

CEAMAGAZINE

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GARY GRIEVE-CARLSON AND NICOLE WILHELM

Learning to Shudder: Sex, Ideology, and the
Pedagogical Function of Horror
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Specialized Readers: Anarchy in the Canyonlands
ALAN RAMÓN CLINTON

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Lindley Murray and the Grammar Wars

by Gary Grieve-Carlson and Nicole Wilhelm

“. . . [A]t school the really completely exciting thing was diagramming sentences and that has been to me ever since the one thing that has been completely exciting and completely completing.”

—Gertrude Stein, “Poetry and Grammar” (211)

“Then I am free to confess I don’t know grammar. Lady Blessington, do you know grammar? I detest grammar. There never was such a thing heard of before Lindley Murray. I wonder what they did for grammar before his day!”

—Lord Bulwer-Lytton, in Nathaniel Parker Willis’s “At Lady Blessington’s” (263)

The obscure American grammarian Lindley Murray appears in a remarkable number of famous novels. In Charles Dickens’s *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838), “a Murray’s grammar” lies on a table in the parlor of the Yorkshire schoolmaster, Wackford Squeers (78). In Dickens’s *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840), Little Nell and her grandfather are briefly given shelter by Mrs. Jarley, the owner of a traveling waxworks show that includes a representation of “Mr. Lindley Murray as he appeared when engaged in the composition of his English Grammar” (216). In *Great Expectations* (1860), Pip falls asleep troubled by the message “Don’t go home,” which “became a vast shadowy verb which I had to conjugate. Imperative mood, present tense. Do not thou go home, let him not go home, let us not go home, do not ye or you go home, let not them go home.” The Norton Critical Edition glosses this passage as a “[s]poof on manuals of grammar, probably Lindley Murray’s, from which Dickens almost certainly learned his conjugations” and notes that Murray was at that time “a household word” (274).

In *Moby-Dick* (1851), Ahab nails a large gold doubloon to the Pequod's mainmast and announces that it will go to the man who first sights the white whale. The chapter titled "The Doubloon" depicts Ahab, Starbuck, Stubb, and others approaching the doubloon, studying it closely, and trying to interpret its images. Pip, who has slipped into madness after nearly drowning, watches the others as they study the doubloon and says, "I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look," to which Stubb replies, "Upon my soul, he's been studying Murray's Grammar!" (335). One year after the publication of *Moby-Dick*, Harriet Beecher Stowe published *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, where, in the opening chapter, the slave-trader Haley is criticized because "[h]is conversation was in free and easy defiance of Murray's Grammar" (1). In George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1874), we read that "Mrs. Garth, like more celebrated educators, had her favorite ancient paths, and in a general wreck of society would have tried to hold her 'Lindley Murray' above the waves" (169). Finally, in the "Eumaeus" chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), we read that Bloom, late at night in the cabman's shelter, "recollected the morning littered bed etcetera and the book about Ruby with met him pike hoses (*sic*) in it which must have fell down sufficiently appropriately beside the domestic chamberpot with apologies to Lindley Murray" (534). Murray would have corrected "have fell" to "have fallen."

Murray's fame, or notoriety, was largely the result of the remarkable sales of his *English Grammar* (1795), "the most famous grammar of all times" (Belok 107), nearly two million copies of which appeared in roughly two hundred editions during the nineteenth century (Applebee 7; Van Ostade 3). What one scholar calls a "strange Murraymania" led to "an edition for the blind (almost unheard of in the nineteenth century) and even a board game, 'A Journey to Lindley Murray's,'" as well as editions of the *Grammar* in Ireland, Canada, India, Germany, France, and Portugal, and translations into German, French, Dutch, Swedish, Spanish, Russian, and Japanese (Lynch 109). Between 1801 and 1840, Murray was "the best-selling producer of books in the world" (Monaghan 95). Hundreds of thousands of American students read Murray, and hundreds of thousands more read grammar textbooks that imitated his.

So Murray was certainly famous, but the novelists use him most often as a metonym for mildly snobbish propriety and treat him with gentle mockery, while today he is so obscure that he requires footnotes in Norton Critical Editions, and no famous novelist would even bother to mock him. What can account for this precipitous descent from fame to obscurity? The simple answer is that Murray was a victim of the grammar wars, a conflict between rival sets of grammarians—the prescriptive and the descriptive—each of whom tends to ridicule and caricature the other. In some ways the grammar wars may seem about as serious as the war between the Big-Endians and the Little-Endians in *Gulliver's Travels*, whose bloody conflict centers around which end of an egg ought to be broken first before eating. But Swift's satire was deeply serious, and so are the grammar wars.

Prescriptive grammar is normative—it imagines grammar as a system of rules for creating “correct” sentences and is the traditional schoolroom grammar of “parts of speech” and diagramming sentences that some of us remember. When the first English grammars were written in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, “grammar” meant Latin grammar, so it is not surprising that the first English grammars took Latin as a kind of template. According to that template, “knowing” grammar meant memorizing definitions, rules, and paradigms of declension and conjugation and then applying those rules by “parsing” (or diagramming) each word in a sentence, as well as correcting errors in sentences. In learning a foreign language, this approach makes reasonably good sense, for the student lacks the native speaker's sense of whether something “sounds right.” In studying one's own language, this approach may be less helpful.

Categories that make sense when describing Latin grammar, such as the “ablative absolute,” don't fit English grammar quite as neatly. More importantly, because Latin is a dead language, it is no longer evolving—its syntax and morphology are fixed and unchanging—but it is unreasonable to assume that the syntax and morphology of a living language such as English should be similarly unchanging. The prescriptivists, however, tended to conceive English grammar in terms of rigid and unchanging categories of “right” or “wrong.”

Although Robert Lowth's *Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762), from which Murray borrowed heavily, was the most important of the early prescriptive grammars, Murray was the great popularizer of prescriptive grammar, so he bore the brunt of the opposition's fire. William Hazlitt called Murray's grammar "obsolete to petrification" (qtd. in Belok 109), and Thomas de Quincey wrote, "The grammar of Lindley Murray . . . full of atrocious blunders . . . reigns despotically through the young ladies' schools, from the Orkneys to the Cornish Scillys" (qtd. in Crystal 123). In 1826 *The American Journal of Education* published a series of "Strictures on Murray's Grammar," and in 1832 the grammarian Gould Brown launched "a long two-installment attack"¹ on Murray and his followers.

Murray has also frequently been accused of plagiarism—Lowth was his major source—both while he was alive and long after his death. As recently as 1959, for example, Emma Vorlat criticizes Murray for "compos[ing] a whole grammar almost entirely by compilation, hardly mentioning any source and publishing the whole as a genuine work of his own," though she also concedes that, at that time, "most grammarians copied, usually without mention of their sources" (125) and that, beginning with the 1810 edition, Murray names his sources in his introduction but is vague on the extent of his borrowing. Sensitive to this sort of criticism, Murray writes somewhat defensively: "In a work which professes itself to be a compilation, and which, from the nature and design of it, must consist chiefly of materials selected from the writings of others, it is scarcely necessary to apologize for the use which the Compiler [i.e., Murray himself] has made of his predecessors' labours; or for omitting to insert their names" (1821 ed., 5). He sees himself less as a grammarian than as an educator: on the first page of his Introduction, he notes that "little can be expected from a new compilation, besides a careful selection of the most useful matter [from various English grammars already published], and some degree of improvement in the mode of adapting it to the understanding, and the gradual progress of learners" (1821 ed., 3).

Since eighteenth-century grammarians seem routinely to have borrowed from one another, one suspects that the plagiarism accusations stem largely from pique at the enormous popularity of Murray's book. The book was popular precisely

because it made the work of earlier grammarians more accessible to students and their teachers: Murray grouped rules together in ways that made their connections easier to see, and he clarified and shortened many of the examples used to illustrate those rules. As a result, his *Grammar* (1795) rapidly displaced the school grammars of Noah Webster (1784) and Caleb Bingham (1799). Hitchings notes that “Webster’s contempt for [Murray] and conviction that Murray was forever stealing his ideas . . . bordered on the paranoid” (111) and that Webster regularly denounced Murray in essays and pamphlets. In a letter to his brother in the U.S., dated 1815, Murray comments:

I have received the paper containing some observations of Noah Webster, on my Grammar. I think they are of so little consequence that I would by no means have any reply made to them of any sort whatsoever. Whoever writes a grammar must in some degree make use of his predecessors’ labors: and I think I have made an ample apology for doing so in the Introduction to my Grammar. I have applied two paragraphs on that subject. Noah Webster is not correct in saying I have made “numerous extracts from his Grammar.” I have looked over and reckoned them, and I believe that, *exclusive* of the one to which I have put his name, as it was a long one, and to which he does not object, they do not when put together amount to *two pages* of the American octavo Grammar, which contains more than six hundred pages. Most if not all of the extracts have some modification, either to the language or matter of them. I have, in several parts of the octavo Grammar, controverted some of Noah Webster’s grammatical opinions and positions: but I have not mentioned his name. If I had, he would, I think, have appeared as a rather eccentric grammarian.²

We should also bear in mind that Murray never set out to write a best-selling grammar. Three young teachers (one of whom was the daughter of a close friend of Murray’s) at a Quaker school for girls in York asked him to write an English grammar for their students, and, as Murray recalls in his *Memoirs*, he replied, “if my little labours will be confined to the Schools of York and Clonmel [a Quaker missionary school in Ireland], an extent abundantly sufficient for them, I purpose to make some essay to comply with your desires” (189). Murray had no idea that his little book would prove so popular, but, once it did, he was, not

surprisingly, proud of its success, and he worked hard to improve it in successive editions.³

Was Murray's *Grammar* as bad as his detractors claim? In some ways it was, in part because Murray's understanding of syntax differs drastically from ours, which depends heavily on the patterns that underlie phrases and clauses. For example, the most common syntactic pattern in contemporary English includes a subject, a verb, and a direct object, and different kinds of words can fill each slot. The direct object slot, for example, might be filled by an entire clause, as in "I (subject) know (verb) what you did last summer (direct object)," and a noun phrase like "last summer" may function adverbially, as it does in the example. Instead of asking his students to recognize the syntactic patterns that underlie sentences, Murray asks them to "parse" the sentence, i.e., to provide a grammatical description of each word in the sentence. If, for example, the sentence is "Virtue ennobles us," Murray writes that the student should reply:

Virtue is a common substantive, of the neuter gender, the third person, the singular number, and in the nominative case. (*Decline the noun.*) *Ennobles* is a regular verb active, indicative mood, present tense, and the third person singular. (*Repeat the present tense, the imperfect tense, and the perfect participle*—the learner should occasionally repeat all the moods and tenses of the verb). *Us* is a personal pronoun, of the first person plural, and in the objective case. (*Decline it.*). (1821 ed., 215)

Such an approach depends far more heavily on memorization than on an understanding of English syntax and strikes most of us today as stultifyingly tedious although Murray claims in his *Memoirs* that, as a boy, he was "agreeably exercised in the business of parsing sentences" (8) at the school he attended in Philadelphia.

For most descriptive linguists, Murray represents an extreme model of prescriptivism. Like Lowth, Murray condemns the double negative, and he corrects the putative grammatical errors of well-known authors. Van Ostade finds him even more prescriptive than Lowth (289), and Lynch agrees: "of the three major linguists of the day [the other two are Lowth and Joseph Priestley], Murray was the one who most enjoyed legislating: a greater proportion of his grammar is devoted to prescription than either Priestley's or Lowth's" (110). Moreover, he concludes that

Murray was “the least sophisticated thinker of the lot,” despite his being “certainly the most influential” (109).

For an ostensible prescriptivist, however, Murray is often undogmatic in his comments: “We say rightly, either ‘This is the weaker of the two;’ or ‘the weakest of the two;’ but the former appears to be preferable, because there are only two things being compared” (qtd. in Hitchings 125). He also acknowledges that acceptable usage may vary between formal and informal, or what he calls “grave” and “familiar,” contexts. Here he is, for example, on the double genitive: “Sometimes indeed this method is absolutely needful . . . the expression ‘This picture of my friend’ and ‘This picture of my friend’s’ suggest very different ideas . . . [but where it] is not necessary to distinguish the sense, and especially in a grave style, it is generally omitted” (qtd. in Lynch 111). Lynch calls this “a model of descriptivism . . . Murray here is talking about what’s *appropriate* rather than what’s *right*” (112). For one final example, on the vexed question of whether one may end a sentence with a preposition, which is improper in Latin, and which John Dryden may have been the first to insist is equally improper in English (although we find the usage in Old English texts, as well as in Chaucer and Shakespeare), Murray writes: “this is an idiom to which our language is strongly inclined; it prevails in common conversation, and suits very well with the familiar style of writing . . . but the placing of the preposition before the relative [which, whom] is more graceful, as well as more perspicuous” (qtd. in Crystal 113).

The label “prescriptive” oversimplifies Murray’s attitude toward grammar, but such oversimplification persists. Jack Lynch writes:

The usual story is that English speakers were happily speaking confidently, without the least hint of self-consciousness. Then along came the [prescriptive] grammarians, who ruined it for the rest of us ever since. They foolishly imposed Latin rules on a recalcitrant language; they made people ashamed of the way they spoke. (94)

Lynch also cites Stephen Pinker on the prescriptivists: “Most of the prescriptive rules of the language mavens are bits of folklore that originated for screwball reasons several hundred years ago” (114). David Crystal argues that prescriptive grammar makes people feel threatened or inferior and claims that “[t]he

prescriptive grammarians went out of their way to invent as many rules as possible which might distinguish polite from impolite speech” (122). Edgar Schuster bemoans the fact that, in 1783, Rhode Island College (known today as Brown University) required Lowth’s *Grammar* and that Yale freshmen had Murray’s *Grammar* inflicted on them. Each book, writes Schuster, was “downright reactionary,” for “[b]oth authors gloried in condemning the prose of the greatest masters of the English language, based on ‘rules’ that no one other than pop grammarians ever followed” (522).

Descriptive grammarians celebrate the example of Murray’s nemesis Noah Webster, who switched sides in the grammar wars. In the Preface to Part One of his *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language* (more commonly known as the *Blue-Backed Speller*, 1783), Webster states his goal—“To define a uniformity and purity of language in America”—which sounds rigorously prescriptive (qtd. in Applebee xii). Part Two of the *Institute* (1784) was a prescriptive grammar that, like Murray’s, borrowed heavily from Lowth. After reading Horne Tooke’s *The Diversions of Purley* (1786), however, which is highly critical of Lowth, Webster abandoned prescriptivism and rewrote his grammar. He deleted the praise of Lowth that had appeared in the earlier edition and, on the basis of common usage, accepted the double negative, as well as constructions like “It is me” or “Who is she married to?” He also changed his mind on the subjunctive: not only does he accept constructions such as “If John was here now,” but he insists that English does not have the subjunctive (what that means for those speakers who say “If John were here now” is an interesting question). Here is Webster in full dogmatic mode:

After all my reading and observation for the course of ten years I have been able to unlearn a considerable part of what I learnt in early life, and at thirty years of age can with confidence affirm that our modern grammars have done much more hurt than good. The authors have labored to prove what is obviously absurd, namely, that our language is not made right; and in pursuance of this idea have tried to make it over again, and persuade the English to speak by Latin rules, or by arbitrary rules of their own. Hence, they have rejected many phrases of pure English, and substituted those which are neither English nor sense. Writers and grammarians have attempted for centuries to introduce a subjunctive mode into

English, yet without effect; the language requires none distinct from the indicative . . . The people are right, and . . . common practice, even among the unlearned, is generally defensible on the principles of analogy and the structure of the language. . . . very few of the alterations recommended by Lowth and his followers can be vindicated on any better principle than some Latin rule or his own private opinion. (qtd. in Scudder 42-43)

“The people are right” sounds stirringly egalitarian, but what if “the people” disagree? What if a particular usage is deemed acceptable not by 90% of adult native speakers, but by 70%? 60%? 50%? Siding with the “Websterians,” Dorothy Sedley writes, “When *snuck* (not ‘sneaked’) is perceived by large numbers of native speakers to be the past tense form, it is the past tense form” (204). But what are “large numbers”? A bare majority? A large minority? How do we know when the requisite “large numbers” have been reached? Finally, for all of his democratic posturing, Webster sounds quite elitist when he writes, “Very few men are competent to decide upon what is national practice” (qtd. in Southard 17). Who, one wonders, gets to determine that competence and on what grounds? Perhaps the most well-known example of the “battle” that Southard describes was the publication of *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* in 1961, which accepted words such as “ain’t” and “irregardless,” and usage such as “like” as a conjunction (readers of a certain age may recall the controversy over the 1960s advertising jingle “Winston tastes good like a cigarette should”—the advertisers responded to their prescriptivist critics with the slogan “What do you want, good grammar or good taste?”). For some descriptivists, “good grammar” implied a misguided prescriptive elitism focused on arbitrary rules that were deaf to the usage of adult native speakers. Confident in what they considered their more objective approach to language, these descriptivists saw the project of prescribing a “standard” English as a tool for reinforcing the inferior status of different minorities. Geneva Smitherman, for example, argued that the grammatical norms of standard English are “based on race and class position and are simply attempts to make the ‘outsiders’ talk like the ‘insiders,’” i.e., to “conform to white, middle class society”; such norms are merely “a manifestation of white America’s class anxiety” (775).

The strengths of the descriptive position are clear: the “correct/incorrect” duality that the prescriptivists had borrowed from the pedagogy of Latin grammar is replaced by the kind of careful, empirical description that allows linguists to induce the grammatical structure of a language, and no forms of a language are stigmatized as non-standard; instead, each form is recognized as grammatical in terms of its own internal structure.

Constructions that most adult native speakers regularly use, such as prepositions at the end of clauses, or split infinitives, or “it’s me” instead of “It is I,” are accepted on the grounds of “prevailing usage” rather than proscribed.

It is easy to grasp the reasons for rejecting prescriptivism: it can be used as a tool of elitism or class snobbery, it can play to base feelings of nativist xenophobia, and its authoritative emphasis on following the rules, on getting things “right,” can very easily slide into imputations regarding one’s education or intelligence. It is easy for even well-educated people to feel anxious or unsure of themselves when it comes to grammar, and it is natural to resent being made to feel that way.

If the prescriptive attitude is rooted in elitist snobbery, then why defend it? In the 1999 *Phi Delta Kappan*, Edgar Schuster lays out the case for the demolition of prescriptivism by contrasting grammar rules from usage rules. Grammar rules are internalized by adult native speakers although people who learn English as a foreign language may violate them. For example, a native speaker would never confuse the word order in the verb phrase “could have been playing,” while a non-native speaker might well get the word order wrong. Usage rules, on the other hand, may not be followed by large numbers of adult native speakers, but prescriptive grammarians still declare them wrong. Schuster’s example of a usage rule violation is “Where’s the English teacher at?” But this usage error, he insists, is grammatically correct: “If a communication is correctly understood by a native speaker, then that communication is grammatical.” Breaking grammatical rules may impede understanding, but “[i]f a usage rule is broken, there will be no misunderstanding” (519). At first, this distinction seems plausible, but only at first: if a non-native speaker asks me “What for dinner is tonight?” surely I can understand him/her. Schuster writes as if “understanding” were a question of all or nothing—either I understand what you say, or I don’t—when in

fact there is often a considerable gray area. Some utterances I understand immediately, and others may seem utterly opaque, but I can often “understand” the broken English of a non-native speaker as well as the non-standard English of a native speaker, so Schuster’s distinction breaks down. To claim that any variety of English that I can understand is grammatical is to set the bar for “grammaticality” quite low. Baseball fans understood Dizzy Dean when he announced that a baserunner had “slud” into third, but Dizzy himself would proudly admit that his English was not always “grammatical.”

If prescriptivism were simply as wrongheaded as writers like Schuster would have us believe, the grammar wars would be over. But as Lynch points out, “[Lindley] Murray’s descendants are still with us,” and he points to Lynne Truss’s *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* (2003) as “only the latest bestseller in a long line of unexpectedly successful books on language” (112). But why “unexpectedly”? Is it because Truss’s book is essentially a twenty-first-century version of Lowth’s or Murray’s, and the Descriptivists have told us that Lowth and Murray were wrong? David Crystal calls Truss’s book “the publishing success story of the new millennium” in the opening pages of his *The Fight for English: How Language Pundits Ate, Shot, and Left*, in which he parodies her title and dismisses her as a “pundit.” Lynch may be surprised, and Crystal may be unhappy, but Truss’s book succeeded quite simply because she gave her readers the same thing that Murray gave to his: clear-cut answers to the question of “what’s right?”

Writers like Truss and Murray are also popular because they stress clear, straightforward writing. The public’s assumption that clarity results from rules contributes to its desire for the kind of linguistic authority promised by prescriptive grammar. Another response to that desire is *The Chicago Manual of Style*, which first appeared in 1906. Cecelia Watson shows that the *Manual* has grown increasingly prescriptive in each new edition, largely as a result of its readers’ demands. In the latest edition, “the preface announces that the book will ‘recommend a single rule for a given stylistic matter rather than presenting multiple options’ [because this] was what the *Manual*’s users wanted” (668). The *Manual*’s users, like the purchasers of the books by Truss and Murray, know that in certain contexts—in the world of business, or journalism, or

academia—a particular “register of discourse” (as the linguists say) is expected, and they know, or at least suspect, that they have not mastered all of the expected conventions of that register. The parts they have not mastered are what Schuster calls “usage” problems, and although these are relatively few in number, many of us feel unsure of our mastery of them.

For example, what is a dangling participle? Should I write “the heavier of the two” instead of “the heaviest of the two”? These are the kinds of questions that prompt the kind of anxiety that created a market for Lowth, Murray, and Truss. In fact, we see many of these same issues covered by each of these authors. But descriptivists are troubled by the way in which “right” and “wrong” can slide from simple grammatical correctness to “proper” or “improper,” which can suggest a moral infraction. We know that people often feel self-conscious or guilty about their grammar, but we also know that grammar is not a moral issue.

The linguist C. M. Millward, who is no friend of the prescriptivists, explains their appeal: “people still long for a single authority that will define linguistic morality in unambiguous terms” (308). Millward implies that if people were to recognize that grammar is not a moral issue, then they would cease to seek out the authority promised by usage handbooks. But is that true? The linguists’ attack on prescriptivism has led to far less grammar instruction in American public schools, but anxiety regarding one’s ability to write correctly remains common even among well-educated Americans. Cecelia Watson writes, “when I talk to students and fellow academics about grammar, they lower their voices confidentially, as though confessing a sin: *I just don’t ever use the semicolon because I’m afraid I’ll do it wrong. I sometimes want to use two colons in a single sentence, but I’m not allowed. I am very confused about the Oxford comma*” (671). But, she continues, a return to prescriptivism will not solve the problem:

We must still worry about whether we know the rules and have applied the rules correctly. We must worry about situations for which we cannot find an applicable rule, and hope that the authorities on the *Chicago Manual’s* question-and-answer page address the oversight *tout de suite*. And if we are very good at remembering the rules and applying even their less well-known precepts, we must wonder if our

assiduous application of these details will strike the average reader as *mistakes* rather than the markers of precision we hope them to be. (671)

Watson is right. Rules cannot “[free] us from the challenges of interpreting other authors’ texts and the anxieties of writing our own” (671). But throwing out the rules does not eliminate our linguistic anxiety, either.

So what shall we do? Perhaps we can re-conceive the reasons for the conflict. Both sides agree that one reason for the popularity of eighteenth-century prescriptivism was its appeal to those who wanted to climb the ladder of social class. The relationship between speech and social mobility has long been acknowledged, and people know that in order to climb that ladder, they have to behave, dress, and speak in “socially proper” ways. In fact, much of the prestige of Standard English derives from the value ascribed to it by those striving for upward social mobility. The eighteenth-century Lowth and the twentieth-century Truss are popular with that same segment of the population for that same reason.

Still, we don’t like class snobbery, and some of us feel that prescriptivism lends itself to such behavior. But if I want to climb the class ladder, one of the things I’ll have to do is to dress like people in the class to which I aspire. Fashion can be snobbish, but who would criticize someone who tries to dress well for an important job interview? Most of us accede to the expectation that we dress “professionally” in certain positions or for certain occasions. Similarly, most academics accede to the expectation that we write according to professional expectations when, for example, we submit something for publication (even if we’re writing in order to argue against prescriptive notions of “correctness”).

We might think of fashion and correct usage as forms of etiquette: each concerns itself with a set of expectations within a particular social context, and each is a potential scene of anxiety (“What are you wearing tonight?” “Does this sound right?”). Both fashion and usage may impose rigid expectations that function to enforce conformity in the service of social exclusion. But both fashion and usage also create sets of broadly accessible expectations within which anyone can feel as if he or she belongs. When I know that I’m dressed “appropriately,” or that I’m using Chicago Style references correctly, or that all of my

subjects agree with their verbs, I may feel less anxious, more confident, more relaxed. Some people care more deeply about etiquette than others; they feel a need for certainty regarding its expectations, and they want very much to conform to what's expected of them. Others take pride in not caring about it, while many of us fall somewhere between these two extremes. This seems a fairly accurate way of describing people's attitudes toward usage: some want very badly to abide by its rules, while others take a sort of pride in their refusal to follow them, but many fall somewhere between these two extremes. It is no surprise that the word "etiquette" first appears in English in 1750 and that books on etiquette become popular right around the time that Lowth and Murray are writing their prescriptive grammars. When Murray cites *propriety* as a linguistic value, he means discourse that is polished, elegant, and correct, discourse that is *ap-propriate* to a particular social context.

Some etiquette matters because it's moral—something as simple as "please" or "thank you" may prevent unintentional rudeness—while other kinds of etiquette strike us as purely arbitrary and useful merely in the service of snobbery: does it *really* matter which fork we use for the salad? Similarly, some usage rules matter because they promote clarity, while others strike us as pointlessly rigid: is it really wrong to use "while" to mean "although," on the grounds that "while" refers only to temporality? Yet such rigidity is not necessary; after all, in both etiquette and usage, even the experts sometimes disagree on what is "correct" or "acceptable," and many of those same experts can be quite broad-minded in what they find "acceptable."

The Grammar Wars ought to be declared over. It is a gross oversimplification to assert that prescriptivism flourished only until the advent of linguistics as a serious academic discipline and that, since that advent, descriptivism has displaced prescriptivism just as the Copernican model of the solar system has replaced the Ptolemaic. Using "the purist attitude toward language" as a metonym for the prescriptivist attitude, Thomas Pyles points out that this attitude "has been current" not only in the eighteenth century but "in all times and places," and that such an attitude, like its descriptivist counterpart, "is above all a matter of temperament" (207, 222). A person's "temperament"

cannot be “right” or “wrong,” and neither the prescriptive nor the descriptive “temperament” is merely “right” or “wrong.”

David Crystal is correct when he claims that “you can’t reduce clarity to a few simple rules” (119), as is Samuel Johnson when he concedes that rules cannot calcify a living language. Still, it’s easy to say that rules don’t matter (in grammar or etiquette) when you know the rules and can follow them when you need to. It seems unobjectionable that the rest of us might sometimes look to experts for guidance on how to punctuate a particular sentence, or for the past tense of “sneak,” or on how to dress for a formal dinner, or on how to behave at our first important job interview. At their worst, prescriptivists and descriptivists can both come across as pedantic and self-righteous, but that’s a function of their belief that they’re at war. Perhaps like Hiroo Onoda, the Japanese soldier who continued to fight the Second World War in the Philippines until 1974, when his commanding officer travelled to the Philippines and formally relieved him of his duties, the extremists on both sides can finally be persuaded to lay down their weapons.

Notes

¹ Drake 327. In 1851, however, Brown would shift to the prescriptivist side with the publication of his elephantine 1102-page *Grammar of English Grammars*.

² Letter #19 in the Murray correspondence at the Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College. Murray’s brother sent him every U.S. edition of all of his books; at that time, no copyright law protected English authors in the U.S., so pirated editions were plentiful and not always entirely accurate.

³ Bernard Jones defends Murray similarly: “He laid no claim to originality and in his introduction he named the authors he had mostly consulted . . . made clear that he was providing a handbook rather than a scholarly treatise” (30).

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Learning to Shudder: Sex, Ideology, and the Pedagogical Function of Horror

By Becky McLaughlin

I first began thinking about the relationship between sex, ideology, and horror when I read James Twitchell's *Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror* (1985). One of the most interesting and fruitful passages in the book draws a distinction between horror and terror, two terms that are often used interchangeably—wrongly. According to Twitchell, the word “horror” comes from the Latin word “horrēre,” which means “to bristle” or “to tremble” (10). It was used in nineteenth-century medical terminology to refer to the “sudden tremors associated with plummeting body temperature as a fever receded” (11). A patient experiencing a “horror” was between fever and chill, a position created by the evaporation of sweat. The word also turned up in nineteenth-century nautical jargon, where it was used to describe “the topmost oscillation of surging water, the foam” (11). The word “terror,” on the other hand, comes from the Latin word “terrēre,” which means “to frighten.” In Twitchell’s understanding, terror has a specific external cause and end-point, while horror does not (16). Images of horror cannot be made sense of intellectually because they are full of the condensation, distortion, and exaggeration that one finds in the uncanny (a word whose very definition is in contradiction with itself)¹, the unconscious, and the dynamics of the nightmare. While terror is associated with rational fear, horror is associated with irrational fear and/or free-floating anxiety. As Twitchell says, horror transports us “to the margin, to the threshold, to the crest” (16). It is that zone in which breakdown occurs, “where distinctions can no longer be made, where old masks fall and new masks are not yet made” (16).

With Twitchell’s definition of horror in mind, it does not seem like too much of a leap to say that, when we experience the

tremblings, bristlings, and erections of sex, we experience a “horror”—we “horripilate.” Or perhaps we experience Aristotle’s shudder: “According to Aristotle, once the spectator of a tragedy has grasped the universals revealed by plot and character, he is made to ‘shudder’ . . . The spectator cannot help his response; his feeling overwhelms him, and in his shudder he expels what he cannot absorb” (Malmo 81-82). Perhaps in the climax of the sexual act, there is a surplus of enjoyment that cannot be absorbed but must be expelled through the shudder. In any event, it was with Twitchell’s definition of horror and Aristotle’s shudder in mind that a fairy tale whose meaning had always eluded me began to make sense. It’s a fairy tale with a message that seems counter-intuitive because it appears to privilege fear instead of the overcoming of fear. If what Twitchell argues is true, i.e., that what the audience of a fairy tale, horror film, or roller-coaster ride wants is a repetition of the “ick” and “boo” in order to be startled and then overcome it (a kind of adolescent *fort/da* game² in which what is mastered is not separation anxiety but the fright caused by the “ick” and “boo”), then this fairy tale is an odd bird indeed.

Told by the Brothers Grimm, the fairy tale is rather prosaically entitled “The Story of the Youth Who Went Forth to Learn What Fear Was.” In this story, we are told of a father who had two sons, the elder smart and the younger stupid. The elder son could do everything, but the younger son could neither learn nor understand anything. When chores had to be done, it was always the elder who did them unless he was asked to do something after dark or in a dismal place, a request to which he would reply, “Oh, no, father, I’ll not go there. It makes me shudder!” (§ 1). And when stories that make the flesh creep were told by the fireside, those who listened would say, “It makes us shudder!” (§ 1). The younger son sat in the corner and listened but could not imagine what they meant. “They are always saying, ‘It makes me shudder; it makes me shudder!’ It does not make me shudder,” thought he. “That, too, must be an art of which I understand nothing” (§ 1). When his father suggested that he learn something by which to make a living, the younger son replied that he would like to learn how to shudder. Thoroughly disgusted by his younger son’s stupidity, his father sent him away to seek his fortune. Although the boy met many people on his pilgrimage who attempted to teach him the “art” of

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fear, it was only after he married that he learned how to shudder, for his wife took it upon herself to teach him by removing his clothes as he lay sleeping and dousing him with a bucket of water that contained dozens of wriggling gudgeons (i.e., small fish). He awakened with a shudder and new knowledge: “Ah! now I know what it is to shudder!” he said (§ 19).

I have always found this tale puzzling, but when I began to think about it using Twitchell’s definition of horror, I was finally able to get purchase on what it might mean or how it is supposed to be read. For it suddenly occurred to me that the new knowledge he acquires, which makes him shudder, is the knowledge of sexual difference. Can it be anything but significant that the place he learns to shudder is in bed and that the one who teaches him the art of shuddering is a woman? As for the bucket of water with small fish swimming around in it, this is surely a metaphor for the ejaculate that accompanies orgasm, and thus what we find in this fairy tale is an allegory of the primal scene and its retroactive effects and affect, the central one of which is horror.

What strikes me as remarkable about this fairy tale is that it lays bare something that the horror film generally tries to hide: *the fear of difference must be learned.*

As I first began writing this paper, my interest in the relationship between sex and horror was, if not purely academic, certainly more so than it is now, for my adolescent son has recently entered the wildly hormonal terrain of puberty, alongside of which has arisen in him a singular interest in the horror film. Now, when I make a trip to the local Red Box, my son’s almost exclusive request is that I get a scary movie—“a *really* scary movie,” he says emphatically. According to Twitchell, who has written extensively on the psychological attraction of horror, it’s no coincidence that puberty and a taste for horror sit comfortably cheek by jowl, for “of all the various art forms, horror art has the most defined and predictable audience,” an adolescent audience in need of information about sexuality (66-67). As Twitchell points out, “[m]odern ethnologists have shown that myths . . . are not just adaptive; they are prescriptive. Myths inform an identifiable audience about a particular problem at a specific time” (85). He continues, saying, “Because we need myths when we need information, and because we need information when we are confused, fantasy

structures are given by a society as maps—so to speak—by which a lost audience can find its way” (87).

Cultural anthropologists interested in rites of passage study “the periods of greatest biological change” because those are the “periods in which the rites are most pronounced and mythologies in [highest] demand” (Twitchell 88). It is no surprise, then, to learn that puberty is one of the periods that receive the most study. What is surprising, however, is to learn that while American cultural anthropologists frequently study the Nyakyusa of Central Africa, the Banaro of New Guinea, and the Aranda of Central Australia, they appear reluctant to study their own culture, disavowing the existence of its own rites of passage. Twitchell, however, challenges this disavowal when he argues that the rite of passage from adolescence into adulthood goes on every weekend right under our noses when adolescents gather in one another’s homes or at the movie theater to watch the latest horror flick: “the stuff of sexual initiation inheres in all the major horror myths and informs the audience of important knowledge whether it be told in comics, on television, or especially now, on the screen” (89). The irony, Twitchell quips, is that we “send our children into the dark to find out the truth,” but I would argue that what our children encounter in the flickering darkness of the movie theater is not the truth but the illusion of truth—i.e., ideology—and, further, that while they may be confused and in need of knowledge, the horror film is one of the last venues in which they will actually find it. In fact, I would go as far as to argue that one of the most regressive but essential features of the horror film is its effort to discourage the seeking of knowledge.

All one has to do to find proof of this is to think back to a fairy tale such as “Blue Beard,” an avatar of the story of the Garden of Eden in which God permits Adam and Eve to sample everything in the garden except the fruit of Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, saying that if they eat of it, they will surely die. In Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, however, the knowledge gained is made more explicit as that of sexual difference, and thus we can understand the death God threatens as the “little death” of orgasm. In the case of “Blue Beard,” Blue Beard himself plays the role of God when he offers each consecutive wife all of his wealth but forbids her entry into one room of his castle. As in the story of Adam and Eve, the

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temptation to *know* is too great, and thus each wife's gaining of knowledge is punished by her death. The fairy tale of "Blue Beard" ends rather surprisingly for modern-day readers with an explicitly stated moral: "Ladies you should never pry, — / You'll repent it by and by! / 'Tis the silliest of sins; / Trouble in a trice begins. / There are, surely—more's the woe!— / Lots of things you need not know. / Come, forswear it now and here— Joy so brief, that costs so dear!" (Perrault 43). All one has to do to find further proof of what might be called the "knowledge taboo" is to think of the way scientists and/or learned men or women are often characterized in horror films and fiction. The characters seeking knowledge are frequently vilified, while the characters seeking to protect the group, often by keeping its members in ignorance, are generally glorified. Literary examples of this can be found in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter" to name but a few.

Although I agree with Twitchell when he argues that there is nothing remarkable in the convergence of horror sagas and sexual anxieties since "the transition from individual and isolated sexuality to pairing" is "a concern fraught with unarticulated anxiety and thus ripe for the experience of horror" (68), he and I part ways when he begins to analyze why horror results from "latency sagas . . . spun around a core of sexual confusion" (90) and when he asks, "What is it that we sexually want to do that we must repress, subvert, sublimate . . . [?] [W]hat is it that we must learn enough about so that we will not do it? What is the sexual act that must be feared . . . lest real horror result?" (93). His answer, of course, is incest. We must not engage in incest lest the "real horror" of *Oedipus Rex* become our own personal story of disaster.

While I might agree that incest is the most appropriate answer to the questions he poses, I think he fails to ask the right questions. Horror films, at least the reactionary rather than the progressive kind, are not about interdiction but injunction. In other words, horror films are not sending adolescents a message about what they must *not* do but about what they *must* do. The central function of the horror film is not, on the one hand, to teach sexual mores such as chastity or, on the other, to prevent incest but to teach the doctrine of difference, a doctrine that teaches intolerance for whatever constitutes the other, a doctrine

that hides the difference *within* using the difference *between*. What the horror film insists that its young viewers do, in other words, is to accept the closure of sexual identity by occupying one side of the sexual divide or the other. Although Robin Wood very fruitfully uses the concept of “surplus repression” to explain the repression of desires that are seen as threatening to the existing order—for example, bisexuality, female desire, or homosexuality, each of which is represented by the monster in the horror film—I think projection might be an equally useful term to apply to the mechanism undergone by the adolescent viewer. Projection, as we learn from Freud, is a mechanism that allows us to claim that an ugly thought or hostile impulse is not internal but external—i.e., that its source does not lie within ourselves but within the other. Because one’s identity, a large part of which is one’s sexuality, is probably at its most precarious when one is going through puberty, what the adolescent viewer thinks he or she needs is not knowledge so much as certainty, certainty that he or she is “normal” or “acceptable,” that he or she does not appear different from the rest of the herd. What better way to reassure oneself on this score than to project all of one’s fears about oneself onto some object other represented in the horror film as the monster? (Just as an aside, I cannot help thinking that this concern is more pronounced for boys than for girls because masculinity is—or at least appears to be—more fragile than femininity. That is, masculinity is more precariously constructed than femininity. Perhaps this explains why in so many reactionary horror films the woman either identifies with the monster or becomes a spectacle of horror herself.)

Instead of recognizing one’s difference—i.e., one’s non-coincidence with oneself, one’s split or division or dehiscence, one’s Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde—one projects one’s rejected double and/or other onto the movie screen as the monster, and, at the end of most horror films of the reactionary kind, the monster is destroyed in the most violent of ways. The only concession to truth in these movies comes, if at all, in the final seconds of the movie, which occur almost simultaneously with the rolling of the credits, and so it is a gesture easily missed or ignored: when all of the protectors of the group are walking away from the site of the monster’s destruction, congratulating themselves on a job well done, we, the viewers, see that some small trace of the

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monster remains and know that with this trace the monster will continue to remain a threat. This remaining trace is, I would argue, unconscious knowledge of the primary body before it is zoned and regulated by the codes of sexual difference. What the horror film teaches is the fear of difference, but what it hides is the fact that this fear must be learned.

To conclude: the horror film, it seems to me, is the perfect vehicle for this form of psychological projection since film itself relies upon the projection of a celluloid product onto a movie screen. Am I arguing, then, that the horror film is guilty of a kind of ideological brainwashing, that it slyly (or sometimes not so slyly) indoctrinates us with the belief that difference is bad, evil, wicked, sinister, and that it must be rooted out in order to protect those who identify as same? Yes, I would want to make this argument against horror films of the regressive and/or reactionary ilk. But does this mean we should not watch and/or study these films? No, for they have a pedagogical value other than the one built into the films themselves. Because the cinema and psychoanalysis were born at the same moment, there has always been an analogy made between film and dream. And as we know from psychoanalysis, one of the best ways of getting access to the unconscious is through the analysis of our dreams, particularly, perhaps, our nightmares. As Kaja Silverman argues,

belief is granted not at the level of consciousness, but rather at that of fantasy and the ego or *moi*, and [thus] it consequently comes into play at the most profound sites of the subject's formation. In order for ideology to command belief, then, it must extend itself into the deepest reaches of the subject's identity and unconscious desire. (16)

If, as Wood states, films “respond to interpretation as at once the personal dreams of their makers and the collective dreams of their audiences” (203), then what better pedagogical tool for examining the way ideology comes to command belief than the horror film itself? Instead of turning away from the horror film in disgust and contempt, I propose that we turn toward it in order to discover what we find disgusting and contemptible in ourselves and in our cultural beliefs and practices. Perhaps if we can be taught to shudder at difference, we can be taught *not* to.

Notes

¹ I am following, here, Freud's account of the word in "The 'Uncanny.'" There he notes that although the word *heimlich* (i.e., "familiar") is clearly the opposite of *unheimlich*, one of its many definitions is identical with the definition of its opposite, *unheimlich*. What is of interest to Freud is the paradoxical concept of something's being at once familiar and strange.

² Freud discusses the *fort/da* game in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. He observed his 18-month-old grandson, Ernst, tossing into his crib a wooden reel attached to a string. Upon the reel's disappearance into the crib, Ernst would utter what sounded like the word *fort* (i.e., "gone"). He then retrieved the reel by pulling on the string. Upon the reel's reappearance, the child would utter the word *da* (i.e., "there"). Freud theorized that Ernst was attempting to master his anxiety regarding his mother's comings and goings by treating the reel as a stand-in for her: "At the outset he was in a *passive* situation—he was overpowered by the experience [of his mother's departure]; but by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was, as a game, he took on an *active* part" (10).

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No Beginning and No End

By S. Selina Jamil

Ghassan Kanafani's "Ard el-bortoqal al-hazeen," written in Arabic in 1958 and translated into English by Hilary Kilpatrick as "The Land of Sad Oranges" in 1983, is told from the point of view of an exiled Palestinian, who addresses another exiled Palestinian with whose entire family he has been uprooted and who attempts to understand what the "story" of Palestinian homelessness means from "beginning to end" (75). For the uprooting occurs suddenly, at which time the narrator is a child who does not grasp the meaning of homelessness. Now as an adult in quest of a coherent narrative structure that has a beginning and an end, and, hence, as a seeker in quest of meaning, he finds a complicated knot of multiple "threads," which suggest that the only way to grasp meaning is to create it through the acknowledgement that innocence is inseparably connected with guilt and, hence, through the sense that the binaries of young and old (child and adult), of cause and effect, and of Palestinian and Jew, disintegrate. As Kanafani suggests, then, the knot of multiple threads opposes the linear unity of a beginning and an end. That is, his image of "threads," which may become "clearer" but which may not be disentangled, suggests that the story has only a middle. Indeed, the attempt to understand the beginning and the end of the story of Palestinian homelessness leads to the awareness that there is no beginning of and no end to homelessness, for there is only the inseverable connection that the middle suggests.

As the narrator begins his monologue with the image of a family ("our" and "we") that is already uprooted from Jaffa, this "story" of homelessness does not begin with the anticipated beginning (75). For this monologue, in which a nameless narrator addresses a nameless listener, does not begin with a "happy, united family" (78) being uprooted from a paradise-like home in a blissful garden of "well-tended orange trees" (76). Likewise, it does not open with "the martyrs killed defending" the "land" and the "house" (78), nor even with the point in time when the listener's father "abandon[s]" the orange trees "to the

Jews" (76), and, hence, it opens with no attempt at the linear unity of chronological progression. Instead, it opens with the journey from Jaffa to Acre, which is "another city" this family customarily visits during "the festival season every year," and, hence, with the suggestion of a cyclical journey (75). Clearly, the story begins in the middle of a journey, for it begins after "our departure" from the permanent home to a temporary home and with no awareness of any beginning (75): "You and I and the others of our age were too young to understand what the story meant from beginning to end" (75). Further, as Kanafani describes the "big lorry" that "mov[es] off" from Acre on the "bend[ing]" and winding "road" to Ros Naqoura (75) or the journey from Ros Naqoura to Sidon on a "road" that "swallow[s] up" the uprooted Palestinians, there is no linear progression. For, as there is no beginning of and no end to the story of homelessness, there is no beginning of and no end to this journey. Clearly, as in the case of the journey, there is only the middle in this story of homelessness.

Further, as Kanafani highlights the absence of a beginning, he introduces the mystery of origins. Just when the reader assumes that the narrator refers to his own family, he transforms "our" and "we" to "your mother," "your aunt and the children," and then to "[y]our father" (75), and finally to "[y]our uncle" (77). And as Kanafani turns the screw of unknowability with the mystery of origins, the narrator never explains who or where his parents are. There is no reference to his mother, and the only reference to his father is shrouded in mystery: "I quite imagined that if I ran over to say something to him [the listener's father] he would explode in my face: 'Damn your father! Damn . . .'" (76). Has the narrator's father died? If so, why is the listener's father on the verge of spilling the venom of exasperation on a fatherless child? Has the narrator's father been separated from the family because of the political turmoil? Unlike the listener's father who has "abandoned" the orange trees to the Jews, the narrator's parents are not likely to have abandoned the children or to have died recently, for the narrator could not then have "enjoyed those days" of the "departure" or the brief sojourn in Acre (75). Why does he never mention the whereabouts of his parents? And exactly what part does the nameless narrator and his brother, Riyad, play in this group which seems to be his extended family?

Although he says nothing about being an orphan, clearly he does not simply represent an individual human experiencing either literal or figurative orphanhood but also, in the wake of the disintegration of Palestine, he represents the collective orphanhood of a people who must confront the loss of national identity and of whose “tragic” struggle with identity the entire world seems to have become oblivious (75). For, as they cannot turn to non-Arabs, so they cannot turn to other Arabs for any solace or comfort. Indeed, the nameless narrator’s sense of alienation is so intense that, as a child whose “childhood” has been snatched away, he finds no relief from the tension and the threat of violence in the presence of a patriarch who is supposed to protect him: “I slipped into the room like a pariah” (80).

As he examines the threads of the Palestinian story of homelessness that consequently have begun “to grow clearer,” then, the narrator develops an increasingly “clear[]” sense of the inextricable connection between innocence and guilt. As Kanafani focuses on the meshing of the threads of innocence and guilt, the illusion of the end to homelessness debilitates the confused adult, who “give[s] hoarse shouts” and “gasp[s] for breath,” as he tries to influence the children, who “shout[] in unison with him,” and as he “pull[s] cigarettes out of his pocket to throw” to the “silent and motionless” Arab soldiers (78). Clearly, the patriarch’s surrender to confusion and shock reveals how the thread of innocence is inextricably bound with that of guilt. In this story that has neither a beginning nor an end, there is no chronological movement from innocence to guilt. Not only does the patriarch exhibit the innocence of a shocked and helpless man who has been turned out of his home by unlawful occupiers, but he also exhibits the guilt of a self-pitiful man who seeks refuge in gullibility and abandons his human identity in the process: “[L]ying on the ground, gasping for breath and grinding his teeth,” the weeping patriarch dehumanizes himself into “an ogre” (80). As Kanafani highlights the patriarch’s waste of time, energy, and resources symbolically, instead of letting a “hungry” child consume an orange, he allows it to “shrive[]” (80). For innocence has become inseparable from guilt, and the knots have become acutely complicated because the patriarch refuses to take responsibility as the family’s leader: “[Y]our mother asked your father to look for some job, or let us return to the orange trees. Your father shouted in her face, the rancor trembling in his

voice, and she fell silent” (78). Indeed, the process of his dehumanization begins immediately after “the night of the great attack on Acre,” when, instead of thinking out a plan of action, “the men” of this family waste the night in “despondency,” making it “cruel and bitter” to the children (75).

The child, then, becomes indistinguishable from the adult, for, as Kanafani discusses the confusion about beginning and end through the knotted thread of guilt and innocence, he dismantles the binaries of “young and old” (78). For instance, failing to embrace the responsibility of guiding and protecting the children, the father “burst[s] into tears” like a “child” (76). Indeed, the adult and child are trapped in a vicious cycle as the one infects the other: watching the “beloved” oranges they buy on their way to Ras Naqoura, the women and the “father” begin “weeping”; and, not surprisingly, “I too burst into a storm of weeping” (76). As the storyteller who quests for “mean[ing]” in a series of events, the narrator realizes that the “father,” who cannot “control” his tears, is “like a despairing child” (76). As the word “despair[]” indicates, this action of surrender that springs from denial also demonstrates a repetition with a difference: the adult breaks down like a child, except that he also despairs. Despair is a painful and complex emotion that is the result of “[c]omplications” (79), and that “undermine[s]” the “simple” world of childhood (77). This action of weeping, then, shows how the adult, just like the child, is suddenly and confusingly both an adult and a child at the same time. If, “despite his fifty years,” on the one hand, the “father” is as “hope[ful]” as an innocent “little boy,” on the other hand, he is as full of “mad[]” illusions as a naïve “small boy,” who expects non-Palestinian “silent and motionless” Arab “soldiers” to restore Palestine (78). Conversely, on the one hand, he is so full of malevolent bitterness that he strikes “mortal terror” into a child’s heart (80), while, on the other hand, he is so full of unspeakable “[d]espondency” and disillusion that he can only succumb to “tears” and “absolute[] silen[ce]” that show the complexity of the world of adulthood (79). Likewise, if, on the one hand, the children are as full of the unawareness and vulnerability of innocence as “a little flock of goats” (78), on the other hand, they are as full of unspeakable experiences as disillusioned adults: “Your [...] lips were sealed as though they had never been opened, as though they were scars left by an old

wound not properly healed” (80). Just as the old or adult cannot be associated with guilt alone and young or child with innocence alone, so the old and the young cannot take precedence over one other.

As Kanafani explores the flux of identity, “The Land of Sad Oranges” is the story of the constantly shifting roles of victim and victimizer. As there is an inseparable connection between innocence and guilt, the victim and victimizer become indistinguishable. For, as his goal is Palestinian endurance and survival, Kanafani’s focus is Palestinian awareness of the flux of identity. Hence, he is mindful not simply of the unethical conduct of Jews but also of the unethical conduct of the Palestinians themselves. Indeed, the narrator, whose storytelling demonstrates his quest for meaning, realizes that, traumatized by uprooting and suffering, the victim is inseparable from the victimizer: “A diabolical thought had implanted itself in his brain, . . . ‘I want to kill them. I want to kill myself, I want to be done with . . . I want . . .’” (79). For the father has spilled self-pity in the form of violence. Hence, as the narrator is aware, the patriarch reduces himself to the absurdity of baleful grotesqueness and of the futility of violence. Surrendering to massive trauma, not only does the victim learn to become a perpetrator, but as Kanafani points out, the victim, who traps himself in the past, surrenders to victimization because he is also a victimizer. And as Kanafani underscores this problem, the patriarch, who “cast[s] fresh terror” in a child’s heart, and brutally snatches away his innocence (77), “diabolical[ly]” heads to the destruction of his own future. Lying on the floor, and thus making no attempt to end the story of Palestinian homelessness, he “gasp[s] for breath and grind[s] his teeth as he we[e]p[s]” (79).

Indeed, as Kanafani demonstrates the narrator’s courageous and conscientious confrontation of the knot of innocence and guilt, if, on the one hand, Palestinian anomie is the effect of homelessness, on the other hand, it is the cause of homelessness. This sense of the indistinguishability between cause and effect, which indistinguishability is Kanafani’s way of highlighting the confusion between beginning and end, becomes most clear in the narrator’s reference to the listener’s “uncle[’s]” corrupt behavior as he attempts to take possession of a Lebanese Jewish home in Sidon: “Your uncle never had great faith in

ethics, and when he found himself on the pavement like us he lost it entirely” (77). If the second half of this sentence suggests that homelessness effects unethical conduct, the first half suggests that unethical conduct effects homelessness. The “uncle” deliberately chooses this particular house because it is a Jewish home: “He made for a house occupied by a Jewish family, opened the door, threw his belongings inside and jerked his round face at them, saying very distinctly: ‘Go to Palestine!’” (77). Perhaps, in his “desperation,” the uncle, who has suddenly been uprooted and reduced to homelessness, feels justified in victimizing one Jewish family because he sees himself as the victim of another Jewish family (77). But as Kanafani underscores the narrator’s focus on “ethics,” one must engage in self-scrutiny and explore one’s own moral values. Clearly, the uncle’s flawed reasoning and the “round face” of his complacent outrage tell the story of a habitually unreflecting, self-absorbed, worldly mind that has “never” been bothered by “ethics,” and, hence, of a vicious cycle of cause and effect. Because he highlights this deficiency, and because his images of the land of orange groves evoke images of the biblical paradise, and, hence, of the archetypal fall from innocence and grace, Kanafani suggests that perhaps the loss of home is the consequence of unethical conduct. Indeed, as Kanafani shows the storyteller’s awareness of the complex intertwining of the “threads” of innocence and guilt, the Jews are not the only ones who “threaten[] and fum[e]” (75). Hence, Kanafani’s “terror[ized]” Palestinians are a parallel to his “frightened” Jews in a story that refuses to trace a point as the beginning of Jewish or Palestinian guilt (77). For the God who is “unable to find a solution to his own problems” is the Abrahamic God, who has given the land to both these inimical descendants of Abraham (77).

As the narrator’s reference to God’s “own problems” indicates, this reference to a sense of the complete absence of a solution is also a subtle reference to the knot that has no beginning and no end but only a middle (77). For, as the intertwined “threads” of the “story” demonstrate, the Jews and Palestinians are inextricably connected. Hence, there can be no point where the Jews begin and Palestinians end or where the Palestinians begin and the Jews end. Further, if the Palestinians are “refugees” now, the Jews have been refugees earlier (76). And if the Palestinians are subjected to ethnic cleansing now, the

Jews have also known this horror, particularly during the Holocaust. Clearly, “the tale of injustice done to both sides” is “part of their *common narrative*” (Bamyeh 827). As Kanafani shows this common narrative, the Lebanese Jews, who do “not” go to the Palestine that becomes Israel, but who go “into the next room,” make space for the uprooted Palestinian family (77). The “Jewish family” and the Palestinian “family” find themselves in the same house because the one cannot replace the other (77). Indeed, just as the Palestinian family cannot make a new beginning in Lebanon, so the Jewish family cannot make a new beginning in Israel. And just as the Jewish family leaves “the roof and tiled floor” of a room to the Palestinian family, so the Palestinian family cannot make this “shelter” (77), which is “not large enough for half of us” (78), the home to end homelessness. But as there is no end to homelessness, there is no beginning of homelessness too. As the narrator manages to make a “home” (80) on “the outskirts of Sidon,” despite being homeless, there is no beginning of homelessness, and, as “the land of the oranges” has become inaccessible, there is also no end to homelessness (80). Indeed, both the Palestinian and the Jewish families are caught in the middle of “problems” that have no “solution” (77). As Kanafani suggests, to look for a “solution” based on linear unity via the historical precedence of either group is simply a futile attempt to look for a traditional beginning and end, which uphold hierarchy and hegemony.

But as Kanafani appropriates the “problems” of the God who gives the same space and experience of exile to the contending descendants of Abraham, both Jew and Palestinian are caught in the middle of a becoming. As Deleuze and Guattari claim, “[e]very becoming is a block of coexistence” (292), and Kanafani’s story, which has no beginning and no end, but only a middle, is a Deleuzoguattarian line of flight that unites Palestinian and Jew. A line of flight, or a line of becoming, has “neither beginning nor end” but “only a middle” because “[a] becoming is always in the middle” (Deleuze and Guattari 293). “A point is always a point of origin,” but a line of becoming “passes *between* points” and “comes up through the middle” to produce “a shared deterritorialization” (Deleuze and Guattari 293). Kanafani’s Lebanese Jews, who most “certain[ly]” do “not” leave their “house” to move to Israel (77), despite being “frightened” by the listener’s uncle’s unethical demeanor,

understand the minoritarian experience. For, as the Jews are a minority in Lebanon, so the Palestinians are a minority in Lebanon. Hence, making order out of disorder, they “leav[e]” a room (77), which becomes the listener’s “uncle’s room” (78), and, hence, a home, to an uprooted Palestinian family. Because of their refusal to surrender to fear and because of their refusal to be territorial, Kanafani’s Lebanese Jews, who literally deterritorialize themselves from a room in their house to make space for the literally deterritorialized Palestinians, who do not resort to violence despite an unethical patriarch’s “desperation” (77), enter a line of flight with them.

Indeed, Kanafani’s story, which is a line of becoming, appropriates literal deterritorialization through the image of the “sad” oranges. As Kanafani shows, only a neglected orange shrivels, like the “dried up and shriveled” orange that the patriarch’s “strange hand” places next to a revolver (80). This shriveled orange is a “sad” one, for oranges must be consumed after being plucked; that is, they have to be internalized because, as Kanafani underscores, the orange symbolizes the uprooted but journeying Palestinian’s deterritorialized home and fluidity of identity. Kanafani also suggests this idea through the narrator’s brother’s name—the only name in this story—Riyad, which means “garden.” As the image of Riyad, “sitting quietly” on top of the lorry (which has begun to “mov[e] off”) suggests, the Palestinians must find their garden, and, hence, their home within themselves as they embark on a symbolic journey (75). Indeed, if the narrator leaves the “house” but returns “home” in a land where he is a homeless refugee, the home is not in territorial acquisition but in a line of becoming. As Deleuze and Guattari claim, “in a becoming, one is deterritorialized” (291). And as Kanafani develops a line of becoming, a nameless Palestinian, who cannot find the beginning of or the end to homelessness is deterritorialized to carry home within himself in a moment of becoming adult, for the home, like the identity, is also in flux.

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**“To sing his mistresse prayse,
and let him mend”:
Feminizing and Queering Queen
Elizabeth I in Book III of
*The Faerie Queene***

By Horacio Sierra

When I first encountered the *Faerie Queene* as a college freshman, I was under the impression that Edmund Spenser idolized Queen Elizabeth and dedicated his epic poem to her with sycophantic praise. But when I read Book III in graduate school and thought of Britomart as a feint for Queen Elizabeth, I realized that neither Spenser nor all Englishmen were completely supportive of the queen. The potentially negative connotations associated with Spenser’s promise to “shadow” the monarch allowed me to question just how obsequious the poet is in his ode to the queen. As the years have gone by, I now see that it’s even possible to see subversive portrayals of the queen in Book III that misogynistically feminize and queer her.

When one examines Spenser’s letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, which was appended to the 1590 edition of *The Faerie Queene*, it becomes clear that the poet exploits the queen’s bifurcated persona to fashion a candid and critical portrait of the monarch:

In that Faery Queene I meane glory in my generall intention, but in my particular I conceiue the most excellent and glorious person of our soueraine the Queene . . . And yet in some places els I do otherwise shadow her. For considering she beareth two persons, the one of a most royall Queene or Empresse, the other of a most vertuous and beautifull Lady, this latter part in some places I doe expresse in Belphoebe . . . (2)

Spenser affirms that the latter of Elizabeth’s dual personas, “a most virtuous and beautifull Lady,” will “in some places” be “expresse in Belphoebe” (2). The author will neither explicitly name who will personify the first part of Elizabeth’s duality, the

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political “most royall Queene or Empresse,” nor will he always express the second half through the character of Belphoebe. The nonexistent legend that would help readers decipher who will personify the royal presence of the queen and the vague modifying adjective “some” quietly announces Spenser’s more polemical objectives in his portrait of Queen Elizabeth.

This announcement of the epic containing a versatile depiction of the queen continues in Book III’s proem. Spenser humbles himself by convincingly lauding Queen Elizabeth for being the paragon of chastity and thus rendering moot any desire to “fetch from Faery / Forreine ensamples” (3.1). Spenser, however, is anything but muted in his quest to depict the virtue of married chastity. He affirms the queen as the epitome of chastity, “Sith it is shrined in my Soveraines brest” (3.1), but continues to justify his need for portraying chastity with his “humble quill” (3).

Although Britomart is the heroine of Book III, she is not the only notable female character in the book. Spenser reminds the readers one last time before Book III begins that he will offer a complex portrayal of the queen:

But let that same delitious Poet lend
A little leaue vnto a rusticke Muse
To sing his mistresse prayse, and let him mend,
If ought amis her liking may abuse:
Ne let his fairest *Cynthia* refuse,
In mirrours more then one her selfe to see
. . . . (5)

The phrase “mirrours more then one” unambiguously invites the readers to search for the various reflections of the queen in the book. Furthermore, this stanza anticipates the queen’s potentially unenthusiastic reaction to these portrayals by assuring her that he will “mend” anything “amis her liking may abuse.” Spenser treads lightly in his quest to offer readers and the queen a comprehensive and sometimes critical portrait of the aging, barren, and unwed monarch.

Books III’s richness is found not only in its depictions of Queen Elizabeth but also in the themes and characters that reflect early modern sociocultural views of the monarchy. Likewise, the variety of female characters in this book allows readers to view a panorama of women’s positions in early modern England when

it comes to the issues of gender roles and sexuality. Besides Britomart, Book III offers such varied female characters as the fair damsel Florimell; the imprisoned Amoretta; the English stand-in for the face that launched a thousand ships, Hellenore; the asexually conceived, chaste huntress Belphoebe; the maternal maid Glaunce; the wicked and lecherous Malecasta; the lustful giantess Argante; and the mythological Venus. These women represent a different form of female sexuality and so the reader is always considering the diverse forms a woman's sexual identity can take—from stagnantly chaste (Florimell) to destructively sensual (Argante). All of these characters function as one in a series of fictional and didactic binaries that contrast Queen Elizabeth with the disposition and sexuality of each character. Even when Britomart does not appear in the book, we are reminded of England's monarch through the other female characters that hold up one of the "mirroures" that Spenser employs to reflect the queen's personae.

Feminizing the Warrior

Britomart's role as a knight leads readers to ponder Queen Elizabeth's military might. The queen was not known to "represent herself as a warrior . . . because this avatar [was] too much of an incursion into traditionally masculine territory" (Villeponteaux 59). Nonetheless, because the publication of *The Faerie Queen* closely followed the Spanish Armada's failure to invade England in 1588, one can see Spenser wanting to imbue the queen with military attributes to laud her nation's success in fending off the invasion. This attempt to paint the queen with the masculine colors of war can be found in the first image of Britomart: "They spide a knight, that towards prickéd faire, / And him beside an aged Squire there rode" (3.1.3). The masculine pronoun "him" fools readers into believing that the approaching knight will be male. This gender-reversal continues in the final lines of the stanza: "And on his arme addresse his goodly shield / That bore a Lion passant in a golden field" (3.1.3). By continuing to use masculine pronouns, Spenser forces the reader to associate this soon-to-be victorious knight with the image of the regal lion emblazoned on the knight's shield. The knight's heraldry represents the armory of Brutus, the legendary founder of the British race, who is a descendant of the Trojan hero Aeneas, and thus links the island nation to ancient Greece.

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Readers are also given a masculine portrayal of Britomart before her true sex is revealed through a glance of the knight’s sword: “That speare enchanted was, which layd thee on the greene” (3.1.7). Spenser notes that the phallic sword is “enchanted” to cast aspersions on Britomart’s military prowess. Because the sword is charmed, one can see that despite all of the preparation that Britomart undergoes to become a knight, her entrance into this masculine realm can always be attributed to an artificial, magical element. Likewise, Queen Elizabeth’s recent use of bellicose rhetoric at Tilbury is shown as superficial language because the army’s success was seen as possible due to the men in the military, not her speechifying.

The sword becomes retrospectively transformed into a symbol of androgyny and male anxiety when the subsequent stanza discloses Britomart’s identity. The defeated Guyon’s castration fears surface when he snatches “his bright sword” (3.1.9) to avenge the female knight. The employment of “snatching” to describe Guyon’s appropriation of the sword magnifies the tension that Britomart’s presence engenders. *The Oxford English Dictionary*’s definition of the British slang use of the noun “snatch,” the female pudenda, attributes the contemporary word’s usage to a sixteenth-century employment of it that had bawdy implications about wenches. Thus, Guyon’s attempt to violently reassert his masculinity with his phallic “bright sword” stigmatizes the presence of Britomart as a female warrior in a male sphere.

Spenser develops this problematization in his first descriptions of the now-unveiled Britomart: “Even the famous Britomart it was, / Whome straunge adventure did from Britaine fet, / To seeker her lover (love farre sought alas), / Whose image she had seene in Venus looking glass” (3.1.8). These lines highlight Spenser’s ambivalence about the role of this cross-dressing female knight in an indictment of Queen Elizabeth’s androgyny. Britomart reverses the long-held expectation that a male knight would search for his female love. Here we see Britomart rejecting both the clichéd role of a damsel-in-distress and that of the passive object of desire that a man will pursue. Rather, we see her taking action in order to achieve her goal of marrying Arthegall. Britomart’s agency reflects Queen Elizabeth’s noted powers as a skilled monarch who did not let her sex impede her quest to augment England’s political,

economic, and territorial powers. This gender-blind perspective of the queen is best illustrated in a line from her famous Tilbury speech: “I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too.” Although Britomart and the queen are lauded for their militaristic mindset in this instance, Spenser’s irresoluteness on the matter is highlighted by his need to feminize Britomart in a negative manner. The “looking glas” is both a mirror and a crystal ball. Besides Puritan tracts from the likes of Thomas Salter affirming that “the glass mirror is so negatively identified with worldly pride that it can in no wise evoke the celestial spheres” (Kalas 536), looking glasses were often associated not only with women’s excessive vanity but also with women’s fragility. By associating Britomart with these negative feminine practices, Spenser undercuts her valiant nature in an attempt to highlight the incongruous presence of Britomart, and, in turn, Queen Elizabeth, in a normatively masculine field.

The mirror scene also expresses anxieties about the queen’s lack of a husband and insistence on ruling alone. Spenser articulates this angst through the didactic myth of Narcissus. The first time Britomart views the mirror “Her self a while therein she vewd in vaine” (3.2.22). The usage of “vaine” employs several meanings of the word—describing something of little value, performing a futile act, and exemplifying someone’s vanity—to show Britomart’s inability to move beyond her ego. Prior to describing Arthegall’s appearance in the mirror, the narrator notes Britomart’s chastity: “Not that she lusted after any one; / For she was pure from blame of sinful blot” (3.2.23) to celebrate her virtue. Nonetheless, like so much of Book III, readers can also view this as a criticism of Britomart’s unnatural chastity. Initially she desires no one. Readers can then reflect on the young maid’s “vaine” reflections in the mirror.

The myth of Narcissus presents the most fruitful lens through which we can view this mirror episode because of the legend’s fateful ending. Even after Narcissus has died, he returns to the Stygian pool to gaze on his image in Ovid’s version of the tale in *Metamorphoses*—“tum quoque se, postquam est inferna sede receptus, / in Stygia spectabat aqua” [“And even when he had been received into the infernal abodes, he kept on gazing on his image in the Stygian pool.”] (3: 504-05). Britomart explicitly alludes to the tale of Narcissus when she confesses her fears

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about her new adoration for Arthegall. But why would her love for Arthegall become problematized by the myth of Narcissus? The emphasis on Britomart’s lack of “sinfull blot” positions her as a Florimell-like virgin who would avoid romantic relationships with men were it not for the mirror. Therefore, when Britomart tells Glaunce that “I fonder, then Cephisus foolish child, / Who having vewed in a fountain shere / His face, was with the love thereof beguild” (3.2.44), she recognizes how this new erotic intrusion into her previously unperturbed life is traumatizing. This fear of a self-love that excludes exogamy represents real anxieties in Elizabethan England about the queen’s marital status.

If we see narcissism as the utmost form of incest, then the incestuous fears circulating around the royal crown, especially after King Henry VIII based his reasoning for divorcing Catherine of Aragon on the supposition that she consummated her marriage with his older brother, are ameliorated by the heroic decision of Britomart to search for a union with her diametrical end of the male-female binary. Despite Glaunce’s best attempts to assuage Britomart that she will follow in neither Narcissus’s nor Myrrha’s disastrous steps, the second canto of the book ends with a tearful Britomart dangerously close to replicating a Narcissus wasting away by the river: “But that she still did waste, and still did wayle, / That through long languor, and hart-burning breme / She shortly like a pynéd ghost became, / Which long hath waited by the Stygian strond” (3.2.52). Spenser’s coupling of the “burning” imagery with Britomart’s verbal wailing presents her as a parallel to a Narcissus so consumed with self-love that he beats himself to death: “sic attenuatus amore / Liquitur et tecto paulatim carpitur igni” (489-90). The fire imagery used in both narratives reverses the more positive employments of the visual rhetoric of a heart burning with love to depict a troubled situation. Kathryn Schwarz argues that Britomart’s fear is one “of becoming both subject and object of desire” (142). This concern reflects the Narcissus-like imagery that has enveloped the mirror scenes and the queen’s refusal to marry. Spenser, however, recuperates the underproductive situation by introducing Merlin and having the patriarch remind Britomart of her responsibilities as a woman.

Merlin’s narrative begins with informing Britomart that she is to be the “Tree, / Whose big embodied braunches shall not

lin, / Till they to heavens hight forth stretchéd bee” (3.3.22). These “big” branches illustrate the fecundity of a woman with wide, child-bearing hips and ample flesh—a sharp contrast to the lithe maid readers imagine when the narrator describes her “daintie limbe” (3.2.5). Merlin then describes Britomart’s true quest as a marital rather than a martial one: “From thence, him firmly bound with faithfull band, / To this his native soyle thou backe shalt bring” (3.3.27). Britomart’s decision to accept this mission and her eventual success in doing so, implied by Merlin’s prognostications, puts her on the path to amalgamating the archetypal male-female binary in her eventual union with Arthegall, the national *pater familias*. Because we do not see Britomart meet Arthegall in Book III, then we must examine the book’s ending for a positive sign of Britomart’s ultimate merger with Arthegall.

Having rescued Amoretta from Busyrane’s violent enslavement, Britomart wanders back through the castle and notes that the rich tapestries depicting the Garden of Adonis have disappeared: “Now vanish utterly, and cleane subverst / She found, and all their glory quite decayd, / The sight of such a change her much dismayd” (3.12.42). Britomart feels “dismayd” by the absent tapestries, which indicates her sexual maturation. She is saddened because she realizes that she has to and *wants* to achieve her union with Arthegall. This realization is possible because she has rescued Amoretta in order to reunite her with Scudamour—completing their binary.

This reunion is memorably showcased in the final five stanzas of the book. Analyzing these stanzas permits us to recognize how Britomart finally develops into a mature woman by way of vicariously enjoying Amoretta’s reunion with Scudamour. The narrator employs a simile comparing Scudamour to a deer “that greedily embayes / In the coole soile, after long thirstinesse” (3.12.46b) to reinforce ideologies about the need of women to nurture men in their roles as wives/mothers. Describing Amoretta as the nurturing “soile” positions her as a feminine incarnation of Mother Earth. Britomart witnesses this complementary unison of the male-female binary, where the feminine soil is penetrated by the bestial man, and wishes that she could enjoy a similar bond.

A close reading of Spenser’s language reveals that Britomart’s position in her unification with Arthegall will be

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similar to Amoretta's: submissive. Amoretta's body is illustrated as having morphed from a "prison of sad paine" to "the sweet lodge of love and deare delight" (3.12.46c). The connotations of "prison" elicit images of an enslaved and subservient body. Because her body has already been rendered docile, Amoretta is compared to a "lodge," so readers can imagine Scudamour lodging in/penetrating Amoretta's body. Because "lodge" also denotes a temporary dwelling, the word choice implies that this will not be a home for Scudamour; he will transiently use the abode for utilitarian purposes. These purposes, namely producing heirs and enjoying sexual pleasure, are expressed in the line "sweet ravishment pourd out her spright" (3.12.64c), which once again signals Amoretta as an agent of Scudamour's pleasure. The narrator informs the readers that, were they to witness this joyous coupling, they would imagine Amoretta and Scudamour as "that faire Hermaphrodite" (3.12.64c). The allusion to Hermaphrodite symbolizes heterosexual marriage and calls to mind Aristophanes's speech about the wholeness found in love when man and woman, separated in ancient times by Zeus, are reunited. The narrator notes that Britomart is impressed by this unification and wishes to mimic it with Arthegall: "That Britomart halfe envying their blesse, / Was much empasioned in her gentle sprite, / And to her self oft wisht like happinesse" (3.12.46d). The word "halfe" spatially describes Britomart's yearnings. She wishes to be the feminine half of the pairing, once again reminding Queen Elizabeth that she cannot enjoy a spiritual wholeness or "happinesse" without being wed to a man.

Despite these criticisms of Queen Elizabeth, readers are still persuaded to think of the heroic Britomart as one of the queen's doppelgangers. The name Britomart not only alludes to the British nation but also is a seemingly dichotomous reference to martial might and marital merger. Because Britomart represents a chastity enjoyed in marriage, Spenser celebrates the Protestant ideal of womanhood—wife/mother—over the Catholic ideal of womanhood—virgin. This preference of the married state stands opposite to the marital reality of Queen Elizabeth. Although the queen's reproductive years had certainly been eclipsed by 1590, Spenser cannot help but remind the queen and readers of a woman's proper role. Granted, his criticism of the queen's unmarried state could be tempered by an interpretation that lauds her ability to stay chaste while married

to England in her role as a monarch rather than a woman. The queen's decision to decline marriage proposals from such a Catholic stalwart as King Phillip II of Spain would have relieved such an anti-Catholic writer as Spenser. After all, Spenser's 1579 work "The Shepheardes Calendar" offers "veiled criticisms at Elizabeth for her projected match with the duke of Anjou" (Hadfield 59).

As we continue this analysis of the Britomart/Queen Elizabeth spectrum, we see Spenser substituting Britomart for the queen in order to emphasize one of her monikers: the Virgin Queen. When Britomart comes across the embattled Red-Cross Knight, she queries the six knights besieging him to better comprehend the situation. One of the knights explains that Red-Cross refuses to acknowledge that their lady, Malecasta, is fairer than his. Although Malecasta's name implies her uncurbed sexuality, one can interpret Malecasta as an allegorical criticism of the Catholic Church's devotion to the Virgin Mary. The Church's emphasis on venerating the Virgin Mary was a serious point of contention for the Protestants who felt Catholicism supported its followers' iconophilia when it came to images of the virgin and saints. Because England was becoming a decidedly Protestant nation as Queen Elizabeth's reign continued, the queen shrewdly began to take advantage of her unmarried state to craft herself as the Virgin Queen and replace the nation's erstwhile Catholics' love for the Virgin Mary with devotion to herself. Consequently, Malecasta's proclamation "That every knight, which doth this way repaire, / In case he have no Ladie, nor no love, / Shall due unto her service never to remove" (3.1.26) indicts the Catholic Church for its supposedly slavish devotion to the Virgin Mary. Malecasta, like *Lucifera* in Book I, resides in a stately house that the Protestant knights visit. Malecasta's palace is so luxurious that it almost renders the poet speechless before he describes its "royall riches and exceeding cost, / Of every pillour and of every post; / Which all of purest bullion framed were, / And with great pearles and pretious stones embost" (3.1.32). The references to "royal" wealth inside this non-monarchical house, in the sense that the crown is not inherited through a blood line, brings to mind the growing lavishness of the Catholic Church's headquarters in the Vatican. The sumptuous decorations and architecture of the palace

continue to the point where Malecasta is introduced by way of a comparison to "proud Persian Queenes" (3.1.40).

Queering the Queen

This association between Malecasta and a Persian queen reinforces the popular early modern portrayal of a hedonistic and decadent Eastern culture. These Eastern attributes of Malecasta allow us to queer Malecasta and, eventually, Queen Elizabeth and her decision to remain virginal because of historical associations that Europeans made between the origins of homosexuality and the East. This scapegoating is described by Margaret Hunt: "the imputation of tribadism to women in 'the Indies' and Egypt [that] fits into a developing orientalist discourse that dwells obsessively upon comparison between the allegedly low status and low sexuality of foreign, especially Middle Eastern, women and the allegedly high status and sexual respectability of Western European women" (369). Spenser disparages the queen's decision to remain unmarried by resuming his tactic of having other characters mistake Britomart for a man, particularly Malecasta. In many ways, he calls out her non-heteronormative queerness as an unmarried woman.

After all of the knights disarm themselves in Malecasta's bower, Britomart exercises her discretion by not disarming herself and only venting "up her umbriere, / And so did let her goodly visage to appere" (3.1.42). The fact that her face can be seen implies that her features are androgynous enough to pass as those of a man. Although the knights are enraptured by Britomart's beauty, which "gave light unto the day" (3.1.43), when Malecasta approaches the group, she is "All ignorant of her contrary sex, / (For she her weend a fresh and lusty knight)" (3.1.47). Spenser exploits the double entendre latent in the phrase "contrary sex" to highlight the fact that Malecasta does not understand Britomart's true sex as well as to criticize amorous same-sex relations that are "contrary" to the opposite-sex arrangement of normative relationships. The lustful Malecasta's desires are described as "falséd" (3.1.47), but she must be aware that Britomart's face is somewhat feminine since the male knights are entranced by Britomart's beauty. Spenser describes Malecasta's inability to control her desires any longer, "And into terms of open outrage burst, / That plaine discovered

her incontinence” (3.1.48), and juxtaposes this wanton display of lust with Britomart’s naïveté, “But Britomart would not such guilfull message know” (3.1.51). Although readers are to believe that Malecasta thinks Britomart is a man, Spenser’s constant use of feminine pronouns that represent each character’s true sex creates a palpable homoerotic environment in this tense courtship scene. This tension can be felt in such erotically charged lines as “The Lady did faire Britomart entreat, / Her to disarm, and with delightfull sport / To loose her warlike lims and strong effort” (3.1.52) and the emotionally tinged “The outward sparkes of her in burning fire; / Which spent in vaine, at last she told her briefe, / That but if she did lend her short reliefe, / And do her comfort, she mote algates dye” (3.1.53). The last line is even more fraught with homoerotic implications because “dye” puns on the common usage of “die” in early modern English vernacular to connote the experience of a sexual orgasm. Although Malecasta might not technically know Britomart’s sex, Britomart and the readers do.

Spenser craftily demonizes this same-sex attraction by describing Malecasta’s tactics being “Of such malengine and fine forgerie” that Britomart “Did easily believe her strong extremitie” (3.1.53). Malecasta is positioned as a dominating and duplicitous early modern lesbian, attempting to seduce the innocent, heterosexual Britomart into an act of “false instilled fire” (3.1.56). This oft-repeated scenario of a homosexual seducing an unwilling person of the same sex is neither the first nor the last instance of this harmful stereotype being propagated. Spenser continues to play with the use of pronouns to imbue this seduction scene with homoerotic possibilities. After Britomart has retreated to her private bower and “her selfe despoile” (3.1.58), thus removing her armor and perhaps a significant amount of clothing, Malecasta surreptitiously sneaks into the bower “Where she for secret purpose did appoint / To lodge the warlike mayd unwisely loved” (3.1.60). Because Spenser writes these lines in a manner similar to free indirect discourse, it’s unclear whether he wants to inform readers about the “neutral” facts of the scene or whether Malecasta has become cognizant of Britomart’s sex. The latter possibility becomes more plausible when the narrator describes Malecasta sneaking into Britomart’s bed: “Th’embroderd quilt she lightly up did lift, / And by her side her self she softly layd” (3.1.61). Spenser has already

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alerted readers to Britomart's having undressed herself, and so Malecasta would be even more likely to tell that Britomart is a female as she silently lies next to the knight and "inly sighed" (3.1.61). After Britomart awakes and discovers that a "loathed leachour" (3.1.62) is in her bed, she grabs her sword and scares Malecasta into shrieking and fainting in a swoon. The noun "leachour" was used to describe a lewd or unchaste man given to sexual indulgence, which masculinizes the potentially Sapphic Malecasta and compares her to Launcelot's destructive wanton sexuality as realized by Queen Guenivere when she confronts the knight in Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* and tells him that she now "understand[s] that thou art a false recreant knight and a common lecher" (Malory 404).

Of what was Malecasta most afraid? The fact that Britomart turns out to be a female? The heteronormative reading. The fact that Britomart was about to slay her with an imposing sword? An asexual, easy reading. Or the fact that her desire for Britomart has not been reciprocated, and everyone in her house is about to find out about her same-sex desires? A queer reading.

This last reading is supported by Tracey Sedinger's study of female friendship and the possibilities of lesbian desire in *The Faerie Queene*. Sedinger's assertion that "an explicitly homoerotic possibility is proffered to the reader through the medium of disguise, thereby assuming the status of error within the parameters of a supposedly foundational heterosexuality" (101) allows us to easily queer Britomart's encounter with Malecasta. However, Sedinger's argument that Britomart's "supposed ignorance is actually complicity, for her recognition of Malecasta's desire and maintenance of her disguise sustain the other woman's desire" (101) acknowledges Britomart's acceptance of becoming Malecasta's object of desire, but she does so because of the shortcomings "of her feeble sex" (3.1.54) according to Spenser. Readers witness Britomart's courtesy when the narrator informs us that the knight knows what "great rebuke it is, love to despise, / Or rudely sdeigne a gentle harts request" (3.1.55). Britomart thinks that Malecasta's love, "although too light, to woove a wandring guest," stems from a love "That from like inward fire that outward smoke had steemd" (3.1.55). Britomart incorrectly assumes that Malecasta's love is similar to her own for Arthegall. Malecasta's desire for Britomart is unlike the knight's for Arthegall because it cannot

perpetuate the reproductive futurity that will ensure England's destiny. The unnaturalness of homosexual desires has been a church doctrine for centuries and was articulated by the influential Albert of Lauingen, a thirteenth-century theologian, when he asserted that same-sex intercourse is "a sin against nature because it contradicts the natural impulse to species continuity" (Jordan 126). Spenser latches onto this train of thought in his contrast between Malecasta and more natural women:

Faire Ladies, that to loue captiued arre,
 And chaste desires do nourish in your mind,
 Let not her fault your sweet affections marre,
 Ne blot the bounty of all womankind;
 Mongst thousands good one wanton Dame to find:
 Amongst the Roses grow some wicked weeds;
 For this was not to loue, but lust inclind[.] (3.1.49)

Spenser casts Malecasta as one of the "wicked weeds" and positions her as a degenerate woman who does not fulfill the expectation of reproductive futurity. Furthermore, as a weed she threatens more natural and fertile "Roses," such as Britomart, from fulfilling their reproductive destiny. Spenser negatively queers Malecasta for her wanton attraction to Britomart and for her ability to seduce the future mother of England.

This queer discussion of these two female characters allows us to see another dimension of Spenser's criticism of his monarch. Queen Elizabeth's decision to remain a "virgin" marks her as subversive for refusing to partake in the heteropatriarchal economy of marriage. Theodora Jankowski employs her theory about queer virgins to interpret the queen as queer: "In some ways it might be possible to identify Elizabeth as queer because she so distinctly represents what the average woman in her world, especially the premarital virgin, was not. Certainly anomalous, deviant, powerful, and autonomous, it seems she must be considered queer" (27). Jankowski's decision to use queer as a term innately tied to sexuality, unlike more radical queer theorists such as Judith Halberstam, allows us to see Spenser critiquing the sexually queer virgin queen in *The Faerie Queene*. As if the queen's refusal to marry was not enough, her androgynous persona sometimes created rumors about the queen's sexual proclivities. Englishmen were queering the queen even during the English Restoration as can be seen in John

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Bank’s 1684 play *The Island Queens*, which features Queen Elizabeth in an incestuous relationship with her cousin Queen Mary of Scots: “the women meet, embrace, and profess their undying love for each other, and share at least one night of bliss” (Watkins 180). Queen Elizabeth’s refusal to marry made her not only ambiguously Protestant by neglecting the role of a chaste wife but also ambiguously heterosexual for rebuffing so many suitors.

Conclusion

Although readers are prodded to prefer Britomart over the other female characters in Book III, she presents the seemingly irreconcilable oxymoron of chaste fecundity. The book’s title and Britomart’s allegorical significance always highlight her chastity. If Spenser is nudging Queen Elizabeth to select an heir and symbolically reproduce, Britomart’s chastity allows readers to sublimate anxieties about the crown’s impotence. Spenser must remind her of her role as a woman—submissive, feminine, and heterosexual. Merlin’s genealogy narrative ends with the enigmatic but hopeful “But yet the end is not” (3.3.50). The cyclical structure of these stanzas links the “royal virgin” to Britomart and her fruitful union with Arthegall. By connecting Britomart and Queen Elizabeth, Spenser promises an optimistic “end” that has not yet arrived. Because we know that Britomart will succeed in consummating her desire for Arthegall, readers can imagine that the inheritor of Queen Elizabeth’s throne will prove just as successful. Nonetheless, this optimistic ending entails a serious chiding of the queen’s queer decision to remain unmarried and not publicly select an heir. Spenser’s ability to celebrate *and* scold the queen takes readers back to the proem of Book III where the spatial syntax of the ultimate stanza underscores his sly motives for penning the book: “To sing his mistresse prayse, and let him mend” (3.5). By ending this line bespeaking authorial intentions with the third person declarative “and let him mend,” the syntax allows readers to understand the poet’s aim: targeting Queen Elizabeth with “praise” but “mend[ing]” or advising as he sees fit.

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Open-Access Journals and the Question of Specialized Readers: Anarchy in the Canyonlands

By Alan Ramón Clinton

I. Introduction

With the recent death of internet and open-access pioneer Aaron Swartz (1986-2013), who was pursued relentlessly by the federal government for hacking into the search engine JSTOR, we are reminded of just how radical “open access” can seem to a capitalist culture that is uncertain of the nature of the commodity in the digital age, where “objects” *cum* commodities are more spectral than ever. On this level, even choosing to publish an academic journal in open-access form lends itself to an audience that is less specialized than has traditionally been sought after by the academy. Still, the question of whether, in addition, a journal like the one edited by Marc Ouellette and me, *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture*, has an ethical duty to cater to a non-specialized reader hinges on our definitions of specialization in the 21st century. A brief answer, for me, would begin by suggesting that the “general reader” of digital culture has dubious historical antecedents in the “ideal reader” posited by both reader-response theories and the New Criticism of the 1930s. Instead, I wish to suggest how various issues of *Reconstruction*, in particular the recent “Inventions of Activism,” cater to a quite different entity, the “hyper-specialized” reader.¹ One of the advantages of having an online format, of course, is the ability to showcase multimedia content that would not be available in traditional journals. Such content can, counterintuitively, produce a sort of effect that simultaneously alienates and enthralls someone who encounters it. In becoming “hyper-specialized,” readers do not exist as such but are created, interpellated, or “hailed” into an aporia that, in its very confusion, can produce an activist disposition. For now, I would like to focus on one contribution to this issue in

particular that explores these questions in an especially provocative way.

Scrolling down the web page that is “Inventions of Activism,” one is presented with a variety of images, “special features,” articles, and reviews, many of which seem to have an uncertain relationship to activism. The “contents” page itself is information rich, uneven, not exactly confronting the potential activist with an obvious Molotov cocktail to seize upon. This layout is intentional, as it replicates the need that Jacques Derrida expresses for those who wish to engage in activism, particularly inventive activism—the desire to act without a predefined, unquestionable ideology or method. Rather, one has to invent a way to begin, always provisionally but never in a way that defers action *unnecessarily*. The sheer range of both forms and contents on the page, indeed, simulates on a small level the condition that Bruce Robbins has called “The Sweatshop Sublime”:

[C]ontemplating the obscure infinity of the social whole [or the single web page] . . . making us sense that we possess transcendent powers (albeit powers exercised on our behalf and in this case without our active will) yet finally letting us “sink back into ourselves,” so that we fail to express those powers in any potentially risky, disobedient action, I suggest that we provisionally call this trope, with a certain inevitable discomfort, the sweatshop sublime. (85)

Robbins is, of course, citing the Romantic sense of the sublime and its dubious political ramifications, especially when applied to a global context. Yet, the “sublime,” like many other concepts, does not have an *inherent* politics. Perhaps the “sinking back into myself” is the sinking of the nonspecialized reader about to become hyper-specialized. Having given up on knowing how to “act,” perhaps curiosity leads me to click on a place where the spatial meaning of aporia (as a place where the trail ends) might resonate with my cognitive aporia; perhaps I choose to click on something with a title that seems, perversely, decidedly apolitical, Roderick Coover’s *Canyonlands*.

The screen still from this “interactive” movie—and we still have not become jaded to the slight panic, the many types of interaction that the word “interactive” might invoke in digital contexts—is centered on a photograph of a dam, framed by empty space, icons, and a range of colors that simultaneously

evoke a topographic map and an impressionistic painting. Below I notice that the film is dedicated to the anarcho-environmentalist Edward Abbey, author of *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. There is a table of contents below the image with corresponding links, and yet nothing seems quite as anarchic as clicking on the image itself. Hyper-specialized, I know what Abbey has to say. But I do not know what lies behind the hybrid image that has transfixed me.

I am told how to “Read Canyonlands,” which is itself a ruse since Coover gives us two options, to watch a 60-minute documentary or to “explore the cinemascap.” Watch or explore, passive or active, linear or wandering, if we weren’t already habituated to web time (who has 60 minutes to spare anymore and on a single item?) the choice already seems like not much of a choice because it is a decision between not choosing and having the ability to choose. I do not want to become an “expert,” which web time defines as having spent 60 minutes on something; rather, I will “Enter” because I would much rather practice Walter Benjamin’s web-time prophecy about historical materialism, which “blasts out the homogeneity of the epoch” (474). Web time is even quicker than you think. You enter, and already questions about the desert are being asked by Edward Abbey via someone else’s voice. The background is a map with barely readable place names, like those robot detectors you sometimes have to decode to enter a site. The map has abstract shapes and blank areas as well and a giant red flower splayed on the right side and drawings that look like they could be ripped straight from Constant’s many iterations of New Babylon. This is not to be confused with the concept of “remediation,” which Bolter and Grusin ripped off from Benjamin in order to domesticate, depoliticize his “Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” for those of you who like to call yourselves digital humanists.² What is remediating what here? Why the telos, the dead end? Why not radicalized, hyper-specialized?

Move over horseshoes and get Edward Abbey commentary. Because commentary gets us where we want to go, is it “good luck” because it absolves us of the task of interpretation? It is also a retrograde form of travel though not quite as deadly as the biohazard-looking icon, which summons a

train coming straight towards us, and its coal burning everywhere among us.

Here's the paradox of web time. We think it is quick, but, after all is said and done, we lose all sense of time, hailed by both reactionary and radical content, although commercialism has been more on the vanguard here than radicalism. Because, after some time, if a radical open source has transfixed you, look at your phone or watch or wherever your time is located, and you'll see that your desire to explore, which is an activist disposition—and perhaps we should remind ourselves at this time that, just like “the sublime,” “activism” does not have an inherent politics either—after some time, you'll realize that you would have saved time by watching the 60-minute film. Because open source, which can only, for our purposes, occur in a digital environment, properly desequenced, will have held you, in your pauses, your “amorous fits” (Barthes 110), your do-overs and replays, your desire to go on, much longer than 60 minutes. Much, much longer if, speaking in a utopian sense, new media, openly sourced, sources unknown, has opened up a deep ecology inside you, outside in the world, that must be constantly, gently touched, with a monkey wrench or a tuning fork.

“The [screen], the great space, what happens there to the human spirit?” (screen 1). Arches National Park, silent, a brief map leading to anarchist wave-shaped rocks, form after form, chooses not to answer, only repeat itself, until we archly hit the “close” icon in the upper right-hand corner of the screen, not *the* screen, which for Leon Battista Alberti would be a window you can only pretend to look through, *a* screen jetting through time onto the “multiplicity of windows within windows, frames within frames, screens within screens” (Friedberg 2). It could lead to today, where “the new technologies convey a certain type of accident, one that is no longer local and precisely situated . . . but general, an accident that immediately affects the entire world” (Virilio 12). The question I would ask is whether this is the sort of accident that, could he have foreseen it, the author of *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975) might have been interested in, where that book short circuits with the contemporary anarchies of computer hacking, however we might imagine anarchy or, for that matter, hacking:

the basic ingredients: monkey wrenches, wrecking bars, heavy-duty wirecutters, bolt cutters, trenching tools, siphon hoses, sugars and syrups, oil and petrol, steel wedges, blasting caps, detonating cord, safety fuse, cap crimpers, fuse lighters and adequate quantities of Du Pont Straight and Du Pont Red Cross Extra. (Abbey 71)

I realize now that the situation I'm trying to explain involves a set of tools or words as tools: **the screen, Edward Abbey, monkey wrenches, Abbie Hoffman, and hacking.** The method itself has gone off Coover's screen for the time being as I turn myself into a hyper-specialized reader.

II. Monkey Wrench

Like Jacques Derrida reminds us of the *pharmakon*, a monkey wrench can be both an agent of construction or destruction. Its adjustable jaw allows it to grab nuts of different sizes, making it extremely useful to those who wish to travel light, like saboteurs. And yet, sabotage is a problematic concept in Abbey's novel as it is elsewhere, since industrialization itself constantly places us at an aporia of construction and destruction. In *The Monkey Wrench Gang* Abbey makes it clear that he views his illegal activities as a prevention of sabotage: "Almost all the country within their view was roadless, uninhabited, a wilderness. They meant to keep it that way" (82). Of course, in doing so they intend to inflict thousands of dollars of damage against the capitalist entities intending to develop the land. On the other hand, as Lance Newman points out, Abbey's own writings conflict "with the conventional way of thinking about these deserts as inhuman spaces, as spaces empty of human inhabitants—the ultimate wildernesses in the way that wilderness is defined by the Wilderness Act of 1964" ("Desert Interventions"). Humans have inhabited the most seemingly remote and uninhabitable spaces in the world from the beginning of time, and Abbey's own habitation is what makes possible our appreciation of the solitary desert. Conservation practices ironically make more people want to experience the lands that their habitations, however brief, help to destroy. Under these conditions, what does it mean to be a defender of nature; what does it mean to be an ecologist when this very term derives from the Greek word *oikos*, meaning "household"? Whose house are

we talking about? Where does Coover's nonlinear film specifically and the hyper-specialized reader of open source journals reside within that even stranger neologism, "media ecologies"? Let me only suggest, for the moment, that monkey wrenches have something to do with these questions and that they should work on us as theorists of ecosystems in both senses of the word. Let the monkey wrench disrupt our normal critical habits as well as work on our various critical parts with its adjustable job, perhaps damaging us and improving our methodologies at the same time.

III. The Screen

Back to it, then, at least for now: "The discovery of something intimate, though impossible to name, in the remote" (screen 3). These words, which both are and are not Abbey's, attest to the impossible space created by *Canyonlands*. On the screen, it takes the form of a map, but, if we take Abbey at his word, it is not a map that can orient us. The question, then, is what sort of disorientation is at work here, and what may it have to do with readers and activism? If it is a map with cinematic qualities, operating in web time, it would seem designed to make us linger, wander in the desert Coover has designed. The screen moves us in a form of destinerrancy, Jacques Derrida's term for "the wandering or erring that, in its instantiations, always oscillates nondialectically between randomness and intuitions" (Clinton 206). It is a movement that simulates the unpredictable swerves of anarchist politics, animal movement: "To move *à pas de loup* [wolf] is to walk without making a noise, to arrive without warning, to proceed discretely, silently, invisibly, almost inaudibly and imperceptibly" (Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign 2*). Derrida takes on politics in *The Beast and the Sovereign* from the discursive position of the wolf, the most feared and despised creature in folklore, because the wolf is neither beast nor sovereign, but that which undoes sovereignty. Just as Coover's screen disorients the map it invokes, the wolf undoes the hierarchies that sovereignty invokes in order to create its feminine (in French) other in creating itself: *la bête et le souverain*. Anarchism is not a political position, but a way of moving: "one enemy the contractor would not and did not think of was the band of four idealists stretched out on their stomachs on a rock under the desert sky" (Abbey 80). The wolf cannot be

named, is by definition remote because it travels in packs, and “jeopardizes, on the side of words and things both, the relation of the proper name as an *intensity* to the multiplicity it instantaneously apprehends” (Deleuze and Guattari 27-28). There will be no *Desert Solitaire* for Edward Abbey, for he is also Abbie Hoffman, whose book has been stolen.

IV. Abbie Hoffman

And yet, as an anarchist media entrepreneur, Hoffman both *is* and *is not* the intensity of the proper name. As Paul Krassner puts it concerning this duality, “Abbie did a lot of anonymous stuff, but he used his celebrity as a tool. So in that sense it was transcending the ego” (qtd. in Sloman 169). Transcending the ego through media stunts, in the name of a communal form of existence, this is transcendence in the most literal, colloquial, and paradoxical sense. *Aufhebung*, bandied about by German philosophers, is used every day by Germans. Drop something on the ground, and someone may ask you to pick it up, using the verb *auf*. *Heben* is a verb meaning simply to lift, to pick something up as well. It’s almost as if, transcendence seeming impossible in any ontological sense, Hegel could only merely insist by combining into one mega-word two regular words that mean essentially the same thing. Only, the double positives, when placed together, take on the notion of dissolution and annulment, undoing ontology completely. One can only transcend or lift something by annulling it at the same time. This, with respect to the screen writ large, the screen as both window and blind, is what Hoffman seemed, despite all appearances, intent on doing. Borrowing an idea from Lenny Bruce, he wrote the word “FUCK” on his forehead in order to avoid being photographed (Sloman 150), his head in effect becoming a screen preventing appearance on the screen. And yet, intuiting the screen’s power to the point of imagining an Internet-like system, he also distributed a pamphlet at the 1968 Democratic National Convention supporting the opening up of cable television so that everyone could use the media as he or she saw fit (Sloman 137). Now, thanks to the uneven development between technology and politics, the Internet has provided us with a system in which open-source journals like *Reconstruction* are able to produce the most revolutionary “ideological sorts of

‘content,’ if only that content does not touch the borders of language and of all the juridico-political contracts it guarantees” (Derrida, “Living On,” 94-95). Owing to its international following, *Reconstruction* has managed to survive the “juridico-political contracts” that search engines like Google and Bing have signed with capitalist entities. In other words, *Reconstruction* is easy to find, visited 2000 times per day, and read in over 100 countries. Whether these readers are watching their screens within the juridico-political contracts is another matter:

Typically, though I await the T&P committee's official inquiry and . . . direct them to the MLA and cite the ways in which our submissions ed assigns a unique identifier to each new submission, about which I don't even know, and assigns readers based on subject area. Then, the journal is given a final vetting by one of the exec, especially in cases with guest eds, to ensure that everything actually passes muster, even though guest eds are instructed to use the *Reconstruction* reviewer form, to keep them, and to consult with domain eds or one of the exec in the event there are questions or variances of opinions. If there is anything that might exclude a member of the exec and/or the guest eds during the final pass before publication, then either the managing ed or the submissions ed is requested to find a final reader(s). So, before an issue is released it has passed through several sets of eyes and levels of review. We took these extraordinary steps, for which we have been complimented by the MLA and the DOAJ, because we understand that there are still some quarters that do not regard online, open-access journals as being the match of print journals. In fact, this is far from the case and we have taken full advantage of the swiftness and ease of access afforded us by virtue of being online in order to make the journal as rigorous as it is current. Something like that goes out if needed. Feel free to quote me. (Ouellette)

Noting that he “bats near 1000 with them” (no mean feat in this age of dissolving tenure lines), one could cynically read Marc Ouellette’s analysis above and view *Reconstruction* as a very efficient part of what’s left of the tenure-production machine, operating squarely within the “juridico-political contracts” initially maintained by print journals. How close is publishing an open-access version of such journals to Abbie Hoffman throwing “free” money onto the floor of the New York Stock Exchange? I

would call both acts, in the spirit of Situationism, engaging the society of the spectacle on the level of the spectacle itself.

V. The Screen

“Largely incomprehensible” (screen 3), Abbey says and does not say of the desert. And this is reinforced when the impressionistic map on the initial movie/computer screen is replaced with a more “traditional looking” map of the United States, which immediately zooms in, obliterating the distinction between map, camera, and web code, to the Southwestern United States Abbey was so in love with. And yet, though the pixels show us things we might recognize on a map, such as green for forested areas or blue for lakes, the only “keys” left for us are the words of a few place names. More than anything else, one recognizes the plethora of black dots, which are so numerous it is impossible to say they are trails as they might be in a smaller-scale National Park Map: “it would never occur to a neurotic to grasp the skin erotically as a multiplicity of pores, little spots, little scars or black holes, or to grasp the sock erotically as a multiplicity of stitches. The psychotic can” (Deleuze and Guattari 27). So when Abbey speaks of incomprehension, and Coover renders it on the screen, we are speaking of an incomprehension that bears some relation to psychosis. Given this situation, it is worth noting that Coover submitted his “film” to *Reconstruction* knowing that it was to be published/screened in an issue called “Inventions of Activism.” So, at least Coover had certain readers in mind, even if I am not one of them. One can be an editor and not an intended reader; one can be an intended reader and become something else, hyper-specialized or hyper-spatialized.

Thus, if he were not writing a book called *Cartographic Cinema*, it would seem odd that Tom Conley insists that film “bears an implicit relation with cartography” (1). The implication would be that films exist to orient us, send us on our way. It would make it seem as if films were neutral, unless maps as such were not neutral. If we stick with Conley’s use of “cartographic,” we might note its etymological relation to the French word *carte* or card in English. To commit cartography is merely to write on a card, which then may be sent or dealt with as one chooses, except one does not choose; we must come to

terms with Derrida's observation of the post card, understand that it can "always not arrive at its destination, and that therefore it never arrives" (*The Post Card* 33). A map can always detour us or leave us, schizophrenically, in an aporia, at the end of the trail. We can always be caught standing with a map that has no relation to our present position. This sort of trajectory map is the kind Coover's film more explicitly invokes, and perhaps new media makes us more aware of, not a static piece of information but an act involving the force of virtuality, noting that force was always virtual: "The effectivity of the superposition—its ability to have actual effects while remaining virtual—is what is called *force*" (Massumi 160).

VI. Hacking

Brian Massumi's reminder, bolstered by cognitive science, that virtuality is itself the ground of human perception, should make us careful about drawing absolute distinctions between technologies—analogue, digital, or otherwise—even as we attune ourselves to the force-effects they exert in the perceived/experienced world. On a deep level, activism should be thinking about addressing "the growth pain of perception's passing into and out of itself" (161). For all the talk of "information overload" we find ourselves encountering, it does beg the question as to what extent this information is highly differentiated for a person of a non-activist disposition. In other words, how often does someone's perception pass and to what end? We have already defined anarchism as a form of movement, suggesting its potential qualities but not delimiting that movement. Is a hyper-specialized reader someone who moves, perceptually, in certain unique ways? In staring at a computer screen, one confronts both of the meanings of a screen. It is that which provides information to the viewer, but, as I gaze at my screen, I'm also screened out, or at least reflected away back towards myself. It is not a complete image of myself, but I do see, for instance, fractions of my right/left arm, the milieu of papers and books littering my desk. So there is a self, and an other, and an other-self.

Massumi uses, perhaps perversely, most likely to caution us from being too quick about assigning political ontologies to experience and experiencing, Ronald Reagan's first biography *Where Is the Rest of Me?* to discuss these matters. In the book,

whose title comes from the line he uttered in the only scene in which he felt truly othered as an actor (rather than someone playing himself), Reagan points to a moment when he was asked to play someone who wakes up in a hospital bed to discover his legs have been amputated. Massumi suggests that Reagan felt so incomplete, his body and self virtually hacked, that he felt compelled to “look for it in conservative politics” (55). Although the event Reagan describes is bizarre, it is not unique; indeed it is the very thing that turns the actor into an activist. In opposition to Reagan’s reaction, which requires a completion of what has been severed, Massumi puts forth as an assignment to himself and others, “Dis-sever, instead, the imageless from the Ideal. For an incorporeal materialism” (66).

Incorporeal materialism is the plane on which both contemporary capitalism and hacktivists operate. As McKenzie Wark describes it, “Power is in the hands of the vectoralist class. . . . Its power rests not on the ownership of [tangible] things but in control of the logistics by which they are managed” (136). They both operate tactically, and due to the digital vectors on which they operate, they both necessarily move *à pas de loup*. Nevertheless, while the vectoral class aims at total commoditization of previously unforeseen “power[s] of calculation” (Wark 136), hacktivists generally have a sort of piratical nature, which causes a certain disdain for private property. This disdain, in a world of post-industrial sabotage by industry, nation states, collectives, and individuals, may, of course, take on a variety of political forms, which is why it is necessary to produce a “hacker class consciousness” (Wark 141), which is somewhat anarchist in nature, inasmuch as anarchism can have a “nature.” Interestingly, other than Julian Assange, the face of Wikileaks, the main group involved in this “education” is called “Anonymous”— *à pas de loup*.

As of the writing of this essay, Jeremy Hammond, alleged master-hacker behind Anonymous’s cyber-attack against private security firm Strategic Forecasting Inc., is serving a 10-year prison sentence for that and other acts, some of which may have been used by the FBI to garner intelligence from other nations. Natasha Lennard of *Salon.com* writes, “If it can be shown that the U.S. government used information gathered by hackers on [the informant’s] tips, crucial questions arise about why the hackers and not the government agencies that used their

skills are being persecuted.” While Lennard’s sympathies are in the right place, one wonders whether such a question even makes sense in relation to an individual (Hammond) and group (Anonymous), which published, “as an added flourish [to the attacks] the full text of the influential French anarchist tract *The Coming Insurrection*” (Reitman). As Hammond himself notes, “I have always made it clear that I am an anarchist-communist” (qtd. in Reitman). Consequently, those who call upon the good will of the state, such as Lennard or Assange’s lawyer Michael Ratner, to act against its own sovereignty, seem misguided as to the sort of movements we are talking about here. Indeed, one could argue that most, if not all, of Anonymous’s hacks thus far have worked on a principle of defacement, as suggested by Anonymous member CC3, “We’re [now] focusing less on defacement and more quietly taking over infrastructure” (qtd. in Reitman). This would make sense, for as Michael Taussig notes, acts of defacement against the state actually invoke the sacred nature of sovereignty rather than deflate it (3). One can sense this in the recent outing of the NSA network run by the United States. Indeed, what does each new revelation by Edward Snowden do but make us aware of the immense power of the United States not only in conventional terms, but in powers of surveillance as well? Those who argue that just because the U.S. can do something doesn’t mean it should are effectively admitting that whatever the U.S. can do, cybernetically speaking, it will and can continue to do as long as the United States remains a sovereign nation interested in exerting power over others. It is the very nature of sovereignty itself. Rather, Anonymous would do well to take a page from its own citation from the anonymously authored *Coming Insurrection*: “Empire is not an enemy that confronts us head on. It is a rhythm that imposes itself, a way of dispensing and dispersing reality” (6). The question for hacktivists might be, “How does one move with and against that rhythm simultaneously?”

VII. Conclusion

One of the things this essay reveals is what we may have already known—open source, while amenable and even necessary to activism, is not activist per se, as it merely reiterates the logic of those things that are free and those that are not within the purview of digital capitalism. Nevertheless, inasmuch

as it colludes, both in form and content, with anarchistic alternatives to capitalism, open-source “journals” do beckon a closer look not only from a generalized readership, but a hyper-specialized one. This hyper-specialized reader in particular found anarchy in the *Canyonlands* with the aid of Edward Abbey and his digital interpreter Roderick Coover. One descends, necessarily, into these lands in the slow motion that is web time, and every descent is partial. This one so far has unearthed a set of object-ideas: Edward Abbey, Abbie Hoffman, monkey wrenches, the screen, and hacking. They now levitate in the air, like the Pentagon, in a sort of *différance* of activist thought. No doubt this is a limited set of terms even as they themselves are not fully explored. No doubt word-acts and idea-objects will come and go, dancing in various combinations in the service of something other than the situation we now find ourselves in. Anarchism of any kind at any scale requires difference from prevailing situations and difference within itself to function as vitally as possible.

Notes

¹ Many thanks to Joe McDermott, Senior Technical Editor at *Reconstruction*, for his masterful design and technical work on the “Inventions of Activism” issue.

² Bolter and Grusin’s *Remediation* is a book typical of its genre and time, except worse, implicitly reassuring digital humanists that “nothing really has changed” while also suggesting that everything has. In order to do so, Benjamin’s seminal essay is invoked only to be dismissed for encouraging a “utopian” desire for unmediated reality and/or claims of either “a new form of democracy” in the digital age or the alleged “technological determinism” of Marxism. How conservative are these ideas? Well, I cannot speak for Grusin, but shortly after the publication of this book, Bolter held a six-figure endowed chair at Georgia Tech in which he was responsible for overseeing the “Brittain Fellows,” who, despite their illustrious title, were underpaid “full-time” teachers. When I asked as their elected representative for better working conditions, Bolter attempted (unsuccessfully) to have me fired for spurious, unrelated reasons.

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