, and how we act upon it. In a similar way, Joanna Newsom's writing blends spiritual and Modernist themes in songs that approach and are approached by Love's dark twin, Death.

Newsom is a writer whose work spans a wide range of themes, ranging from the romantic and pastoral to the philosophical and existential, often blending multiple modes within a single piece. Her compositions are often deeply layered, with complex polyrhythms (Newsom "Emily"), dizzying internal rhyme schemes, enigmatic allusions (Newsom "Time, as a Symptom"), and disparate musical influences, with particularly clear elements drawn from baroque psychedelia and traditional British and American folk music (Newsom "Kingfisher"). As a result of this sprawling discography, there is considerable variety in how spiritual matters are addressed in Newsom's lyrics, moving from the direct and literal—such as in the final verse of "Emily," when the character of Pa observes how, "loving Him, we move within His borders / Just asterisms in the stars' set order (Newsom "Emily" lines 77–78)—to the more allusive and metaphorical, epitomized by the evocative title of "Kingfisher" (Newsom "Kingfisher"), a cry for deliverance from the world that suggests the Biblical description of fishers of men (*NRSV* Matt. 4:19). Of particular interest at this moment, however, is her tackling of spiritual and metaphysical themes on the 2015 album *Divers*, a concept record concerned with the cycle of death and life within the medium of time. Within this exploration of mortality, questions of the Divine, or of Ultimate Reality, constantly re-emerge.

On certain songs, the discussion of these matters feels more explicitly religious than in others. In "Sapokanikan," Newsom's great epic on the history of New York City, she clearly states the role that Divine influence bears upon the course of history: "The snow falls above me. The Renderer renders. / The Event is in the hand of God" (Newsom "Sapokanikan" lines 12–14).

Much like the Medieval mystics before her, Newsom—or the narrator of the song, in her quotation of George Washington (Morris 21)—is surrendering to what one might call Providence. This notion of surrender becomes clearer in other songs, even though they are less explicitly tied to "the character God" (Newsom "Soft as Chalk" line 43). One verse in "Leaving the City" is particularly notable for how much it echoes the personifying language used by Hadewijch to describe Love in its account of the arrival of Death:

> In December of that year,
> The word came down that she was here.
> The days grew shorter. I was sure,
> If she came round, I'd hold my ground.

I'd endure . . . (Newsom "Leaving the City" lines 32–36)

The central character of this stanza approached the end of her life with fire and vim, determined not to go gentle, but it is an ultimately futile effort. Death is going to come regardless, and no matter how hard you fight, Death is bound to win. By the end of the song, after the dying woman is astounded by the sight of "unstaunched daylight, brightly bleeding" (Newsom "Leaving the City" line 44), it seems possible that the narrator has switched, and that we close on the perspective of someone who has observed or imagined these hyper-natural events, and reached a different conclusion about how one should face the end of life: "...That is all I want here: / To draw my gaunt spirit to bow / Beneath what I am allowed . . . (Newsom, "Leaving the City" lines 49–51). Once again, the decision is made to surrender to the will of nature, and to the rightful boundaries of mortal existence. No matter how far we travel "on the black road / through the gold fields" (Newsom "Leaving the City" lines 9–10), or how frequently we "slow our canter to a trot" (Newsom "Leaving the City" line 14), Death is waiting at the end of the road.

The album *Divers* concludes with "Time, as a Symptom," an abstract account of the obliviating exposure of childbirth (Newsom "Time, as a Symptom") filtered through Modernist literary influences, most notably in its poetic deployment of the final line of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (Joyce 628) in the song's denouement: "A pause, a sound, a song: / A way a lone a last a loved a long (Newsom "Time, as a Symptom" lines 46–47). Significantly, the song's gentle evocation of the syntax of Joyce's experimental masterwork does not stop with that single allusion. It continues on into the strikingly spiritual final stanza, which paints an image of a Divine dock which awaits us at the two great thresholds of birth and death: "A shore a tide unmoored, a sight abroad: / A dawn, unmarked undone undarked (a God). / No time. No flock. No chime, no clock. No end" (Newsom, "Time, as a Symptom" lines 51–53). The visionary account continues on at an increasingly frenzied rate until it culminates with the repeating call, "Nightjar, transmit: transcend!" (Newsom, "Time as a Symptom" lines 54–58)—which, much like that last sentence from *Finnegans Wake* (Joyce 1), forms a perfect loop with the opening track's "Sending the first scout over" (Newsom "Anecdotes" line 1), lurching us back and forth through Time back into the heat of life. While it may seem like an unnecessary diversion to focus so closely on the album's inclusion of Joycean references, I would contend that it is significant in understanding how this twenty-first century record approaches spiritual matters from a profoundly different angle than its Medieval forebears. Joyce was a lapsed Catholic, frequently described in scholarly literature as either a "heretic" or an "apostate" (Van Mierlo 3–6). He was not someone who pretended towards orthodoxy, or even Christianity—he once described himself as "mak[ing] open war upon [the Church] by what I write and say and do (Van Mierlo 3)." It is not the sort of influence which would even be considered as a viable source

in the context of a Medieval worldview, which regarded the potential of witches as heretics outside of the Church as an existential threat to the governing Christian order (Heinrich 57–68), and yet it is one that seems almost perfectly natural in the context of Newsom's contemporary, neo-mystical spirituality. Her open reference to the work of a writer so publicly hostile to orthodox Christianity is in some senses a continuation of the sacred-mundane ambiguity displayed in the writings of Hadewijch and the other *fine amour* poets, albeit a distinctly contemporary manifestation thereof. The boundaries of the spiritual and secular remained blurred, but the manner in which they are blurred has shifted dramatically, the borders of what could be considered blasphemous being challenged further by direct dialogue between the religious and apostate within a single text. In the same way that Hadewijch presents us with a Love that is felt simultaneously by troubadour and beguine, Newsom shows us the Death that is experienced by both the mystic and the novelist in the sense of one who makes something *new*. It is an act of ultimate creative destruction, standing between both the unfolding (or opening) of eternity and the birth (or rebirth) of the infinite present.

I feel that there is a chance that, after reading these analyses of Hadewijch and Newsom's writings, one could come away with the impression that they are morose writers lingering in a space that, while interesting, is not necessarily pleasant. To a degree, that might be true, insofar as they are both undoubtedly comfortable with melancholy, and with presenting questions that do not have answers. At the same time, I hope that the reader of this paper will be able to appreciate Newsom and Hadewijch's work as writing that is not only finely attuned to the overwhelming rhythm of reality, but that is also capable of finding the beauty and joy within that reality. Love and Death, like God, contain multitudes. In fact, like God, they are living concepts of such visceral depth that we can only really hope to point towards some aspect of their meaning (Johnson 292). That does not only mean that we can look at Love and Death as both secular and spiritual experiences, but also that they are experiences which can be understood in both negative and positive aspects—in the emotional sense, but perhaps more vitally in the sense of absence and presence. As a result, our attitude does not have to be one of somber reverence or passive wonder. Instead, both writers include within their works celebrations of their subject matters, serving as profound affirmations of the goodness of existence.

The clearest expression of Newsom's ability to find both sides of the matter that is Death likely comes in the previously discussed "Time, as a Symptom," where she looks at being born as a neglected twin of dying:

> When cruel birth debases, we forget.
> When cruel death debases,
> We believe it erases all the rest
> That precedes. (Newsom, "Time, as a Symptom" lines 6–9)

Although the precise nature of the commonality of the state before birth and after death

is obscure, the essential message is not. Birth is, like death, a traumatic experience, striking us unaware. Simone de Beauvoir once noted that "there is no such thing as a natural death" (De Beauvoir 106). In the same way, there is no such thing as a natural birth, because, to paraphrase de Beauvoir, "for every [person their birth] is an accident" (De Beauvoir 106). What is it, then, that makes death feel like an "unjustifiable violation" (De Beauvoir 106) from the perspective of the living, while birth is eminently justifiable? Perhaps it is that we can perceive birth's effects.

In the subsequent verse, Newsom follows that meditation with an exhortation to relish existence, telling us to:

> . . . Stand brave, Life-liver,
> Bleeding out your days
> In the river of Time!
> Stand brave:
> Time moves both ways. (Newsom, "Time as a Symptom" lines 10–13)

This verse is vital for two reasons: its evocation of Time and its evocation of Life. Time—a subject which is considered on a number of other songs on the album, most notably the opening track, "Anecdotes," and the science fiction epic "Waltz of the 101st Lightborne"—is here depicted as the fluid medium in which existence drifts back, forth, and beyond the two entrances of birth and death. Travel along this river is always on "a ship you may board but not steer" (Newsom "Waltz of the 101st Lightborne" 21), which can engender a certain fatalism: as was said before, "the Event is in the hand of God" (Newsom "Sapokanikan" line 14).

At the same time, even if the course of our lives is just "thundering blissful towards death" (Newsom, "Only Skin" line 150), there is some solace in the notion that Time is not bound in the same way that a human being appears to be. It is capable, these lyrics suggest, of moving in two directions, which is perhaps not surprising when we consider that it is rounded by the two events which serve as the equal and opposite doors of life. Birth and death are the two great catastrophes of mortal existence, and they both echo in a circle through Time like a stone striking the surface of a stream (Newsom "Emily"). Time, in the mystical worldview of this song and its companion piece "Anecdotes," is exceptionally malleable, capable of shifting form as it is pulled back and forth in the game of cosmic tug-of-war.

The question that necessarily arises is, what acts upon Time? If it can be shaped, what is the shaper? Although some songs, like "Sapokanikan," suggest the answer might be God (Newsom "Sapokanikan"), "Time, as a Symptom" has a less explicitly theological answer (although, depending on one's formulation of the Divine, it very well might amount to the same thing.) In one of the song's most striking moments, leading into the rapturous finale, the narrator makes an unusual confession:

> . . . It pains me to say,
> I was wrong:
> Love is not a symptom of Time.
> Time is just a symptom of Love,
> And of the nullifying, defeating, negating,
> repeating
> Joy of Life! (Newsom, "Time, as a Symptom" lines 24–30)

Time, then, is more complicated than just a passive medium. It is less something that Life exists within than it is something that emanates from Life itself, and from the Love and joy which in turn animate Life. It does not have a form of its own, and can only be understood within the context of the shaping power of experience. Birth and death, therefore, are only either a beginning or ending if they are understood in terms of their effects. The fact that we, for lack of a better term, *survive* birth, and see its ripples with every second, means that we do not fear it the way that we do death, which we can only anticipate. If we were beings who comprehended time in the other direction, or perhaps were in some bardo state between death and reincarnation (Keown 29), we would likely fear the grand unknown of birth in much the same way. A person of certain theological convictions would suggest that, like birth, death results in a movement into a new, more wondrous form of existence than previously experienced; Newsom does not explicitly make that claim, although much of her work suggests strongly the possibility of a transfiguration in death, from the "feast for precious hearts" (line 80) in "Cosmia" to the frozen creek which nevertheless remains water in "On a Good Day." However, whether or not the state after death most resembles an extension of life or a return to the hazy state before birth, or whether it is something experientially distinct from both, is not the fundamental issue. Instead, the vital fact is that death is just another change in state, another variation upon the strange geometry of Love and Time. That is the reason it is so important for the album to draw upon *Finnegans Wake* in its circularity: the loop that is formed by "Time, as a Symptom" and "Anecdotes" helps to expose the false dichotomy between beginning and ending, life and death.

In Hadewijch's case, if there is a false dichotomy, it would appear to be between the positive and negative aspects of Love. When reading her poetry, it is impossible to separate the two aspects to any meaningful degree. Consider how the narrating knight describes Love at the end of "Poem 9," when the topic turns away from fruitless searchers to those who have won Love fully:

> They who early
> Catch sight of Love's beauty,
> And are quickly acquainted with her joy...
> If things turn out well for them,
> Will have, God knows,
> A much better bargain in love
> Than I have found so far. (lines 91–93, 95–98)

This image of Love is conflicted, although ultimately positive. Love is something which serves the lover well, but in which the unfulfilled suitor cannot be satisfied. This line of thought is extended in a later stanza of "Poem 21," which almost reads as a concession in the hunt:

> May God give good success to all lovers, as is fitting.
> Though I and many others have so little part in Love,
> They who know her fully give all for all. She gives herself wholly to whom she pleases . . .
> All her blows are good.
> But it takes a warrior to keep up the fight!
> (lines 66–70, 74–75)

Love is an all-encompassing absolute for the beloved, which is made all the more remarkable by how much Love dominates the thoughts of the knight, who gets only glimpses of its majesty. How wondrous must it be, if only a taste can conquer the mind! Perhaps it is this overwhelming quality which makes it so tiring to keep up the fight, and which compels the searcher to give it up, even as they continue to sing Love's praises.

Of course, this notion of giving up the search for Love is itself complicated by the question of what it means to seek Love in the first place. In "Poem 9," Hadewijch includes a stanza on what it actually means to *win* in the fight for Love:

> What seems to the loved soul the most
> beautiful encounter
> Is that it should love the Beloved so fully...
> That nothing else be known by [the soul]
> Except: "I am love conquered by Love!"
> But he who overcame Love was rather
> conquered
> So that he might in love be brought to
> nought . . . (lines 71–72, 74–77)

Although Love is described here in terms of conquest, it is a conquest that is unwinnable through force, and which can only be victorious in submission. To conquer Love means to be conquered—to give up the attempt at conquest. It is similar to the notion from the Gospels, that "whoever wishes to be first...must be slave of all" (Mark 10:31). In this sense, for the lovelorn knight, surrendering a position among the suitors, accepting that Love has chosen others, is the only route that a lover might take to become beloved of Love. This image subverts the idea of the suitor as the active party in a courtship, and thereby produces perhaps a more accurate reckoning of their role. After all, in the *fine amour* model, "the success of a relationship depends upon the *fine pure amite* [fine pure friendship] which the lady returns to her lover" (Burnley 144). No matter how earnestly, how fervently, one pursues Love, it is guaranteed to be fruitless without mutuality. Accepting that fact requires an acceptance of the notion that you cannot control the course of Love, and must release the event into the hand of God (Morris 21), or fate, or simple chance. Through her mixing of the language of *fine amour* and the language of Gospel, Hadewijch crafts an ultimately optimistic image of love, both spiritual and secular, which paints the search as agony and the surrender as deliverance.

In Joanna Newsom and Hadewijch, we see two writers who comfortably position themselves in dual roles. Newsom is both a mystical poet and a deeply modern songwriter, as likely to reference scripture as she is Joyce in her efforts to ascribe ultimate meaning to reality. Hadewijch is the devout beguine and the beguiled troubadour, courting the kingdoms of both God and man on the path to fulfillment. Part of what enables these writers to move so easily between different realms is that they have such solid footing in their muses, Love and Death. These are universal experiences—universal forces—which act upon human lives in ways that seem both metaphysical and immediate, both mundane and transcendent. The genius which ignites the writings of these two women is that they do not force either understanding to

reign on its own. They let the different meanings melt together, forming a holistic notion of how human minds act upon the world, and how the world acts upon human souls. «

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Reflections on "Death Fugue" Between Celan and Kiefer

CHET MLCEK

READING PAUL CELAN'S poem "Death Fugue"[1] always reminds me of my experience encountering the two paintings by Anselm Kiefer, "Margarete" (1981)[2] and "Sulamith" (1983)[3], at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in the Spring of 2023. Celan's poem features "a man" who "lives in the house... plays with the snakes," (line 4) who "whistles his jews... commands them" (line 7) and writes "to Deutschland" (line 13), clearly meant to represent an SS officer commanding members of a concentration camp. Despite the extreme tragedy that this man enables and exacts, he has ample freedom to play around and write letters to Germany, longing for "your golden hair Margarete" (lines 13, 34) and "Your ashen hair Shulamith" (lines 14, 35), two idealized women who represent the German (Margarete) and Jewish (Shulamith) communities. When I first saw the paintings, I was finishing off my course in Poetry of Witness, in which we covered various tragedies of the 20th and 21st centuries, but naturally spent the most time on WWII and the events of the Shoah. I had heard of "Death Fugue" before that class (in relation

[1] Celan, Paul, "Death Fugue," in ***Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew,*** ed. and trans. by John Felstiner, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

[2] Kiefer, Anselm. ***Margarethe.*** 1981, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/FC.595

[3] Kiefer, Anselm. ***Sulamith.*** 1983, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/FC.598

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to some 20th century philosophers, specifically Adorno's condemnation of poetry after the Holocaust,) but this marked my first encounter with the work. I spent the rest of the WWII and Shoah sections focusing on Celan's work, and when spring break had come and I had left on my solo-trip to visit San Francisco for the first time, I was surprised to come upon the two paintings in homage to the poem on display at the local art museum. My surprise was initially pleasant, as I had found some art related to a poem I love, and perhaps would lead me to a better interpretation than that received from the average encounter with modern art. I was then struck with an awe-filled surprise, more so by the massive size of each piece (each being able to fill a full wall), and finally submerged myself in a solemn effort to appreciate the depth and heavy themes of each piece, remembering the poem.

Margarete, who in Celan's poem represents the idealized Germany according to the nightly fantasies of the SS soldier, represents a much more comprehensive ideal of Germany in Anselm's post-war reflection, "Margarethe." The gray background immediately sets a tone akin to the "smoke to the sky" (line 25) in which the Jewish "grave in the air" (line 32) lies, a backdrop of eerie evocation and turbulence. The foreground of the painting is flat and lacks definite shape but consists of pieces of golden straw glued to the canvas, forming craned vertical lines. The straw, on fire and jagged, does not evoke the golden hair of a woman but the abrasiveness and the cruelty of the death-like German who "is ein Meister aus Deutschland his eye it is blue" (line 29) although, as highlighted by the painting's shocking and haunting mess, shows the clear result that no such German effort could ever be able to "play death... sweetly" (line 23). The name "Margarethe" is written largely in cursive across the center of the painting, both invoking the 'out-of-place' nature of the SS man's longing writings in such a time, as well as marking the mural as a sort of portrait of the idealized woman from the poem.

Shulamith, who (although idolized in letters) was previously made to "shovel a grave in the ground" (line 7), to "jab your spades deeper" (line 15), to "scrape your strings darker" (line 24), and, in a twisted grim manner, poked fun at in orders to "play on for the dancing" (line 17), does not bear the same dehumanization and disrespect in Kiefer's painting as is highlighted within Celan's poem. Whereas the painting "Margarethe" is two dimensional and abrasive in its presentation, "Sulamith" portrays a deep corridor with its colors and forms unified into solid and recognizable shapes and objects. A small fire is lit at the end of the hall, casting specks of golden light on nearly every brick in the scene like "the stars are all sparkling" (line 6), although in the same grim and non-naturalistic manner which Celan uses the phrase (evoking the Judenstern), as the gold light of the image does not take away from the literal and thematic darkness of the scene. Also, unlike "Margarethe," this painting bears its title written out in the upper-left-hand corner, written in a white print script, a presentation which bears an identity with a deeper sense of purity and subtlety, an identity which itself tries to reckon with the darkness and fire not extinguished.

Whereas Celan's "Death Fugue" juxtaposes the immense suffering and terror of the Holocaust victims with the senselessness of the hand which enacted such suffering, Kiefer's paintings seem to reopen the idealizations of that senseless hand, trying to account for the destruction in Germany and the deep darkness thrust on the Jewish community. «

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The Way We Diagnose and Address Learning Disabilities in our School Systems is Equivalent to a Dumpster Fire. Let's Unpack It.

LACEY ARGUS

WHO IS DIAGNOSIS FOR? That's the question I found myself asking after doing a deep dive into how we understand, diagnose, and treat learning disabilities in our school systems. My life changed after I was diagnosed with dyslexia in elementary school. I was placed into specialized classrooms, received accommodations on projects and tests, attended before and after-school tutoring sessions, and had periodic meetings with both my parents and teachers to assess my progress. For a child who struggled to read until fifth grade, my diagnosis shifted the trajectory of my academic career and, in a larger sense, my life. So when I began to investigate the impact of LDs (learning disabilities) in school systems, I expected diagnosis to be championed as a student's saving grace. Instead, what I discovered was a much more complex history of how we understand intelligence regarding our intersectional identities and its impact on the opportunities available to us.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was introduced to ensure that all students, including those who were diagnosed with LDs, have a right to an adequate education. »

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The legislation defines learning disabilities as a "disorder" in the "basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken, or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical Calculations." LDs don't speak to a person's intelligence but rather how neatly a student's thinking and behavior fits into a specific standard, which in this context are rigid academic standards developed through Western standards of intelligence. LDs are not affiliated with race, gender, or intelligence; however, certain social identities may impact the likelihood of diagnosis or the resources available to accommodate them. One in every 59 children has an LD or several, which makes LDs increasingly prevalent in our education system. However, just because a student has been diagnosed with an LD does not mean that their academic needs are being properly addressed. Further, many students go years, or their entire school career, without being properly diagnosed. One of the most prominent issues in this loosely regulated system for identifying students who may be struggling in the educational system due to an undiagnosed LD is that identification often comes at the discretion of educators, many of whom are working in underfunded classrooms or lacking proper knowledge of the signs of LDs. Because there is no unified and established system for identifying LDs outside of educators, many teachers' biases or lack of education dictate the care and attention students receive, especially students with intersectional identities.

One of the intersectional factors impacting diagnosis rates of LDs is race. Students of color (Asian students exempt) received special education at a higher rate compared to Caucasian students. This can be explained by the cultural assumptions or racialized stereotypes of educators while deciding to give LD referrals. Additionally, students who had English as a second language are also overrepresented in this pool, documenting that LD referrals tend to stand in for schools that do not have programs or resources for ELL students. There are often long-term repercussions for students when life circumstances are misdiagnosed as LDs. According to researcher Enoch Leung:

> African-American students with LDs reported negative consequences of their special education placement. Though they mentioned the benefits of special education placement such as interactions with responsive teachers and more appropriate instructional pacing, the social consequences of having an LD label outweighed such benefits. They reported additional stigmatization by peers (in addition to their race-based harassment), making limited academic progress due to a slow-paced curriculum, and barriers preventing them from returning to general education placements.

This imbalance in LD diagnosis across races impacts a student's entire academic career and is an example of the systemic racism present in the structure of our educational system. By denying certain students of color access to diagnosis and the benefits it supplies or falsely diagnosing students, academic mobility is limited.

Another dimension of LD diagnosis is socioeconomic class. Students who are from middle to lower-class households may be attending schools that are underfunded, understaffed, and lacking the proper resources necessary to responsibly address students with LDs. As infamously documented in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, students who are struggling to get their basic needs met will likely have manifestations of their struggles in their performance in the classroom. As Leung points out:

> In this manner, students of color experience increased risks due to their lower class, including cardiovascular disease, arthritis, diabetes, and mental illness, all of which disproportionately diagnose them as having LD, though the achievement gap may not be due to a lack of learning ability but societal influences.

For example, a student who has to wake up hours earlier than their classmates to take the public bus to school may have a harder time staying awake and alert in class, leading to a dip in their performance that could flag them as eligible for an LD diagnosis. However, this diagnosis will fail to address the root of the student's problem, which is not their academic ability but rather outside factors impacting the way they can show up in the classroom.

If an LD diagnosis does not benefit the student being diagnosed, who is it for? This is not to say that LD diagnosis is a "bad" thing, but rather that this emphasizes that LD diagnosis historically has neglected to acknowledge the intersectional factors present in underdiagnosis, overdiagnosis, and the accommodations available to a student with intersecting identities. In this way, LD diagnosis has become a mode of systematic oppression, often benefiting upper-class white people in well-funded school districts and further controlling the quality of the education that students of color from various economic backgrounds receive. **«**

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The Portrayal of Disability: Comparing *Richard III* to the Present

LYZA WEISMAN

TODAY A DEBATE exists as to whether a disabled person should be referred to as a "disabled person" or a "person with a disability." At the risk of being insulting and forming a stereotype, one can refer to a disabled person either way. As somebody with a physical disability, though—diagnosed when I was 13 months old and which has put me in a wheelchair for life—I am indifferent toward either of these terms. How a person is referred to by someone who is non-disabled, in general, is a topic towards which I hold indifference. As such, I will use both phrases in referring to the disabled. Instead, what is pertinent and impacts the daily lives of the disabled is how disabilities are thought about in society. Disabilities are by no means new; the disabled have been around for centuries, even while the lifestyles, capabilities, and lifespans of the disabled have changed drastically over time. Adversely, stereotypes and stigmas are much harder to change and overcome. Shakespeare's play *Richard III* denotes key historical themes regarding the relationship between stereotypical perspectives on disability and monstrosity, as portrayed by the King, a disabled protagonist who, in his plight for power, fails to overcome the mental outlook surrounding his disability.

The label of disability includes a broad umbrella of diseases and illnesses, each defining a person as "outside of the norm." My own disability is a type of muscular dystrophy that only affects my body, not my mind. My disease, Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA), has caused and

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led to numerous other diagnoses, including scoliosis. When archeologists found King Richard III's body in 2012, they established that he also had scoliosis (Appleby, et al., 1944). The Mayo Clinic defines '*scoliosis*' as «a sideways curvature of the spine that most often is diagnosed in adolescents. While scoliosis can occur in people with conditions such as cerebral palsy and muscular dystrophy, the cause of most childhood scoliosis is unknown» (Scoliosis 1). As such, the textbook definition of scoliosis explains Richard III's hunchback—or curved spine—as depicted in Shakespeare's play. While scoliosis is rarely a life-threatening illness, it does cause body deformity. Richard was known to be a well-trained soldier, able to ride a horse and use a sword; therefore, scoliosis had minimal effect on Richards's physical activities. However, it probably would have caused decreased stamina and lung function with increased chronic pain (Scoliosis 2). Author and educator Katherine Williams points out that when it comes to disability as it is known today, "the emergence of what we might strictly call 'disability' occurs later than the Renaissance and in tandem with a medicalizing discourse that classifies, regulates, and constructs bodies as 'normal' or 'abnormal'" (Williams 2). The time of Richard III was a nonexistent wasteland for medical practices, diagnoses, medications, and care that are available today. What Williams implies here, though, is that, more than individuals' care, disability itself was an obscure concept. Instead, people tended to make crude assumptions and fantastical observations when faced with the unknown.

During Richard III's time, body deformity was enough to subject the king to copious judgments and stereotypes assigned to the disabled. In her article "Literature and Disability in the English Renaissance," Alice Equestri agrees that "physical disabilities in the Renaissance encompass anything from deformity to bodily mutilation to dwarfism or monstrosity, and they are especially prone to be emphasized, explained, or scrutinized in search of their meaning" (Equestri 1). Richard's character even describes his own illness with spite and hatred towards the beginning of the play, saying, "I, that am curtailed of this fair proportion / Cheated of feature by dissembling nature / Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time / Into this breathing world scarce half made up / And that so lamely and unfashionable / That dogs bark at me as I halt by them" (Shakespeare 18-23). I have experienced this stereotype and stigma first-hand for my entire life; typically, it involves pity and low expectations. It is completely acceptable and expected for disabled individuals to evade educational responsibilities, not go into the work force, and live in their parents' basements for their entire lives. As Joseph Shapiro, a writer for *U.S. New and World Reports*, confirms, "Disabled people have become sensitized to depictions of disability in popular culture, religion, and history. There they find constant descriptions of a disabled person's proper role as either an object of pity or a source of inspiration. These images are internalized by disabled and non-disabled people alike and build social stereotypes, create artificial limitations, and contribute to discrimination" (Shapiro 30). These expectations, or lack thereof, can be excruciatingly limiting for the disabled. It is not enough to go about daily activities as one's disability allows; they must go about them while rejecting all

other presumed assumptions of what they can or cannot do and be. For many, even today, this can be too much, and giving in to the stereotype is all too easy.

For Richard III, this stereotype was slightly different. Those with disabilities, especially those visible to the public, were considered either fake or a clear precursor of evil. Both now and during Richard III and Shakespeare's times, a common thought when perceiving someone with a disability was that it did not exist. Equestri identifies this and other misconstructions of the time regarding disability, writing, "Significantly found in early modern literature is that which, as it were, does not exist: either because it is not real but only faked—that is, dissembled—or because it is not attached to a specific body or mind but is used as an attribute or metaphor describing a concept or object, rather than an individual" (18). Equestri also writes further on disability being associated with evil, proclaiming that "this is implicit... [in] the term monster, which, deriving from the Latin terms monstrare (to show) or monere (to warn), pointed at a creature whose difference embodied a sacred or supernatural sign that needed to be interpreted, or a warning that should be understood and heeded" (5). Joshua Eyler, a scholar specializing in disability studies and medieval studies, also notices this association between disability and evil in any form of literature, in which he posits that "the 'belief of modern authors that ancient or medieval societies invariably saw a link between sin and illness appears to be the dominant historiographical notion on the subject of disability" (Eyler 3). Historically, academics and critics have thus

FIG. 1: RICHARD III BONES IMAGE FROM *CURRENT ARCHEOLOGY*

used Richard III's impairment in the play to loosely describe the type of character the king was. Scholar Sarah Bischoff writes, "The most popular readings frame Richard's disfigurement as immaterial, monstrous figuration, making the question of his impairment irrelevant" (Bischoff 2). Furthermore, "Richard was born deformed, which portended evil to a medieval and early modern audience, giving Richard little choice to be anything but the villain, and necessitating the story crush his deviance" (Bischoff 5). Now, of course, we understand that Richard indeed had a deforming and painful form of scoliosis. Journalist Jana Rosalind writes in an article published by The Guardian, "As someone whose spine looked almost identical to Richard's, measuring 78 degrees before. . . surgery, the bottom left side of my ribcage ground against the top of my pelvis when I moved, and my right

shoulder jutted out like a clipped wing. Even beneath clothing, these distortions were visible. Richard may not have had a hunch, but he was definitely crook-backed" (Rosalind 5). It is exactly this circumstance that King Richard III succumbed to, and he tells us outright:

> Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace
> Have no delight to pass away the time
> Unless to see my shadow in the sun
> And descant on mine own deformity
> And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
> To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
> I am determined to prove a villain. (24-30)

I do not blame King Richard for his evil doings in the play, even though they were tremendously wrong and horrid actions. It all, however, goes back to the perception of who the disabled truly are. If it is expected to say certain things and do certain things for long enough, that is eventually what will be done. It takes tremendous energy to fight a stereotype, and it can be perceived as a full-time responsibility, in and of itself. The problem is that more is needed to disprove a stereotype, since it must be disproven continuously and repetitively. Jay Dolmage, in his book *Disability Rhetoric*, discusses the common myths and assumptions that center around disability, most notably the idea of "Overcoming or Compensation." Dolmage states, "The person with a disability overcomes their impairment through hard work or has some special talent that offsets their deficiencies. Shapiro calls this figure the 'super crip.' In this myth, the connection between disability and compensatory ability is intentional and required" (Dolmage 39). Even though Dolmage considers the necessity of proving and overcoming one's disability a myth, it is much more complicated. The necessity of disproving disability is not based on the words said to someone, but instead on how one thinks about or looks at another. Perhaps it is unnecessary to prove oneself after they are well-acquainted with the person. However, as a living human being in society, there will always be those people one will not know. It is the consistent assumptions and opinions of those unknown that, over time, are enough to tear the mentality of the disabled to pieces. Therefore, no matter what, it is never enough—an individual with a disability, to be seen as stable, must consistently prove that they are more than their disability. Richard III was a war hero, and, at the beginning of the character-titled play, had just returned from war with his brother, but the acknowledgment of his goodness and deeds done in service of his country was brief. Instead, the play makes a quick turn into Richards's evil plotting. Furthermore, during Richards's time, the organized care for him, that would have been needed in order to be at peace with his impairment, was overlooked. In this sense, Richard's perspective explains his actions, for his animalistic behavior was thus believed to be because of his disability.

In *Perceptions of People with Disabilities*, scholar Herbert Covey allows for another way the disabled were conceived. He discusses how people thought about those with physical disabilities at and after the time of Richard III, especially in their ability to be mobile. Richard could indeed walk, as well as fight on the battlefield, but this was not the case for most that were severely disabled.

Covey explains, "Before the advent of adaptive devices to help with mobility, many people with severe physical disabilities had to crawl to move about. Societies generally looked upon crawling as a means of human mobility with disfavor. Historically, societies have associated crawling with animals" (Covey 46). With this wild, savage, and crude interpretation of the disabled applied to Richard in the way Shakespeare depicts him, as well as in other songs and tales written before Shakespeare's play, Richard also fell victim to heavy name-calling and slurs during his time. In the book *Shakespeare and the Remains of Richard III*, author Phillip Schwyzer elaborates on this: "The derogatory identification of the king with his crest was a tradition already established in his reign. . . Richard is referred to by a wide range of animal names, including the heraldic 'little boar' (*trymyniad bach*), the prophetic 'mole' (*gwadd*) and the more straightforwardly derogatory 'caterpillar,' 'ape,' and 'dog'" (174). When it comes to this, however, it is hard to say whether the derogatory perception of Richard, because of his evil demeanor, or his disability precedes the other. Something that holds as a notion but is not always well-known is that a disability—specifically a physical one that does not affect the mind—cannot make a person evil. Rather, a disability, in and of itself, is what can allow a person the potential to become evil. Richard became infamously evil when he finally gave in to the stereotype. He believed it was his right to be evil and do as he pleased, since he had already paid the price from birth. Again, he had been seen as something he was not, which dispirited him. Richard's actions in the play cannot be blamed on his disability. In reality, Richard's capacity for evil was not predestined at the time he was born malformed.

In conjunction with Richards's disability, not justifying his actions, Richard also uses his disadvantage against others. Scholar Matt Carter explains some of Richard's odd traits and how he uses his malformation to his advantage in *Embodiment and Disability in 'Henry VI' and 'Richard III,'* writing,

> Given Richard's penchant for redefining the parameters of dis-ability to suit his own ends, we can see why such a restructuring of normativity lends itself to the weapon" (Carter 27). Richard can use his disadvantage to manipulate and cause deceit. Furthermore, some of Richard's practices after returning from war are abnormal. Again, they cannot be tied to Richard's impairment, since he "carries around pieces of his enemies' corpses. Because he collects trophies from others' bodies, Richard bestows a socialized disability on his enemies through physical violence. (27)

This tendency does not bode well for the stability of Richards's mind. It helps to understand, once more, that it is not his disability that causes his actions but rather the way he allows his disability to lead to and justify his actions. In Shakespeare's play, Richard *using* his disability can be directly seen, specifically when he convinces Lady Anne to marry him. After killing her husband, Richard then asks for her hand in marriage, and he succeeds in his scheme through manipulation. However,

Richard's true colors show in his next monologue, where he boasts:

> Was ever women in this humor woo'd?
> Was ever women in this humor won?
> I'll have her, but I will not keep her long
> What? I, that kill'd her husband and his father
> To take her in her heart's extremist hate
> With curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes
> The bleeding witness of my hatred by
> Having God her conscience and these bars against me,
> And I no friends to back my suit [at all]
> But the plain devil and dissembling looks?
> And yet to win her! All the world is nothing!
> Hah! (Shakespeare 227-238)

Richard uses his disability and strength of wit to melt Lady Anne's heart, even in her darkest hour. The cruelty and absurdity of this encounter is evident, and besides an utter misuse of power, little can be said justifying Richard's actions and the impact his "dissembling looks" had. Richard's brother continues to trust Richard until the very end, when he learns that Richard indeed ordered his assassination. Richard has a way with words, and this is not unique to him as a person. From experience, I know that having a disability tends to make others feel guilt and pity for the suffering the disabled endure. For example, many complete strangers have approached me throughout my life, saying, "I will pray for you," or "I am so sorry." This makes it all too easy to use the stereotype—as negative as it may be—to one's advantage. With this being said, no amount of successful manipulation, accomplishments, power, or elevated status removes the inherent shame a disabled person may feel.

When disabled, it is natural to want to prove being both worth more than one's disability and capable of more than its limitations. This poses the question of where a person with a disability should be referred to as "disabled" or "a person with a disability." While I am indifferent to either of these terms, a person must think about how they refer to someone who is disabled, regardless. If someone has to think about how to refer to the disabled, they have to consider a person's disability. The two go hand-in-hand; therefore, whatever comes most naturally in how one refers to the disabled is the correct way to refer to the person. This stands because, at every turn, the goal is to make others not see any one person's ailments. This can be near impossible for some illnesses, especially obvious physical disabilities. However, certain activities still highlight what an individual with a physical disability cannot do, causing increased shame. Richard III is seen experiencing this in the 1995 movie adaptation of the play, when he meets his nephew at the train station. Richard III falls over after a little boy tries to climb on his uncle's shoulders. Two men surrounding Richard promptly try to help, but in anguish and anger, Richard shouts, stopping them in their tracks (Bayly, et al., 19). Richard is mad that his disability has yet again come to light. He cannot do so much as carry a child, and he is angered at how other men have to help him, as if he were the child. As someone who is about to be king, Richard has an extreme power and pride problem when he requires or is seen to need help. It is natural

for him to be upset at the situation, but his automatic outlash is exaggerated. One of the most important lessons I have learned myself is maintaining humility in asking for help and recognizing when I need help. I will admit, though, I am not always the best at this; there have been times when I have avoided asking for help, to my detriment.

Disability is an intricate and complicated concept, not only for the disabled but also for those who see individuals with a disability. Disability is outside of the norm—it is now, and it was when Richard III suffered from scoliosis. Disability makes people think and reconsider in both negative and positive ways. The difference is whether the disabled choose to use these benefits and costs for good or bad. Richard tells the audience outright that he has succumbed to the expectations of others and, therefore, will be evil. The stereotype that he faced was that of good or evil, given that during that time, disability and the devil were associated in tandem. The primary stereotype that I, myself, face is not one of good or evil, but of being or doing nothing. The context of these two stereotypes throughout the centuries is vital. Richard and I also differ significantly in the severity of our disabilities. I cannot walk and have a severe illness that I was diagnosed with when I was extremely young. In truth, if I had been born at the time of Richard III, I would not be alive today. If I had lived, who is to say whether I would have chosen good or evil. I like to think that I would have been too physically unable to choose evil, but I do believe that the social pressure and assumption of being evil would have made living up to the expectation of goodness very difficult. Richard III, on the other hand, had a significantly less-severe disability. In fact, "Richard thrives… overcoming his brothers and rapidly taking the throne. Even romantically, despite his insecurities, he triumphs; he admits he '[is] not made to court an amorous looking glass,' yet, in the following scene, Richard woos the widow of a man he murdered, over the corpse of her father-in-law, whom he's also murdered—an extraordinary accomplishment for even the best looking. His disabilities do not really disable him" (Bischoff 1). Essentially, Richard chose wrong. According to Shakespeare, Richard succumbed to the animalistic wickedness whispered in his ear, since his deformity was revealed. Richard III's scoliosis does not justify any one of his actions. The stereotypes and conceptions of disabled people needing help and being weak thus explain both how Richard was able to get away with all he did, as well as a partial explanation as to why Richard did what he did. It is critical to remember that because Shakespeare lived under Queen Elizabeth I, he would have been against Richard III, since he was the last Yorkist king. Shakespeare's Richard III is, additionally, a play written to be entertaining and, as such, is most likely exaggerated. The true crimes of Richard III and whether or not he murdered the children and executed his brother, along with many others, will forever be unknown.

The portrayal of disability is still relevant in today's society because it is a demonstration to all non-disabled people of what stereotypes and assumptions can do to a person; it is a warning to not assume before understanding. For the disabled, it is also a warning and demonstration of what it means

to submit to society's expectations. Richard III's situation was unique; after all, he was in a position to, which resulted in him becoming the King of England. During the time of his reign, disabled individuals did not have money and were left in poor living situations at best, because "there was no state provision for people with disabilities. Most lived and worked in their communities, supported by family and friends. If they could not work, their town or village might support them, but sometimes people resorted to begging" (*Disability in the Medieval Period 1050-1485*, 3). This did not change until Queen Elizabeth I took action to improve the quality of life for the disabled, where she "prompted Parliament to pass a series of laws to take care of the 'poor and disadvantaged.' These Elizabethan Poor Laws, as they were called, shifted more responsibility to the government for the care of the poor, which included most persons with disabilities" (*Parallels in Time a History of Developmental Disabilities*). As such, even though Richard III was immensely privileged, he still lacked resources to help him cope with his disability. From experience, I also understand how pain can wear a person's morality down, and scoliosis, as exhibited above, is painful. I think that whether or not Richard was evil, he did struggle with his ailment, due to expectations and stereotypes. Even though the stereotypes are different today, they still exist, and, therefore, it is crucial to keep looking into the disabled persons of history and the lessons they may now teach. Eyler recognizes that times have changed, and new approaches are finally being taken to change how the disabled are seen. He states, "A key element of this new approach has been the recognition that segregation and exclusion is not a necessary consequence of a physical or intellectual impairment, but the result of conscious policy choices based on false assumptions about the abilities of people with disabilities" (Eyler 33). Even if this new approach is successful, I feel that there will always be some sort of stereotype and stigma surrounding the disabled. However, as long as the disabled can recognize and overcome this, progress will always be made in officially eliminating the negative stereotype of disability. As such, Shakespeare's tragedy of Richard III and his actions can never be blamed on the fact that he was disabled, but instead that it was the nature of the time and Richard's own lack of conscience. «

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Gambling Chip, Inanimate Spectacle, Legal Tender: the People and Punishments that Dehumanize Women in Angela Carter's "The Tiger's Bride"

CALLIE SALAZER

IN MOST CLASSIC FAIRY TALES, punishment and justice are simple concepts: the wicked are punished and the virtuous are rewarded. In Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's timeless tale "Beauty and the Beast" (1740), for example, the envious and superficial sisters of the titular Beauty are transformed into statues and forced to look upon their sister's happiness for all eternity, while Beauty, an honest and gentle woman who is capable of seeing a man's kind heart hidden beneath a beastly exterior, becomes a queen. However, in Angela Carter's short story "The Tiger's Bride" (1979), an adaptation of "Beauty and the Beast," the roles of those who receive justice and those who are punished are reversed. The unnamed protagonist loses her freedom when her father bets her in a game of cards, while her father, whose irresponsibility caused her imprisonment, regains his lost wealth when the protagonist exposes herself naked to The Beast. However, the protagonist eventually receives justice when she finds herself free from the patriarchal society that denies her

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personhood by becoming a tiger, shedding the skins of a thing to be gambled with, a display to be gawked at, and a piece of currency to pay the debt of another. The offense committed by the protagonist's careless human father, the dehumanizing and demeaning punishment inflicted upon his daughter, and the outcomes delivered to both parties (of which only the protagonist's can be considered justice) underscore the cruelty of the circumstances that strip women of their personhood through different kinds of objectification and draw attention to the men who use their privileged standing in society to strip others of this fundamental right.

Carter quickly establishes that the protagonist's "profligate" father, who objectifies his daughter by using her as a gambling chip rather than seeing her as a person, is responsible for her fate due to his own carelessness (59). As the protagonist helplessly watches her father gamble more and more of his fortune away, she sarcastically ponders their situation: "What a burden all those possessions must have been to him, because he laughs as if with glee as he beggars himself; he is in such a passion to donate all to The Beast" (Carter 59). Her sarcasm not only reflects her anger at her father's foolishness, but it gives him some semblance of control over the situation, control that she lacks over his actions and her life. Reframing his gambling losses as donations gives the protagonist's father agency: he isn't losing his possessions, he is choosing to donate them. He is beggaring himself of his own free will, which the protagonist lacks. Her father continues 'donating' to The Beast until he runs out of things to bet, to which he then strips his daughter of her autonomy to make her into a gambling chip. The protagonist acknowledges that her father "thought he could not lose [her]" and planned to recover not only the "unravelled fortunes" of their family but The Beast's massive wealth as well (Carter 61). This acknowledgement displays both her father's arrogance and his possessive view of his daughter. He genuinely thinks that he can prevail against The Beast at cards and win back his possessions and his dignity, despite having an abundance of evidence to the contrary. This kind of arrogance and hubris would be punished according to standard fairytale rules of morality, but it is not he who faces the consequences of his actions. Instead, his daughter, whose freedom is staked on a card game, is punished for the carelessness of another. In fact, when she later reflects on her situation, the protagonist acknowledges that "[her] father abandoned [her] to the wild beasts by his human carelessness" (Carter 70). Here, she equates the quality of carelessness with the state of being human, suggesting that the blatant disregard for her life and personhood that has gotten her into this situation are not traits exclusive to her father but to humanity in general. The problem is not one careless person but a society of people maintaining systems that equate the lives of women with gambling chips, to be used for their own gain. The protagonist's father, whose actions would normally be punishable according to fairy-tale morality, views his daughter as something he owns rather than a human being. These actions highlight the cruelty of how the men who are granted the privilege to be seen as a human being by those in power use this privilege to

strip women of their rights to autonomy and personhood.

Furthermore, the punishment given to the protagonist for actions she had no say in is degrading and dehumanizing, as it reduces her to a spectacle in a deeply violating way and uses this violation as currency to pay off a debt she did not create. After the protagonist is lost to The Beast, it is revealed that The Beast's "sole desire is to see the pretty young lady unclothed nude" (Carter 65). The use of "pretty" and "young" to describe the protagonist implies that her exposure is less about revealing a reality buried beneath a series of facades, as nakedness becomes a metaphor for later in the story, but about the objectification of her body. This punishment reduces the protagonist, a human being, to a spectacle on display: something to gawk and gander at, but nothing more. The Beast's valet then adds that should the protagonist comply with The Beast's request, she "will be returned to her father undamaged with banker's orders for the sum at which he lost to [his] master at cards" (Carter 65-66). First, declaring that she will be returned "undamaged" rather than unharmed further dehumanizes the protagonist, suggesting that she's a beautiful inanimate object to be looked at but left undamaged rather than a person with thoughts and feelings to leave unharmed. Second, the notion that her father's wealth will be returned should she comply with this invasive request establishes her body as payment for a debt, further stripping her of her humanity and objectifying her in a third way: legal tender. Overall, the punishment dehumanizes the protagonist by treating her like something to stare at and something to pay off a debt, further establishing the cruelty of the circumstances and individuals responsible for this dehumanization.

Ultimately, both the protagonist and her father receive some kind of resolution to their situations, but only the protagonist's outcome can be considered justice. After the protagonist lifts the facade of a dutiful noblewoman by willingly removing her top in response to The Beast's removal of his human disguise, The Beast keeps his promise. The protagonist is informed that her father is currently "counting out a tremendous pile of banknotes" (Carter 72). Her father, who lost her due to his carelessness, receives the reward for her choice to expose herself to The Beast. According to classic fairy-tale rules of justice and punishment, the protagonist's careless, "profligate" father, the man who gambled away the daughter who he, by virtue of being her father, was supposed to protect, should not be receiving a reward for his actions (Carter 59). Yet here he is, tallying his "tremendous" compensation for his own foolishness and his daughter's exposure, emphasizing how men profited from stripping women of their personhood and thus continued to perpetuate systems that existed to oppress women (Carter 72). Additionally, the protagonist's father's newly acquired wealth allows him to change his appearance; his daughter notes that he is now "well-shaven, neatly barbered," and wears "smart new clothes" (Carter 72). These changes indicate his status as a wealthy member of high society, the same society that has stripped the protagonist of her personhood and agency time and time again. There is no justice here. The protagonist's father is allowed to go free with his wealth. He is granted

power and personhood in this patriarchal society, and he does not face any repercussions for the decisions he made that dehumanized his daughter. The protagonist undergoes a change in her appearance as well: she joins The Beast and becomes a tiger to escape the oppression of human society. The process of transforming into a tiger involved The Beast licking the protagonist's skin, and "each stroke of his tongue ripped off skin after successive skin, all the skins of a life in the world, and left behind a nascent patina of shining hairs" (Carter 74). The process of becoming a tiger involves the removal of every facade, peeling away every skin that has been put upon her by the world and the men who hold power in it. She is no longer a gambling chip, no longer something to gaze upon, and no longer currency. She is free to make her own decisions and live her own life, no longer bound by the constraints of a careless human society. The fur that now covers her body is "nascent," giving her new form a sense of potential and framing her transformation as a rebirth. She is just coming into her own and recognizing her true power, and this power stems from her detachment from the human society that sought to oppress her. While her father is rewarded unjustly, the protagonist is freed from a life of imprisonment, indicating that she has received justice, justice that could only come through an escape from the life she used to have. This justice and the price paid for it again draws attention to the cage of patriarchal social structures and those who used their power to keep her locked inside it.

Most people's general understanding of morality has evolved since the days of fairy tales, as the vast majority of people now recognize that the world cannot be neatly divided into two broad categories of wicked or virtuous, punished or praised. However, amidst these more complicated questions of who deserves punishment and what justice should look like, there are still people who are given sentences disproportionate to their offenses (if any), and there are still careless individuals who are rewarded and set free despite their actions. Often, this has to do with those who are in power and granted personhood using this power and personhood to deny rights to those who need to be viewed as people the most. Angela Carter's "The Tiger's Bride" serves as a cautionary tale, warning against punishing and objectifying those who lack power and rewarding and freeing those who strip others of their rights. The story of a man who gambled away his daughter like a possession, of a girl who became a tiger to escape being an object, is a story that beckons people to reevaluate the individuals, systems, and structures that oppress and objectify groups of people so justice can be ensured for all. **«**

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Oh

MIA CARLI

SILENCE COMES ALL AT ONCE. As so many things—distance time undisclosed closure masks the unyielding universe universes shadows secrets space to think and let imagination exist between words sounds phrases big thoughts in small places traffic exposure limits limitations risk allowing an audience to participate tricks nothing collision an idea combined with another idea triggers trigger different associations in the minds of others blood bones hearts veins all parts of the body divergent and convergent thinking rules breaking rules temperature maintenance listening rendezvous weather amassed conclusions no endings endings different sizes of waves calms before storms storms before a calm graciousness gratitude for each word sound surprises cities people recognizing cities loose harvests time for havoc peace meandering crooks fruit to pick from trees slenderness unbearableness gods demons guns without bullets killing without killing light and dark sourness barbaric souls traps agriculture and atmosphere the time time understand difference blankness worry humanity fervent understanding foreverness beginnings mountains versus hills pause harpoons of various opportunities different horses or houses different races pillows the hard stuff the making of a bed foundation of homes wind wandering breath desire expectations expectations handled in different ways lost conclusions misunderstandings humor resolution that never resolves the bump of heart the rotten tomato in a story hardship struggle belief colors that have sound colors that don't have sound sounds that have color things that don't belong that all of a sudden belong rudeness mentality sharpness swallowing truth the absolutely un-understable things force compliance deliberate manifestations degrees moments different speeds of sand fast snails the absolutely unbelievable power time for pictures solitude chaos suffering magnitude targets cross-examinations turns sudden turns slow turns acceptance reliability

MIA CARLI Mia Carli was born in Corona, CA. She has a B.A. in English and Political Science from Loyola Marymount University. She has an M.F.A in poetry from the University of Iowa, is also an alum of the UC Davis MFA program, and has been recently completing her M.A. in Creative Writing from LMU. This essay was inspired by Sarah Maclay and the study of poetic ideology and form in her Summer 2023 Advanced Poetry Workshop: Form/s. Mia lives to thank her teachers and mentors. If she could have a "Gratitude Party" every day for them, she would. Because, as she puts it, she is "one of the 'nerd' species of mammal... Which is neither here nor there."

trust hope aliens monsters confusion mixed characters mixed ideas mixed conclusions tape glue threats drama mistakes marksmanship gas roars whispers opportunities for paint difficult ways to grasp coldness agreement and disagreement warmth war manufacturing untellings homelessness separation unexpected forgiveness rain on planets we've never been to sounds we have never considered separateness amongst the nonsensical claims things we share things we cannot hear things we do not want to hear animals that stretch like stars bereavement magnificent bereavement loud little words the understanding of when to stop the understanding of how to stop lard the skinniness of an unknowable word land meditation destruction hearts of darkness moments of being lost hard truths blankets pills melancholy measurements of diabolical human capacity capacity knowing that we are small and big at the same time or not knowing size at all forgetfulness deadness pursuit long strands of things we may never truly understand but the bleakness blankness of time makes everything sound like it belongs cheating rarity growth letting things just be diminishment fools foolishness lies undeniable madness creeps children's play child's play things under the bed remembering bankruptcy retreating severance honoring the past letting someone or something live again the neverendingness sleep and wakednesss wickedness drear fault faulters faultiness our judgement radical sanity plainness lament lamenting resurrection triumph limitless failure mixed up body body parts any thing we want control or lack of control the desire to belong or relate individuality deception deliberateness disheartening farming claims motion deliverance solitude demands haunting specimens bad people good people people people we make up people we make up our minds about charm closure readiness something steady learning how others move learning to move holding something letting something go having everything having nothing or both at the same time sheerness absolution progression property expectation expectations death slime all the unheard diminishment rolling up your sleeves preparation discontent everything all at once while you are penniless of life crowds alone blame discussion dragging hurt the unbearable thought that certain things and thoughts will never go away permanence fatality absentness flashes things that go so unseen substance allowance vomit swallowing learning to lose winning vastness claustrophobia obsession mania the depressive phobias constant losing lists variables gender hatred the danger in not understanding danger longingness cramped expression cramps in general generosity spoiledness selfishness fear dismantling something you never thought that you would dismantle falling apart buildings having not having loosening your tie gloriousness poison horning something not giving a shit about time forgetting fleeing making soup with rocks or bread or teeth doing what you wan when you want how you want and making everyone accept it gluing nothingness together making sandwiches knives taking your time because you need people to understand stoplights distributing stoplights go or no rage racing softness softness of nothing learning not to care learning to take your time learning to dismiss time or everything disclaiming arguing with someone arguing with yourself abruptness of nature

god gods God hell the difference between need and want humility making someone look good or bad celebrating temptation dismounting flamboyant shame honesty climbing slow death or illness or cancer or temptations of suicide suicide suicide's resilience resilience connection resilient disconnection allies property—oh, anything—really. Even the really really reallies. No matter what . . . if there are no spaces or seem to be spaces or grammar or something that permits "silence" (because we think inside a journey and the desired grace—and the push of authority—and the need for automatic pliability and flexibility of where "silence" lives. We push by through everything—and look and beg and strive for anything. Any thought—any time—any endful ending that we think will give us peace. Peace. Peace that we think will bring "silence." And—peace—of all things—at the end of the day—actually just seems to be so distant from "silence." And, just when—when did "silence" become a desired thing? I will say this: that last page-and-a-half is hard (and it at least includes spaces between words and maybe some phrases . . . but you could read it and read it and sometimes things will make sense and sometimes things won't make sense—and sometimes you just say a "silent" prayer that it will just—fucking end—already.

There are a lot of people and a lot of writers and a lot of poets that take issue(s) with form and structure and grammar and all of those "boxed-in" limiting kinds of entities. But—when something like a long unstructured and smothering list like that comes along—I think it may be safe to say that we begin to almost beg for some structure and convention and . . . well . . . *something* to help guide us. People want to understand everything and know everything. So, how in the hell can any remote understanding and knowingness and concreteness happen when something like *that* happens . . . And, quite frankly, causes our blindness or frustration or surrender to beg for something—something—*anything* to help us move forward with more certainty or the kindness of helpful—positive—obliging—supportive—and accommodating construction or edifice. This long and tedious list of things that may belong together or separately would drive anyone mad. It drove me mad . . . and I got to at least have fun writing it. But I assure you that I will not return to read it again. Not with any seriousness—or serious eyes, at least.

And now . . .

an essay on the way "silence" is something humans have created with various definitions and relied on for an infinite number of reasons—but cannot possibly conduct without *form*. We do it in our walk—the way we hold something in our hands—the way we trap ideas or let them go. All of our choices are built through and by form. Exploration and bust and hem. We may embroider our mouths with decorations—but silence demands exploration and forces us to sink into the gore and stunningness of the infinite. But our eyes can only catch so much and our minds look for roads and paths . . . being lost in a forest is okay for a while—but we need paths and roads and assembly and form to be comfortable with our ears and our minds. We need to have routes of relief.

While form is seemingly "silent" in this list . . . technically, there is still a form and, believe it or not, there are still rules. They are just a little more "silent." And, even if the two things seem isolated—or distant—or dissimilar—or whatever

. . . we need to understand that we need form for sound. We need sound for "silence," and we need "silence" to finally get some goddam' peace—right? And, unless you are the most drugged-up, patient person, or some sort of contrarian that is contrarian just to be a contrarian jerk, I do believe that you will probably side with some rules and some more grammar and some form. It is human nature to crave form. We have developed systems from the beginning of time. Just think about "time." Think of how we tried to nurture nature into something we could understand. Think of numbers. It would be impossible for numbers to exist without the spaces between each number; each number needs space and a kind of silence to exist for the next number to count. This is all so chicken/egg—nature/nurture—war/peace—cause/effect/cause/effect/cause/effect/cause—it is all just an effective constitution of communication that we have developed and enveloped in order to keep our brains and our minds connected. We are so obsessed with controlling chaos because we are made of fear—a fear that we spend our lives trying to shed by trying to make sense and rules and systems and forms. But—even circuses have tents, tenacious tarps, tickets, tight-ropes, trampolines and tricks—and timestamps when they start and stop. And look at war. There is even form in war. War—with its "wandering and wavering dissimilar worlds"—waving weapons over wealth and whistles and words as a way to say, "We win." As if to say—"We own our own wind and water." We are possessed by possession(s) because we really just want to run through all of the silence that waits and waits for us to waste away—the silence that we fear is just waiting for us to be weathered by the worms we walk upon as we weigh and weigh everything with our wrought and wriggled and warped expectations. Expectations that have been written with such a want for form. Even when we thought that the earth was flat—when we thought we could just one day walk off of an edge—when we thought we were the masters of understanding our own made-up rules—when we (very early on) defined life in terms of—life and death, beginnings and endings, pauses and pleasures, breaths and burdens—beckonings and reckonings—blah blah blah blah blah. And—still—we wade in a pool of hearts just trying to survive the sand of solvent silence that creeps and creeps.

Fortunately, poetry is a more lovely kind of war. A war that we get to wear everywhere—as if everywhere was the solace of our own skin—of our own homes—in our own understandings of all the varieties of form that tempt us to continue to be. Poetry is a form that allows for a spectrum of infinite forms—forms of war that we get to have to get away from silence . . . . ironically . . . for the sake of "silence." We are so weird. But—what's more weird is that part of the reason why we long for form and expectation(s) is simply a part of our longing for some kind of shock—some kind of tremor or trembling—some kind of wild rain of some kind of failing or flailing universe that just drops all of its planets and stuff on top of us as we move through a poem and get to discover something new—something so silent that it is actually loud, or creates something loud. We want poems to become or create something that is very . . . NOT silent.

Silence carries delicacy, decay, dread, desolation, death, and titanium strength. It is

the authority of both the narrator's mind, as well as the audience's mind. It floats like a bee that never finds a flower. And it vanquishes everything we want to know. But these parts of silence allow us to have our gravid heavens of clawing spheres—circles made of circles made of circles made of circles made of circles. Silence is an opportunity. It is the "lacking" that we find within ourselves. And it is an infinite unearthing that everything tries to belong to. Silence is the mask and the face together—and neither will ever truly be discovered. First, form is a kind of silence that is made of acceptance and a kind of quietness that automatically forces thoughts to commute and communicate within a realm that is soundless.

When you build a house—a room—a stanza—a something—a something that is anything, you must understand that there must be a foundation. And this foundation is a form that must be connected by the smallest, most simple, and often the least discussed component of the entire creation and construction. Nails. We must hail the nails more. They are the silent bridges of foundation that make numbers generate more numbers; they make wood become connected to more wood—to make a larger family of wood; they make things link. These nails are the smallest part of the house—the room—the stanza—the anything. Nails are the silent bridges that hold the foundation of a structure together; they are the whispers that we forget about but absolutely need for everything else to materialize and exist. And their silent reality may be forgotten until the noise of wind and water and heaviness makes you pray for the strength of the nails to commit to keeping everything together. Nails are the silent escorts to a longed-for form. And everything (including nothing) has form. And form is a human entity that allows us to understand things in more specific, delicate, and distinct ways. Form allows us to see an entire body before we think about the stuff that makes the body. The body is there. And we can see a body right in front of us—but—without the silent nails of blood and heart and bones and organs and brain and mind and wisdom and love and disappointment and hurt and fear—there would be no body—nobody—nobody—nobody at all.

A poem is a house made of rooms—of stanzas—stanzas that navigate our imaginations and our ways of understanding someone else's truth(s), as well as our own truth(s) by giving us a way to look and hear and feel the way each word connects to every other word. Even if we were to think about the fundamentality of grammar, we need to learn to see that there is a stillness and a silence in just the small spaces between words. And the house—the room—the body—the skeleton—the form—gives our eyes and ears and minds and mouths an immediate course of contemplation and conception. Even the space and silence between the active flames of a fire creates a kind of wonder that is seen and is precious but is so unexplainable that it makes us try to understand the rest of the fire even more. According to multiple sources, Federico Garcia Lorca once said that "in each thing there is an insinuation of death. Stillness, silence, and serenity are all apprenticeships" (*Only Mystery . . .*) It's all the little things that make the big things (at least seem) bigger. All poems have moments—but first we must recognize and appreciate the little

nails—the little words and spaces and forms that push our minds into an ambiguous universe that can be different for everyone—and be different every single time you see it and visualize it and realize it in a different way—again and again and again—again—again. Everything can be the basis for (a) basic changing—a flutter of fluctuating commands or impressions or clues. There are so many silent mysteries built in the spaces and the stillness and the silence of a poem. But it is important to understand that our eyes see the form and shape of the poem before we discover all the decorations that fill these rooms—these stanzas—these stanzas with all their possessions and properties and goods and flags and feelings and varying infinite worlds of everything that is possible. And the silence allows the audience to participate in the construction of these worlds that let us see the endless and immeasurable imaginative spirit—moods—essence and life that always starts with a kind of foundation. And in poetry, this foundation—this collection of nails—this liberation—this release and escape—and a culmination of everything that is beautifully striking—always begins with the birth and beginning and being and presence of form.

You would think that one would be stuck in a box—but, the box—the form, as we can see across its many types, allows a kind of silent renaissance that creates a pattern that makes ideas, thoughts, words, lines, phrases, and overall sound to create a kind of shadowing cloud of resilient reception for the audience to accept and essentially make sense out of things that may not fit in terms of image or definition—but—the audience does get to feel a kind of comfort in the ultimate destination because of the form even of, for instance, syllabic-based lines. Syllabics are silent mathematical conditions that make both the narrator and the reader feel the intimacy that never quite gets to where they can connect to the temperamental truth and nature of an absolute. For example, In "Days of 1994: Alexandrians," by Marilyn Hacker, she not only plays with the silence of the quiet spaces between syllables, but she uses the image of just looking at the poem to express silence. For example, she indents the third and fourth stanzas to create a kind of silent separation that is built within each of the stanzas. But she plays with the form and in the middle of the poem she makes a specific line jump *out* (even though it is still in the syllabic count that she has chosen):

> grief, as he savors spiced pumpkin soup,
> and a
> sliced rare filet. We'll see the next decade in
> or not. This one retains its flavor.
> 'Her new book …' '… brilliant!' 'She
> slept with …' "Really!' (13-16)

What makes this interesting, in terms of silence, is that Hacker is silently forcing the audience to accept a kind of panic of speech—but does it in a way that introduces a chopped-up conversation that automatically imports a kind of silent disturbance between the words being spoken. And because of this kind of ruggedness, disruptive, disturbing, and blemished speech is broken up—there is such a *full* silence in what is not being said. The reader must just accept the silence being expressed in the conversation. And by playing with the space but keeping the syllables in the same pattern as

in preceding stanzas, she silently drives the reader into a fresh territory where they may be quietly tricked into thinking that the syllabic pattern has been altered. And on top of all these various forms of silence built into this particular stanza—she makes the reader have to silently use their own imaginations to fill in the blanks that are arranged within the conversation. This is a kind of sneakiness that only builds more silent reverie. The navigation throughout this stanza, as well as the rest of the poem, constantly plays with space and silence and uses the quietness and the subtleness and subtext to surprise the reader as she plays around with the syllabic form. This is quite different from other forms that may play with syllabics, but they get more complicated—and, oddly enough, more silent, even if they offer more poetic devices and more words or lines to make it seem like they know the answers. But the more certain something seems . . . it really is just a kind of silence that can trick both the writer and the reader. When you seem so sure of something, and you try to impose or illustrate authority, silence is simply hiding behind the fact that amongst the over-confidence and cockiness of this authority—there really is a kind of silent ruin that breathes quietly within the form and the words that make the poem. Take the sonnet as an example of how there seems to be so much authority and a kind of power and agency; but it, too, navigates its interaction through a kind of silence.

The sonnet urges and promotes silence by using iambic pentameter to seesaw the sounds of words. It uses variation in its syllables to give altering and shifting strain to the power of its words. The iambic pentameter manufactures a kind of stress that takes sound and makes meaning out of decibel(s) and hushness and calmness and quietness—and it labors to connect with the boom of tension and noise and pressure and the force of other syllables, words, lines, and stanzas. These kinds of bonds with silence and variation and transformation in sound(s) make each word have a different impact on the syllable(s) and the word(s) that precede and follow every word throughout the line, the stanza—and eventually the entire poem. And the volt of the volta brings a silence and a hard crack that contains a kind of reformed revelation and resolution that often contests with the tone of the rest of the poem ("The Sonnet." *The Making of a Poem*. Strand, Boland 55-58).

Poet Brendan Constantine, in an interview with poet Mariano Zaro, mentions that he is "particularly aware of patterns," while also stating that "when [he] is on the trail of a poem, it seems to exist in this space just out . . . in the air . . . outside of [his] head.]" ("How I Write a Poem") Which is fascinating because I wonder sometimes who notices forms and patterns, and functions, and format, and "poetic" tools, and "poetic" systems first . . . the reader or the writer. Poet William Archila (in the same interview) explains that one of the main things he needs when writing and constructing a poem is "some kind of form; and that . . . form would [could] change depending on the subject; and that, sometimes, . . . the experience itself dictates the form of the poem" ("How I Write a Poem.")

In *The Triggering Town*, poet Richard Hugo explains that *syntax* can "change what's there [in the poem]." He discusses "[asking

and answering questions]," which is a kind of form that gets overlooked; but in so many different kinds of art—the "call and response" is extremely important to the work/piece; but it may also be the most important thing there. The writer has a relationship to the audience where decisions are made by both the reader and writer; and it is often common for a reader to notice something happening that the writer has missed, or dismissed, or even ignored.

For example, by using repetition, the reader and the writer are both affected by sound; but the themes and subjects and variations of meaning are also important to utilizing this poetic tool. Sometimes, repetition can suggest that something means more; but, interestingly enough, it could also suggest that somethings mean "less." Even poetics in song prove this—if you really think about it. Some writers discover a line that they deem a "best line" or phrase or idea . . . and they think that it holds so much importance that it needs to be repeated (perhaps as a chorus); but some of the "best lines" should live on their own and let other things repeat around them—so that the "best line" can strike more strongly.

Rhyme works similarly in that the echoes that are complimentary to the "room" (the stanza) are colors and a kind of furniture that mimic a kind of presence that makes a room feel whole; or perhaps unsettling. A tool like "slant rhyme" pushes ears and eyes past many initial glances, but also allows an entrance for both the reader and writer to think and realize and escape or confront things that they have never thought of; or that they might, now, think of in a different way. An echo lends itself to the memories we cast and forecast, and it can be trajected into a life of both learning and relearning. An echo, a rhyme, allows a thing or idea or feeling to bleed in different speeds and different colors. There are certain attachments and detachments that can occur because of these echoes.

There are expectations that a form or different tools and formats may make both the writer and the reader become used to, accustomed to, or expect certain things in the house of a poem; or maybe, even just the small room of one stanza. In the introduction of Federico Garcia Lorca's "Selected Poems," W.S. Merwin has many interesting ideas on the way certain "poetic tools" and "forms" and "systems" . . . allow "elements of [sustained] excitement. They allow the "elements of excitement" to be 'contagious' (*Selected Poems*, xi). So, even before we discover some of Lorca's most revered works, Merwin begins to discuss the "unpredictable bursts of light [that occur] in history"—" or "metaphor" that a poem can introduce, explain, ask, or even demand of both reader and writer.

In "The Narrow Road to the Interior," written in the seemingly most formless of forms, the zuihitsu, Kimiko Kahn opens the collection with an introduction entitled "Compass," which is both a lovely and important way of thinking about her experience of seeing and writing poetry. Her spastic and unpredictable "bursts of light" force the reader to read and reread—to discover and rediscover, think and rethink. The idea of a compass being the beginning of many intertwinings of small and short directions, that plait with direction and misdirection, allows for a kind of possibility and impossibility in her short streams, or maybe, just for the little stones that lie amongst a stream to rival assumption(s) or reveal crossing paths—or maybe suggest that

a tree a mile away is somehow still tied to that stream. There is a kind of "coming togetherness" that is promoted in her collection. In this introduction, she writes, of the varying approaches in a zuihitsu, something that should definitely be examined closely: "notice that none conveys the tonal insistence a writer finds her/himself in. None suggests an organizing principle what we might call a theme. None comments on structural variety—list, diary, commentary, essay, poem. Fragment . . . None offers that a sense of disorder might be artfully ordered by fragmenting, juxtaposing, contradicting, varying length or—even within a piece—topic" (Hahn 3). So, in a sense, she is saying that nothing and everything can and should occur; a form—in its own divinity—is pressed and unpressed by the compass of everyone's expectations. And if the expectations are simple, the stream can flow as a simple stream; and if something unexpected or unexplainable occurs—that is, in fact, the nature of nature. On the other hand, David St. John and Larry Levis explore the idea that a form exists to really "engage . . . readers with the most subtle and disturbing questions of the self . . . " (*The Gazer Within* Foreword).

With all of that said, I do want to impart the idea that, as with a poem, a person or a family or a group of people could live in a room or a house forever and not notice a certain crick in the floor or ceiling that explains a noise or a drip or a discomfort; and a person that views such a "subtle" thing at first glance may notice something different—something more—something small or seemingly "silent." There is, in fact, noise everywhere. But there are different eyes—different ears—different smells—memories—experiences—feelings—perceptions—explainable things—unexplainable things—imagined and unimaginable things that all are linked in a weird harmonious juxtaposition that is hidden or elevated differently in every gasp or glance.

And yet . . . silence? Form? I have to be honest—I believe that everything is noise; especially when people think that things are silent. Whether sound is present with purpose or without purpose, or if it exists knowingly or unknowingly—I must say—that there is a noise; and that, noise is everywhere. People understand things differently—and are taught differently. Everyone/everything listens differently or learns how to listen differently. And some people believe in silence; yet they can hear these words driving various things in their minds and their headspace as they read.

I will end with this: I asked Gail Wronsky (a prominent poet and professor of prosody) if she thought that "silence" was real. And all she said was, "No." And, as if sound just goes and grows like some avowed loud and proud black hole . . . "No." "No" is such a small and simple-seeming word—yet—possibly the loudest word that we know. It was kind of alarming to hear just this one single word—but all I could say was, "Oh." **«**

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The Spirit Papers: Empathy, Elegy, & "The Buzz of Language"

RYA PARTIBLE

WITHIN THE PAGES of Elizabeth Metzger's debut poetry collection, *The Spirit Papers*, one is immediately drawn into a world of profound emotional depth and artistic brilliance. Metzger's mastery of language and metaphor in this extraordinary compilation is nothing short of captivating, as she skillfully wields these literary tools to illuminate her work with vividness and unparalleled creativity. Through the artful use of unconventional yet impactful metaphors, she effortlessly immerses her readers in a journey that resonates with intensity and a raw sense of human experience, delving into the unfathomable depths of her personal sorrow and profound grief. The catalyst for this profound poetic journey is the imminent loss of a cherished friend, Max, who is terminally ill, a pivotal event that serves as the crucible for Metzger's exploration of the intricate web of human emotions and the enduring strength of the human spirit. In the pages of *The Spirit Papers*, she deftly navigates the complex terrain of loss and bereavement, weaving together a rich tapestry of emotions that profoundly resonates with her audience, extending an intimate invitation to share in her cathartic and transformative journey.

To fully grasp the intricate use of language in Elizabeth Metzger's *The Spirit Papers*, one must first understand the deeply personal context that shaped its creation. In her interview with *The Rumpus*, Metzger reveals the dual forces of creation and loss that influenced her work. As she navigated the emotional »

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landscape of trying to conceive a child while dealing with the illness and eventual loss of her beloved friend Max, Metzger found herself at the crossroads of life's most profound mysteries: birth and death. She said of this, "...as conceiving a baby became more and more real for my husband and me, and as Max simultaneously became more and more ill, the odd timing probably opened the channels between the unborn and the dying for me." Her musings delve into the heart of human vulnerability, questioning the very nature of understanding and connection. Metzger ponders the possibilities of becoming a mother to a being that might remain an enigma, a mystery that eludes her grasp. This contemplation extends to her poetry, where she reflects on her childhood and family, considering the paradoxical nature of a child's existence—how it can signify both a presence (birth) and an absence (miscarriage), and in both, a form of abandonment. *The Spirit Papers* thus becomes more than a collection of poems; it is a journey through the complex terrain of loss and bereavement. Metzger's language is not merely decorative but serves as a conduit for exploring these profound themes. Her words invite readers into her world, offering a glimpse into the transformative power of grief and the possibility of finding solace in shared experiences. Understanding the emotional backdrop of Metzger's life during the creation of this work is crucial for appreciating the depth and resonance of her use of metaphor, which serves to communicate and navigate the nuances of loss and connection.

To understand the intention behind how Metzger writes, we must first understand what she has said about her own writing. In discussion about her use of metaphor with *The Rumpus*, she said, "We can only define ourselves by what we are not. Language invites its opposite. It is approximate. It is not quite what we mean. This is the blessing of the figurative, of metaphor, and I think it's also the curse of the anxious mind: What if this happens? What if this does not happen?" She also said, "Using language to get beyond language is my favorite use of language. By expressing a thought or feeling as it emerges, the act of expression itself becomes inextricable from thinking. The more intimately linked thought-feelings are with language, the more paradoxically incapable language seems...Language, because of its inevitable shortcomings, approaches, like an asymptote, the infinite and unknowable. Poems are all about this beyond language—I'd love the poem to be just the buzz of language that creates sense, meaning and the pulse of consciousness, open enough for another to enter it, wear it, run wildly beyond it." Elizabeth Metzger's reflections on her use of metaphor and language offer a profound insight into the thematic core of *The Spirit Papers*. Her assertion that "We can only define ourselves by what we are not" and her exploration of language as both a blessing and a curse demonstrate that she acknowledges the limitations of language, yet simultaneously embraces its potential to transcend its own boundaries. This paradoxical view of language as both inadequate and infinitely expressive is central to the way she navigates the complex terrain of loss and bereavement in her work. Furthermore, her desire to create a "buzz of language" that creates an open, shared experience resonates with her audience's emotional journey through

grief and loss. This approach to language creates a space where readers can enter, interact with, and extend beyond the text, mirroring the transformative journey of understanding and healing that Metzger undertakes throughout *The Spirit Papers*. Her metaphors and linguistic choices are not just tools of expression but pathways to deeper understanding, making the intangible aspects of grief and loss more accessible.

Building on Metzger's commentary into the use of language and metaphor in her work, let's dive into specific examples from *The Spirit Papers*. Here, we can see how her metaphors not only encapsulate the essence of loss and transformation but also invite the reader into a deeply personal yet universally relatable experience. First, I would like to analyze a metaphor from "Expecting a Death," the first poem in part one of this collection:

> I will walk through doors
> until the house
> shrinks down to rooms
> then thresholds
> then door to door
> to door so no one
> can walk through them. (lines 23-29)

Metzger's metaphor of walking through doors is a vivid illustration of her journey through grief. The house, which initially appears as a symbol of shelter and familiarity, gradually is reduced to mere doorways, signifying the stripping away of comfort and certainty that often accompanies loss. This progression reflects the dizzying nature of grief, where the familiar structures of life seem to diminish, leaving only transitions and thresholds. The finality implied in the metaphor, where doors become too numerous and close together for anyone to pass through, speaks to a sense of isolation that mourning can bring. In this metaphor, the journey of grief is not just about sorrow but also about how these deep experiences changed the landscape of Metzger's life, leaving her feeling disconnected from previous realities. This metaphor is so rich because it is not just about her own experiences but also about the universal nature of grief and loss, offering a shared space for understanding and empathy.

Another example of Metzger's illuminating use of language is highlighted in the poem "In My Recklessly Bright but Average Flashback of Your Childhood," in which Metzger writes, "I see the acid bones of a boy unlocked from ice / and the halo of what's unbegun . . ." (lines 1-2) which is a critic's favorite of those who have reviewed this collection, and for good reason. First of all, the metaphor of "acid bones" suggests something that has been preserved, yet also eroded over time, symbolizing the way memories or past experiences can be both long-lasting but also painful. The idea of these bones being "unlocked from ice" can represent the thawing of emotions or memories that have been frozen. This unlocking process is often a part of grief, where previously "frozen" feelings resurface, often painfully so. Finally, the "halo of what's unbegun" is a particularly striking metaphor. It speaks to the potential of a life unfulfilled. In the context of grief, this can reflect the mourning not just of what was, but also of what could have been. It's a recognition of the void left by unfulfilled potential or unstarted paths. Metzger's language goes

beyond simple description, delving into the emotional and psychological landscapes of grief. The metaphors she employs are not just literary devices; they are tools for the reader to understand and empathize with the multifaceted nature of loss.

One final metaphor to analyze from Metzger's work comes from the poem, "Pre-elegy," which was my favorite of the collection. She writes, "A box opens in the stillness / tranquil as any other wish-you-were-here" (lines 3-4). The imagery of a box opening in stillness creates an atmosphere of quiet introspection, possibly alluding to the internal process of confronting memories or emotions that have been sealed away. This act of opening the box in a tranquil environment contrasts with the often tumultuous and chaotic nature of grief, suggesting a moment of calm or clarity amidst the emotional storm. The phrase "tranquil as any other wish-you-were-here" further deepens this metaphor. It evokes the idea of longing and absence typically expressed in messages to loved ones who are missed. This line could imply that in the act of opening this metaphorical box, Metzger is confronting the future absence of Max, reflecting on the void he will leave. The tranquility mentioned here might also hint at a bittersweet peace that comes with accepting his imminent end, a resignation to the reality of loss. This metaphor serves as a poignant illustration; a moment of quiet realization or acceptance, a pause in the continuous struggle of coping with terminal illness. The metaphor captures the essence of grief's stillness, the profound moments of solitude where one comes to terms with what has been lost and the permanent change it brings to their life.

After analyzing the context and resonance of these individual metaphors, I want to now turn focus to how Metzger's use of metaphor impacts the collection of poetry as a whole. Gregory Orr wrote of the use of metaphor, in *A Primer for Poets and Readers of Poetry*, "...metaphors slow a poem down by sending the reader's imagination zooming off to the new connections that the figures of speech introduce. The more metaphors in a poem, the slower the going...they can disrupt narrative unity" (location 1260). Metzger's writing is a slow process, as some of her poems are made almost entirely of couplets of metaphors. I would argue that in Metzger's work, this slowing down is intentional and significant. Her couplets, rich in metaphor, compel readers to pause and reflect, engaging deeply with each image and its implications. This deliberate pacing allows readers to navigate the complex terrain of bereavement more thoroughly. Each metaphor serves as a stepping stone in the journey through grief, providing moments of introspection. This slow journey through her poetry mirrors the non-linear and reflective process of grieving itself. Metzger's heavy reliance on metaphor enhances the emotional depth and resonance of her collection. Rather than disrupting narrative unity, as Orr suggests can happen, Metzger's metaphors build a cohesive narrative of grief and transformation. Her metaphors act as invitations to the readers, extending a hand to join her in this intimate exploration of grief, loss, and ultimately, healing.

While many have described Metzger's work as an "elegy," she herself strays from that label, saying "I...don't see the book as

elegiac (though now it of course can be read that way because Max has in fact died). I think the poems are more about empathy for someone radically present than elegy for someone already lost. Ultimately, I see the poems as intimations of an impossible togetherness." However, in analyzing the book as an elegy, I have found the most clarity in her writing. As defined by David Biespiel in an article for Oregon State, "...the elegy is a poem interested, above all, in making a metaphor from loss." Metzger's work, indeed, excels in creating metaphors from loss, aligning with Biespiel's interpretation of what constitutes an elegy. However, it also transcends this definition, achieving "intimations of an impossible togetherness," as Metzger described. This nuanced approach to the concept of elegy ties back to my original thesis on Metzger's handling of loss and bereavement in *The Spirit Papers*.

Her poems are not just expressions of grief; they are explorations of empathy and connectedness in the face of loss. The idea of "impossible togetherness" that Metzger strives for in her work aligns with the rich tapestry of emotions she creates in her writing. Her poetry invites readers into a shared experience that is both cathartic and transformative, navigating the complexities of loss while simultaneously seeking a deep, empathetic connection with the radically present. Metzger's unique blend of elegy and empathy reflects the depth and resonance of her work with her audience. This blend allows her to explore grief not just as an end but as a means to understanding and connecting with the present, making *The Spirit Papers* a profound and transformative journey through the landscape of human emotions. «

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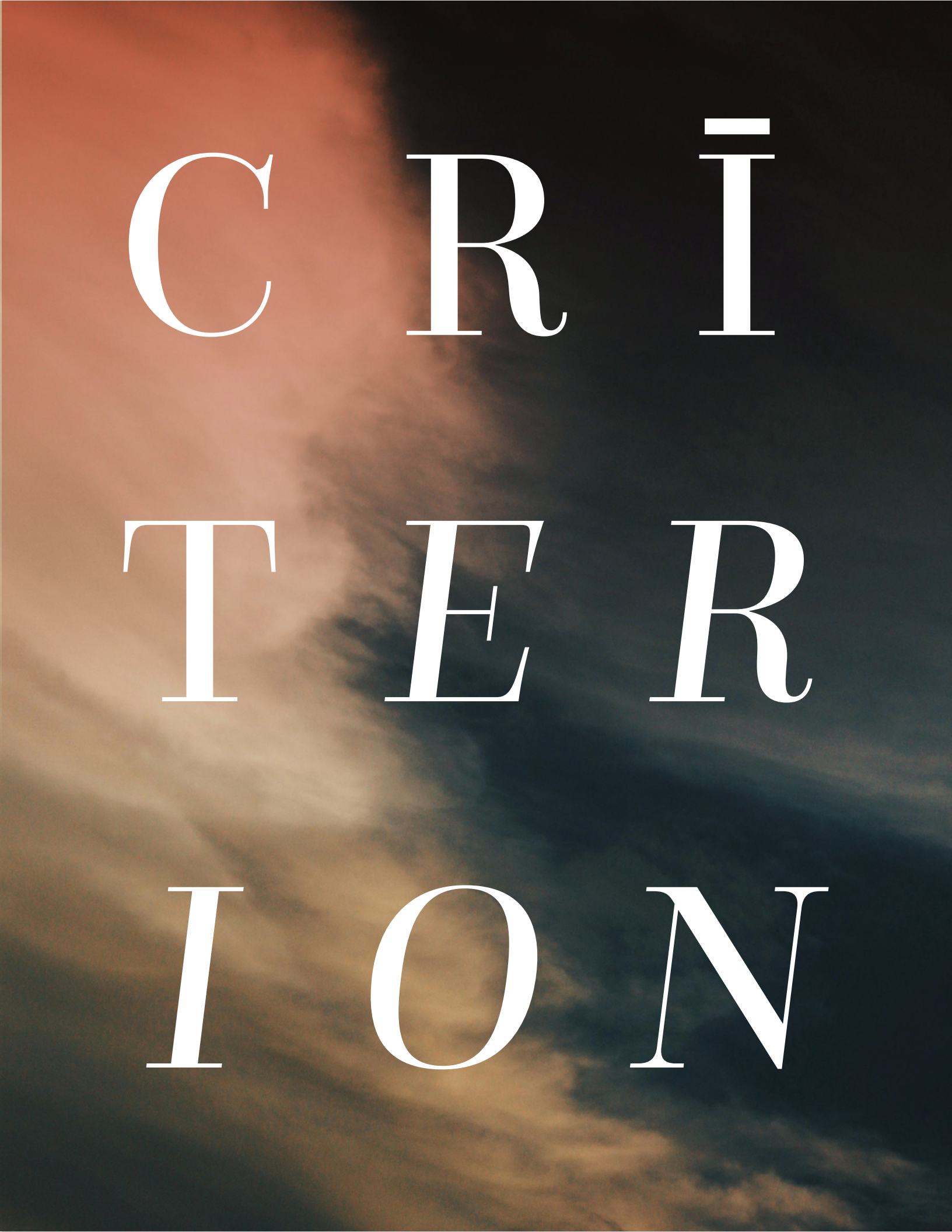
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