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2023 Presidential Address: Recovering the Meaning of Philology

By Valerio Caldesi Valeri

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Good evening, fellow philologists! It is such a pleasure to see us all gathered here *in person* at Centre College in Danville, KY. It has been a long time coming after a two-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For many of us, the annual meeting of KPA hosted at Campbellsville University in March 2020 was bound to be our very last face-to-face engagement for the next couple of years. Thanks to the vision, tenacity and skill of the association's membership and officers, we were able to pull through those challenging times and do the unthinkable. An association whose strong point had always been the shared experience of meeting in person pivoted the forty-eighth and forty-ninth annual conferences to full virtual modality. For all of the technical and practical difficulties associated with broadcasting over the web, our KPA managed to guarantee, if not the experience of the jovial fellowship to which the conference had accustomed us, at least the intellectual exchange of ideas.

Today, we are back to a format that better fits the enterprise and spirit of our association: to host in an academic venue intellectuals from all corners of Kentucky who present and share their scholarly and creative work, but also enjoy each other's company and delight in the companionship, interactions, and conversations before, during and after the sessions. Beyond intellectual enrichment, which is very much an aspect that our conference has unfailingly provided over the years, our gathering today serves to cement the esprit de corps among like-minded intellects. It cannot be a random fact of language that the expression esprit de corps

involves the metaphor of the body, that is our solidarity with one another is best expressed through physical relations.

As a classicist and a Hellenist, I can't help but liken our conference to an ancient symposium of sorts. Not the orgiastic, unruly, drinking party whose craze we witness in the iconography of ancient Greek vases. Rather, the kind of event that Plato describes in his *Symposium*—a communal experience of drinking together while debating a theme, love in the case of Plato's symposiasts and recovery for us. This combination of commensality, sharing a table for consumption of food and drink, and intellectual exercise is a tradition that we carry on at our meeting: we enjoy a plenary session, we dine together, we have lunch together, we engage intellectually with each other. On occasion, we do imbibe wine, resolving for moderation in alcoholic consumption just as the participants in Plato's *Symposium* did: this was to carry on a conversation of the highest standards (*Symp.* 176e). And it also helps to consider that the Greeks would have tempered wine with water, or watered down their wine, as oenophiles would bluntly put it. At any rate, more importantly for the point of the comparison, the Greek symposium, as Plato portrays it, did thrive on the notion of presence, *synousia* in Greek, the ideal of being *physically* together.¹ Togetherness in a very literal and corporeal sense, then, was a requisite for the Greek symposium as much as it is for our conference.

This social communion predicated on physical presence, a staple element of our organization, is indeed what the global health crisis has taken away from us, temporarily halting an identity-fashioning event such as our in-person annual meeting. The pandemic has certainly uprooted our personal but also professional lives, reshaping our views of what we do as scholars and creative thinkers, resetting our career goals, calling for self-reflection of our identities and practices. As we are slowly recovering from this life-changing calamity, it is perhaps timely to

reflect together in this venue on the process of recovery for our association and to ask ourselves how philology can be best situated in a post COVID-19 world.

I would like to suggest that our recovery may start by considering the very term that defines the nature of our work and drives us together: the word *philology*, the word that unabashedly qualifies in adjectival form our association, the Kentucky *Philological* Association. Ironically and in the spirit of self-reflection, I will conduct a brief meta-philological operation: explaining philology by means of philology itself.

The word philology is a compound of *philos*, from *philia*, in Greek fondness, love, friendship and *logos*, the rather elusive term for word, speech, language. Philology thus entails an *affective* relationship, a sort of friendship with its object of study, which is language writ large (Hamacher 118). At a very basic level, for the Greeks a philologist could be somebody fond of words, passionate about speaking: Plato has Socrates identify himself as a *philologos* in his *Phaedrus* (236e). Plato also writes in the *Laws* (641e) that, in the public opinion, Athens was considered a citizenry fond of talk, *philologos*.

Unbeknownst to us, then, we have already practiced good old philology just by entertaining conversations at our tables this evening! In the context of our dialogues, we have heard words, we have *interpreted* words, and we have responded with yet more words. The critical point to take away here is that philology is a practice of *interpretation* in which any individual who speaks a language, or more than one language, innately and instinctively engages. This is why Socrates can afford to state that an entire city the size of Athens is made of philologists. Before it becomes a discipline, philology is therefore *a way of life* (Pollock, “Future Philology” 935) for language-speaking humans. We express ourselves through words, we are

understood through words, we explicate ourselves, our fellow humans and our realities through words: communication and philology therefore go hand in hand.

To a greater or lesser degree, each human being is a philologist by necessity. While Aristotle famously claimed that man is by nature a political animal, (*Politics* 1.1253a) I would argue that man is by nature a *philological* animal. Accordingly, mankind's Aristotelian *telos*, its purpose, is *to live philologically*, that is to understand, interpret and respond to human thought as captured by language. Paradoxically, both the object and the instrument of philological inquiry are one and the same: language. Contrary to most other sciences that research objects outside of themselves, philology may be thought of as *a reflection on language through language* (Hui 155). Self-referential by definition and inseparably intertwined with its object, philology inevitably thrives in subjectivity: philologists, each on their own terms, rethink and re-experience through the medium of language by feeling, by empathizing, by reacting.

A patrimony all of humanity shares in, philology in its application to the classical languages evolved toward the second half of the nineteenth century in Germany into a *professional* discipline on par with the hardest of sciences. (Pollock, "Future Philology" 931) The tension between philology's newly acknowledged scientific status and its humanistic charge is palpable in the 1872 diatribe that pit against each other the philologist Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorf and the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Wilamowitz staunchly advocated for a "new" philology that had to be clinically excised from the blemish of present-day affections; Nietzsche, instead, championed a return to a philological humanism that he felt the new philologists seemed to have forgotten. (Pollock, "Future Philology" 932) Even at its scientific zenith, then, philology continued to be associated with the notion of human-centeredness. Moving closer to our days, the 2020 monograph *Feeling and Classical Philology* by Constanze

Güthenke effectively illustrates how practitioners of what is typically considered the most technical philological scholarship, the unemotional philology à la Wilamowitz, resorted instead to “a language of love and intimacy” (xiii) when describing the relationship with their research object.

It is this kind of philology, the philology that acknowledges an emotional connection with its field of study and recovers an understanding of our shared humanity, that I would suggest our organization embrace and boldly advertise to the general public. This kind of philology exerts universal appeal; it is a philology open to all; it admits of the possibility and potentiality of being practiced by everyone. This kind of philology thereby promotes inclusivity. It rejects that elitist attitude that has attracted a great deal of hostility toward our discipline from outsiders, casting philology into an arcane possession of the privileged few. It absolves the discipline from the accusation of narrowly focusing on words. As philologists and humans, we interpret words, we connect with and attempt to recover the thoughts expressed by those words, and finally contribute our own interpretation in a never-ending “chain of culture,” as German classical scholar August Böckh put it in 1882 (qtd. in Güthenke 121). Once historicized, in fact, our own philological interpretations will become material for future philological inquiry: the philologist’s own meaning becomes the object of philology in a process that is reiterated and reinvigorated *ad infinitum*, or at least for as long as humanity exists.

This appeal to a human-focused philology is not to discredit the notion that philology can be practiced as a science nor that philology does not hold a rightful place in the academy. In his 2015 article Sheldon Pollok sees for a human-centered philology potentiality as a “unified transregional and transhistorical academic discipline.” (Liberating Philology 18) I think that, in addition, the aspiration of philology to recover our humanity would position the discipline

exceptionally well in the climate of identity-crisis and de-humanization that the pandemic has brought about. This patently humanistic philology can map our route toward recovery.

Philology is certainly a difficult, cumbersome label. In 2013, the premiere national association for classics, formerly known as the *American Philological Society*, elected to change its name to *Society for Classical Studies* (acronym SCS) with a smaller-type gloss underneath that reads “Founded in 1869 as the American Philological Association”. Offering a rationale for the decision, the then-president Denis Feeney reported how the main concern precipitating that choice was the membership’s acknowledgement that the term philology was *inaccessible* to the general public. (Feeney) Further, in summarizing the membership’s responses to a survey on the proposed name change, past president Jeffrey Henderson, noted how one of the concerns was that the term philology was not sufficiently representative of all of the disciplinary fields involved in the study of antiquity. (Henderson)

Unlike SCS, our KPA, I think, does well and will continue to do well in hanging on to philology as its mantra, realizing within the Commonwealth Pollock’s dream of uniting philologists from different areas of specialization into a compact, academically united front. We should not shy away from identifying as philologists. There’s a quite noble history behind the name. It behooves us, however, to focus our energies into revitalizing the use of the word philology, stressing its humanistic slant and presenting it as a strong asset in this day and age: philology as a tool to chart our course in the phase of recovery of our identity in the aftermath of the pandemic.

In closing, I want to propose an alternate meaning of the word philology with an important caveat. Be forewarned, philologists: this interpretation can easily be charged with being a false etymology, but I feel it’s worth exploring nonetheless. What if we were to reverse

the relationship between the constituent roots of the word philology, making *logos* the governing principle and *philia* the object of that *logos*? We would effectively transform philology into the science of affection, the science that studies fondness, affectionate connections, friendship. Whether or not we believe in the soundness of such interpretation of the word, a philology informed by the understanding that philologists strive to recover connections with fellow humans is the kind of philology that could serve as a powerful antidote at a time when the fragility of our humanity has been laid bare.

Notes

¹ The word *synousia* occurs no less than six times throughout Plato's *Symposium* to qualify the symposium as a get-together. For all instances of the Greek term in the *Symposium*, see Hobden 200, note 11.

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THE CHANGING NEEDS OF PRESERVICE TEACHERS IN WRITING

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INTRODUCTION

In education, instruction has long-lasting trickle-down effects. What a preservice teacher is taught affects how they will teach, establishing foundational principles for future teachers and teachers of teachers. The effectiveness of educator preparation programs is crucial because it has the potential to be never-ending in both positive and negative ways as preservice teachers become educators who prepare future teachers. In educator preparation, it is often assumed that content is accurate and pedagogy is effective without a complete review or knowledge of course content, despite program review and accreditation practices. Administration in these programs function on assumptions surrounding the qualifications of faculty or assumed standards aligned to courses without properly supporting faculty to prepare teachers in specific programs or courses or thoroughly evaluating course content and program structure on a regular basis. Student performance reviews may demonstrate surface problems that are addressed with reactive solutions. In this way, educator preparation programs often take a passive stance in program review and reform, rather than actively engaging in rethinking approaches from a systemic standpoint in order to improve programs, courses, and faculty development to produce improved outcomes from a foundational level and onward.

One area in which teachers need preparation the most is in writing skills and the integration of writing in all content areas. The preparation of teachers in writing determines their attitudes and approaches in teaching and integrating writing in their own classrooms. Although writing is a

crucial portion of educator preparation and teacher performance, it is often one of the most overlooked areas in teacher education programs, argued to be developed while never explicitly addressed. The preparation of faculty in writing and effective integration of writing practices in real-world applications and contexts in educator preparation programs are essential for the development of positive attitudes and self-identity and improvement of writing and writing in instruction for preservice teachers.

THE PROBLEM: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The work of Linda Darling-Hammond et al. predicates that “many teacher education programs have been criticized for being overly theoretical, having little connection to practice, offering fragmented and incoherent courses, and lacking a clear, shared conception of teaching among faculty” (391). Laurie Sharp, Rebekah Piper and Roberta D. Raymond further demonstrate the inadequacy of educator preparation programs by saying “a coherent and discrete pedagogy of teacher education is obsolete, so novice teacher educators frequently teach preservice teachers as they were taught, whereas experienced teacher educators are often resistant to change. As a result, teacher preparation practices may become static and fail to consider current practices, research, and theories” (229). Educator preparation programs, while attempting to fill their students with knowledge, fail to review and revise their programs and courses with a holistic view of the student experience, leading to shortcomings in program cohesion, pedagogy preparation and current practices.

The results of multiple studies indicate that preservice teachers are not adequately prepared to integrate writing into their instruction. An exploratory study of writing instruction in teacher preparation programs completed by Joy Myers et al. establishes that “some teacher educators feel

that preservice teachers may be leaving Teacher Preparation Programs with little understanding of and experience with teaching writing” (323). Faculty and clinical supervisors recognize this pitfall, but there are many potential contributing reasons why preservice teachers may not be adequately prepared in writing and to integrate writing into their instruction that need to be addressed by educator preparation programs.

Shortcomings in the preparation of teachers in writing begin at the P-12 level. In reporting an evaluation of P-12 writing preparation by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, Chris Street states that “only half of the students in grades 4, 8, and 12 in the United States are able to write adequate responses to informative, persuasive, or narrative writing tasks” (33). Students have not been prepared in P-12 instruction for college-level writing, lacking the foundation for further development and understanding of writing methods that will allow them to successfully implement writing integration strategies in their own classrooms.

Myers et al. identified one shortcoming of educator preparation programs to be that there are few programs that include stand-alone writing methods instruction, and that time in literacy preparation was more focused on reading instruction and methods rather than writing. Educator preparation programs often become oversaturated with content as legislation and administration changes, which places limitations on programs for what requirements can be added in terms of supplemental coursework in writing pedagogy. Studies reviewed by Denise N. Morgan and Kristine E. Pytash demonstrated that “without a methods course, preservice teachers relied heavily on their experiences as students and were influenced by the institutional pressures of schools” (27).

The National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges posits that "part of the difficulty is that pre- and in-service teacher professional development rarely offers teachers an opportunity to see themselves as writers – to experience the power and satisfaction of writing as a means of learning and self-expression" (23). To further this point, Morgan and Pytash affirm that if teachers "do not identify themselves as writers, they will not value writing in their future classrooms and may provide poor writing instruction or ignore writing altogether" (14).

A more individualized issue is that of the attitudes of faculty serving as instructors in educator preparation programs. According to the study of Sharp, Piper, and Raymond: "many literacy teacher educators did not believe that cultivating literacy leadership among preservice teachers was necessary" (229), establishing a negative disposition toward writing in educator preparation. This mindset diminishes the importance of literacy topics and pedagogy in general and leads to inadequate preparation in writing. It is detrimental to the development of preservice teachers, as it causes the amount of practice and exposure to writing integration in instruction to be minimal.

The attitude of instructors is often the result of their own preparation. Myers et al. come to the conclusion that "just as practicing teachers and preservice teachers typically receive little instruction related to teaching writing, it appears as if the same is true for [teacher educators]" (317). If instructors have not had positive experiences with writing or do not have a positive self-identity toward writing, they are less likely to integrate writing into pedagogy instruction. This perpetuates the notion that writing is not necessary as a key component of educator preparation.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS: WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

The National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges calls for changes in both educator preparation programs and writing instruction for general college or university

coursework, stating that “higher education should address the special roles it has to play in improving writing” (3), and that “colleges and universities have an obligation to improve teacher preparation and make writing more central to their own programs of study” (27). Changes in the curriculum and approach of educator preparation programs have the potential to build a more thorough foundation for writing practices as well as extend the exposure and practice of writing pedagogy for preservice teachers.

Change can begin by addressing the mindset with which educator preparation is approached. The work of Karen Hammerness et al. regarding the needs of preservice teachers states that “given the relatively short period available for preparing teachers and the fact that not everything can be taught, decisions must be made about what content and strategies are most likely to prepare [preservice teachers] to be able to learn from their own practice, as well as the insights of other teachers and researchers” (359). They emphasize the importance of providing preservice teachers with experiences that will teach them how to learn so that they may continue their development far beyond completion of an educator preparation program. Educator preparation programs have the responsibility to provide positive learning experiences, model best practices, and present examples of integrating writing in various content areas through coursework in the program in order to establish principles of learning and continuous improvement for preservice teachers. In the words of Sharp, Piper and Raymond: “Literacy teacher educators must ensure that their preparation practices develop essential behaviors, dispositions, knowledge, and skills among preservice teachers that are expected of effective teachers” (229).

The report of The National Commission on Writing in America’s Schools and Colleges urges the implementation of a required course in “writing theory and practice as a condition of teacher licensing” (32). In contrast to attempting to add yet another course to an already full curricular

workload, educator preparation programs should instead evaluate their full catalog of coursework in order to prioritize a course in writing methods and pedagogy and eliminate responsive, perhaps unnecessary coursework elsewhere, taking a more active rather than responsive stance.

Educator preparation also has the opportunity to approach each course with the mindset of writing integration, with intentional assignments to provide writing experiences to preservice teachers in all methods courses as a demonstration of best practice. This goes beyond assigning standards in a course to evaluating all coursework with consideration to writing. Educator preparation programs should use a holistic program review process to review, assess, and evaluate programs in order to ensure that they are providing the most relevant preparation for preservice teachers as needs change and P-12 education develops and evolves. As this process is completed cyclically, educator preparation programs can implement strategies for continuous improvement of writing integration and pedagogy with a complete view of the curriculum. With this mindset, administrators and faculty in educator preparation programs can build programs with integrated writing tasks that provide preservice teachers with real-world experiences to more adequately prepare them to perform the writing tasks necessary of their field, develop constructive and productive dispositions toward writing in their pedagogical approaches, and effectively integrate applicable writing tasks into their own instruction.

In order to facilitate faculty learning and awareness, educator preparation programs should provide professional development opportunities often. Faculty should be led to understand that preservice teachers completing general education requirements are learning the writing conventions of multiple disciplines at a time and code-switching multiple times a day between those disciplines. With this awareness, faculty need to make conventions and expectations explicit, avoiding making assumptions about what students should know. Considering the

discourse from an outside perspective can provide faculty with insight into the holistic student experience, allowing them to be more conscious of their instructional decisions for preparing preservice teachers.

Much of the success of writing integration into content relates to the attitudes of instructors toward writing. Professional development in the writing process, writing pedagogy, or workshops surrounding writing - such as performance expectations, incorporating content and meaning, and multimodal applications in the classroom - can help instructors to understand the value of writing in methods instruction so that they may teach preservice teachers in turn to be able to see the same value (The National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges 34). Faculty can also be provided with examples of writing integration so that they can be made aware of the possibilities and how those examples might apply in their own instruction in educator preparation courses in order to develop a culture of positive attitudes and beliefs in regard to composition.

A supportive class community can assist preservice teachers in having positive developmental experiences that help them to see themselves as writers. As stated by Morgan and Pytash: "Preservice teachers with more positive writing identities were better able to engage students in meaningful writing experiences by employing pedagogical practices more aligned with a process approach to writing instruction, such as modeling, writing workshops, and authentic writing experiences" (25). Preservice teachers should also gain experience that will enable them to feel empowered to serve as a model for their students. Receiving modeling through writing methods courses has been proven to help preservice teachers "understand how writers make decisions and the motivational and personal values inherent in writing" as well as "develop personal identities

as writers and [provide] them with guidance for future teaching practices” (Morgan and Pytash 21).

Preservice teachers should be taught by example that feedback regarding the content of writing more so than spelling, punctuation, and grammar supports student growth in the writing process. A study completed by Kimberly A. Norman and Brenda H. Spencer found that “teachers discouraged interest in writing because they put more emphasis on the conventions of writing than on the content” (31). This is not to negate the importance of correct grammar and conventions, but rather it is to say that focusing on content in writing and feedback has a greater potential to cultivate a culture of exploration and thinking, while emphasizing that writing is a process in constant development without an end. This allows preservice teachers to know that what they think and contribute to the profession has value as they learn how to communicate within the discourse of education.

It is essential for the development of preservice teachers to gain experience not only in giving feedback to students regarding writing but also in assessing writing. Morgan and Pytash found that preservice teachers with these experiences “began thinking of instructional implications for their students’ writing and were able to integrate knowledge of writing with their knowledge of students’ specific needs” (18). This demonstrates how practice in assessment influences the mindset of preservice teachers to better prepare to be responsive to students in writing instruction and development. This also allows preservice teachers to see the other side of the learning interaction and how their actions and feedback may in turn affect students and future teachers, influencing their approach and attitude.

Leading preservice teachers to self-reflect on their experiences, beliefs, and values toward writing gives them the opportunity to judge how experience shapes future learning and teaching practices, put writing methods into perspective, and identify ways in which they may have a positive impact on student writing and attitudes. The pedagogical decisions that teachers make are influenced by their own formal classroom experiences and writing practices and as they take time to reflect, they can identify methods that are most conducive to positive learning. As educator preparation programs employ these self-reflective approaches, they can support preservice teachers in developing the necessary dispositions to approach writing in manageable and effective ways.

Preservice teachers should practice writing specific to the discipline in a variety of contexts to different audiences. Learning the expectations of writing in educational discourse can help preservice teachers to develop more positive attitudes toward writing integration and to understand how it fits into their own approaches to writing instruction. The National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges suggests that a writing assessment composed of a variety of pieces of writing over time serves to best demonstrate the range of a student's abilities (21). Educator preparation programs can implement this idea in their coursework and program requirements, with a portfolio demonstration including writing samples with real-world applications that builds through program courses and serves as a culminating product for program completion. Through this experience, preservice teachers can better understand how writing is used in the context of their profession and instruction, and be able to self-reflect and revise their own work as they continue to gain experience and develop their knowledge and abilities.

CONCLUSION

The cycle of influence of the preparation of teachers is a perpetual work that is necessary for educator preparation programs to address in an active and systemic way. Educator preparation programs should begin from the ground up to review curriculum and address the attitudes, perceptions and beliefs of faculty in order to create an environment within their programs that is conducive to the development and preparation of preservice teachers in writing. Providing preservice teachers with multiple opportunities to experience real-world applications of writing in a variety of contexts facilitates improved development and cultivates positive attitudes toward writing and is imperative for the improvement of educator preparation in writing and integration of writing in all content areas. Without an increased awareness and conscious effort on the part of administrators and faculty in educator preparation programs, any other attempts to prepare preservice teachers in writing will be inadequate. Prompt initiative is required to make the necessary changes that will effectively provide augmented support for preservice teachers so that they may be more prepared to provide better support for their own students.

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“This too will pass:” Discovering Perfection and Recovering Connection in Cynthia Ozick’s *The Puttermesser Papers*

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Since *The Puttermesser Papers*’ release, scholars and critics have largely failed to treat it as a “novel;” most focus on one or two of the chapters, rather than dealing with it as a whole. This is problematic for many reasons, but most important is that qualms with the novel’s form hinge on the claim that the chapters are not interconnected, that there is no overarching theme, no character journey for Puttermesser. This does a disservice to Cynthia Ozick’s vision and critique of Puttermesser (a Jew facing the modern world) longing for the recovery of some sort of lost, perfect, idyllic connection. She creates a golem child so that she may recover Eden, invents an imaginary Uncle so she might recover some lost connection to her Jewish heritage, and more, and all in the name of recovery and connection. In this essay I will offer a reading of the novel, not just its chapters, arguing its central theme: Puttermesser’s longing for the recovery of, and her “demand” of, perfect connections with the past, people, and places in her life. Further, I hope to show the complicated way that Ozick believes this is representative of, and even potentially dangerous to, Jewish culture.

While most scholarship deals with individual sections, at most two or three of them at a time, or the golem chapter, some scholars have addressed the novel as a whole. Timothy Parrish for example does consider the novel in its entirety, but still he focuses the bulk of his reading on “Puttermesser and Xanthippe,” the golem chapter, claiming that it “is the volume’s key text both because it establishes creation as the work’s central concern” (Parrish 447). This central purpose does not seem to be the same as what I find key to the novel. Parrish’s understanding of the novel centers heavily on the tensions between science and fantasy, or

fiction-making, rather than the push and pull between Puttermesser's demand of connection and her fear of it. Hopefully, this reading will add a new dimension to what has been discussed very little: Puttermesser's demand of connection.

This connection could come, for Puttermesser, in many forms. First, Puttermesser attempts to create people to have relationships with to recover her Jewish heritage and bring Paradise to Earth. Second, Puttermesser tries to copy a historical relationship to find this human connection, a more interpersonal "Paradise." Then, when this fails, the people leave her, and all she has left to connect with is *place*, she realizes that place is a prison. This leaves her nowhere to go but to real Paradise in the final chapter, where Puttermesser tries to do all of this again, yet discovers that in Paradise there is no past, there are no people and there is no place. What she finds in Paradise soon fades, leaving her in utter *disconnection*. It is on this expanding path of trying to recover some long-lost connection in the past, people, then place that Puttermesser journeys, though she learns in the end that there is no way to recover them. Her pressing on, deliberately ignoring these warning signs, is what ties *The Puttermesser Papers* together: not just her attempting to recover these connections—but her *demand*.

Ozick's criticism of Puttermesser's strategy to achieve these connections comes in two parts. Most importantly, Puttermesser's strong demand for a connection is treated by the novel as a noble desire and is presented as a specifically Jewish one. Ozick's issue, it seems, is the *way* in which this demand blinds Puttermesser to the truth. Puttermesser is never satisfied with her connections as they are not the "ideal" connections she seeks. For Ozick, modern Jewish thought's allowance of one to imagine and forge these tenuous connections can be taken advantage of by the imaginer, and that is the first danger: that whatever form this imagined

connection might take, be it to a person, a heritage, or a homeland, there is the pull to make that imagined connection idyllic and thus impossible to become a reality.

In fact, in her essay “All the World Wants the Jews Dead” (published thirty years before *The Puttermesser Papers*) Ozick responds to a journalist who claims Jews are not owed a homeland. The journalist’s argument is ostensibly that by disallowing Jews from returning to what they believe to be their owed homeland, they are “protecting” Jews from the harsh reality of their desecrated homeland by allowing them to *dream*, to envision a more perfect, ideal home. Ozick of course rejects this claim and concludes with what could essentially be the mantra of *The Puttermesser Papers*: “Dreams are perfection; reality is flawed” (Ozick). Ozick’s dry sarcasm though insinuates that of course the Jews should prefer a *real* homeland over an *imagined* one, despite modern thinkers’ more complicated takes on the matter. For even if the reality is flawed and will never reach the perfection of a dream, it is real and on Earth, and that is what counts. This becomes the central conflict for Puttermesser, this push and pull between the notions that “dreams are perfection” and “reality is flawed:” Ozick wants Puttermesser to see that the flaws of reality are what make it worth living in, despite not amounting to perfection.

Ozick makes clear that Puttermesser’s manifestation of this desire for perfect connection as the desire for “Paradise” is sinful. Puttermesser ignores one Jewish notion of the afterlife: that it is secondary to this one, that one must live as best they can on Earth without seeking Paradise. And it is only upon entering Paradise that these themes come together, as Puttermesser encounters all her attempts at forging connections and, like Sisyphus, is doomed to relive them for eternity. Here she finally realizes that their Paradisal counterparts are far less satisfying than their Earthly reality, and she learns, as if as a warning to the modern Jew, that the search for

these “perfect” connections and Paradise itself will lead only to what amounts to *Hell*. One must learn to live *on Earth*, as the perfection of the afterlife is not all that it seems.

On the second page of the novel Ozick clues us in to what will be the center of Puttermessenger’s internal conflict, and what informs her desire for connection. “Puttermessenger had a Jewish face and a modicum of American distrust of it” (4). Though Ozick here sets up a dichotomy of Jewish versus American, that “American” nature will morph as necessary between woman, Christian, secularist, so the key word here is not “American,” but “distrust.” It is clear from the opening pages that Puttermessenger is Jewish but does not feel it. Puttermessenger believes that her problem is that she has not had a mentor to teach her about Judaism, its history, and her heritage. This is Puttermessenger’s first lost connection. What she knows about her heritage, she has only read in books, or imagined.

Asher Biemann argues ostensibly that “all homelands are imagined” (124). Their imagined state, however, does not make them any less important or real, and, it might seem that for Jews they might even be more important than “real” ones. Biemann continues: “Imagined homelands are homelands without fixed points; they are fluctuating places, places in between Imagination affirms the freedom of election. But election . . . also needs the freedom of imagination” (124-125). These homelands are intangible yet flexible; they are then able to be molded by the imaginer. By imagining said homeland, Biemann argues, one takes control yet again of their heritage and their lives. For Biemann, Jewish thought allows for this reclamation of agency through imagination, and while this perspective seems to be what Ozick is pushing back against, she lets Puttermessenger give it a try.

Before Puttermessenger can attempt to form a connection with a “real” person, which is her first goal in the novel, she practices, and this practice begins with imagination: she must first

create people to have relationships with. Puttermessenger's first positive and substantial relationship is with her Uncle Zindel in chapter one: she goes to him for advice, comfort, and knowledge. The scene in which Puttermessenger visits him is touching; she learns from him more about Hebrew and in the larger sense, her culture, which she feels she is lacking a connection to. Ozick then sets up a narrative dissonance; she has a second narrator interrupt the "biographer" of Puttermessenger's tale; this interruption is the only time this is done, perhaps insinuating that this is the only instance in which the biographer "invents." As the "biographer" of Puttermessenger's story puts it: "[she] must claim an ancestor. She demands connection—surely a Jew must own a past" (17). But the narrator retorts: "though it is true that biographies are invented, not recorded, here you invent too much . . . Uncle Zindel lies under the earth of Staten Island. Puttermessenger has never had a conversation with him; he died four years before her birth. He is all legend" (16). Puttermessenger (and her biographer) is imagining a heritage; one to recover to as if it were her long lost home, an ideal past for her to have lived.

Puttermessenger's search for connection is (initially) all about the past; but living in the past comes at a cost. Rather than looking to other people who are alive, she looks to legend; she looks inward and backward to try and recover her Jewish heritage, because "she demands connection." But what the biographer does not express is that Puttermessenger is fearful of *human* connection, at least at first; this is made clear when Rappaport, her lover, arrives before a flight. Puttermessenger says that she would rather read Plato than be with him; while Puttermessenger might believe this to be true, she ultimately only pushes Rappaport away because she feels that "he would have deserted her anyway" (25). She does not wish to pursue the relationship because she is fearful that it will end; this contradiction in her thinking is a deeply human problem, as of course pushing away those that attempt to get close to you because you fear they will leave will ensure

you never have these relationships to begin with. This re-contextualizes her first imagined relationship with her uncle in an interesting way: she imagines this relationship with a *dead* relative as a means of keeping it from ending, so that she may have complete control. A relationship with someone who is already dead (which is a theme Ozick returns to in “Puttermesser Paired”) cannot “end” because it never really begins. Puttermesser sees this as ideal; but the narrator does not allow her to maintain it, serving perhaps as a warning for what is to come. Puttermesser is not allowed by Ozick, at least in this instance, to live in the past, or her dreams. She must return to the numerous flaws of reality, which should be (but is not yet for Puttermesser) preferable.

Because Puttermesser cannot maintain an imagined relationship that exists in the past and she cannot successfully participate in this Jewish act of imagining a heritage, naturally her next step would be to *create* a person to have this relationship with in the *present*. The following two chapters deal with Puttermesser’s real-world relationships, and in tandem illuminate her greatest fault. To begin, she creates a golem, a solidified representation of both her need for another person and her need to connect to her Jewishness. Importantly, this creation could not come about without her imagined time with Uncle Zindel. Joseph Lowin explains that her uncle “Zindel teaches his niece not only Hebrew grammar but also, himself an initiate into Jewish mysticism, the power of the combinations of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet” (Lowin 124). Without these imagined Hebrew lessons, as Lowin explains, Puttermesser would not have been able to utilize the power of the language to create the golem. This means that Puttermesser’s creation of the golem brings her struggle to understand her Jewish heritage from the imagination into the real.

This would in some sense lend credence to Biemann's argument that imagination can be a powerful rearticulation of what one believed to be a lost connection. But the metaphysical relationship is not enough for Puttermesser. In the most-discussed second chapter of the novel Puttermesser creates a golem and once she does, she immediately turns to books to see if this is even possible and discovers that Jewish rabbis have created life out of dirt in the past. She initially has her golem daughter, who she is calling Leah as she "always imagined a daughter named Leah" (42) doing laundry, cooking, and cleaning, until the golem insists that she move on to better things—she could help Puttermesser become the mayor of New York. Her daughter, self-named Xanthippe instead, explicitly notes in her plan, which she claims is made up of Puttermesser's own ideals, that her run as mayor will make New York City a "Paradise."

As I have stated, much of the scholarship deals with this chapter alone, as it is one of the most formative chapters for Puttermesser. Miriam Sivan in fact devotes an entire chapter in her book on Ozick to the golem. She argues that the golem acts as a double to Puttermesser, and does not merely represent her desires, but becomes them, while Puttermesser resists. Sivan writes: "[Puttermesser] refuses to assume responsibility for the messianic impulse [which] is, she insists, Xanthippe's. Eventually she sheds this reluctance to assume the mantle of authority . . . Xanthippe, as her double, allows Puttermesser to expand her sphere of influence to include the larger civil and even larger spiritual reality" (Sivan 48). But Xanthippe is not simply Puttermer's Paradisal desires, or her "messianic impulse." Xanthippe serves as a physical manifestation of Puttermesser's imagined (and therefore unreal) heritage, and further, as they work together to create this utopic Paradise out of New York City, a homeland.

Puttermesser consistently ignores Xanthippe's revelations of the truth, and when Xanthippe tells Puttermesser that she was only doing what Puttermesser wanted, Puttermesser

responds with a mantra. Xanthippe, as she is about to be turned to dust, shifts the blame to Puttermesser, shouting: “You wanted Paradise!” Puttermesser responds: “Too much Paradise is greed. Eden disintegrates from too much Eden” (99). Puttermesser here, rather than learn what Xanthippe has tried to teach her, imparts the lesson that she herself is meant to learn to *Xanthippe*, a stand-in for herself, and she deflects, failing to take responsibility for her desire for Paradise, or more specifically, for “too much” Paradise. Then, Puttermesser returns Xanthippe to dust, and if Xanthippe *is* Puttermesser, as Sivan argues, then it follows that Puttermesser’s “undoing” is literally her own. So rather than absorb this lesson, Puttermesser destroys the part of her that has learned it. Just as Rappaport erases the markings from Xanthippe’s head, the language of her Uncle Zindel, of the past, Puttermesser erases the part of her that learns that the permanence of Paradise is its downfall.

Following this, Puttermesser begins dating Rupert Rabeeno, a “copyist,” who recreates famous paintings but can never create art from nothing. Puttermesser, to make this relationship last, decides to in some ways model it after the relationships of George Eliot, while Rabeeno the copyist (ironically) fights back. In one instance, Rabeeno reads from one of Eliot’s letters to Puttermesser: “Our unspeakable joy in each other has no other alloy than the sense that it must one day end in parting” (140). While Eliot acknowledges a relationship coming to an end as essential to its beauty, Puttermesser dislikes the parts of reliving Eliot’s relationships in which they come to an end. It was “the living Lewes she cared for,” not the Lewes that was dead (141). If Puttermesser had her way, the relationships she is reliving here would last forever; she desires complacency. She skips the ending of the relationships to make immortal these dead men.

Yet Puttermesser appears to remember that this is a mistaken mindset: when scolding Rabeeno about Eliot’s relationships to Lewes and Cross, her second lover, Puttermesser breaks

her own spell (and tells herself the secret of the afterlife, again, early): “You can’t lean on a dead man” (142). Puttermesser tells herself she cannot lean on dead men—the truth that she will come to learn—yet she *only* leans on dead men. She seeks ideals, she seeks Paradise at every turn, but when she learns that this is an impossibility (first from Xanthippe and then from Rabeeno), she always forgets the lesson; that is what makes Puttermesser unique, frustrating, and exceptional. She tries, nobly, to connect to someone, something, whether it be explicitly her Jewish heritage or whether using Jewish symbols to forge these connections, but once finding them she goes too far, she idolizes them: and Ozick punishes her.

Puttermesser’s next attempt to find connection is unique; she continues to fail to make lasting relationships, something she sees as integral to Paradise, and after all these repeated failures, after having no person left to turn to, she turns to *place*. Perhaps her apartment can be her connection, her Paradise. She holes up in her apartment, she reads the books that line her walls, and even eventually takes in a long-lost family member, Lidia, a superstitious Soviet Jew who represents a very different lifestyle and challenges Puttermesser. But ultimately, of course, her place cannot be her solace, her connection, as she comes to realize that “place” is one of her greatest fears.

Her fear of place is revealed to her rather explicitly in a nightmare in the penultimate chapter. Lidia helps break down the nightmare, and her conclusion is rather striking in that it differs wildly from what Puttermesser gleans herself. The nightmare is described as such: “Waves and waves of barbed wire were unrolling before her. Her apartment was ringed round with barbed wire: it crisscrossed the windows . . . Thirstily heading for a drink of water, Puttermesser leaped over the wire and caught her shin on one of the twisted barbs. Blood was spilling down her ankle, flowing between her naked toes . . . (201). Puttermesser relays this

dream to Lidia, who, looking in her “nonsensical” dream book, comes to find that people bleeding from their feet means they “make holy future” and that this dream indicates that Puttermesser is a saint (204). There is an inherent issue with this for Puttermesser: she longs for a reconnection with her Jewish heritage, and yet she is told by her cousin that her dream insinuates that she will become a Christian symbol. So Puttermesser ignores this claim altogether, instead focusing on the barbed wire, and not the blood that pours because of it. Puttermesser examines the cause and ignores the effect; so rather than try to extrapolate anything from “make holy future” she instead asks if there is an entry in the dream book for “prison,” perhaps recognizing the barbed wire as a symbol of the Holocaust. By ignoring her cousin and exploring the Christian elements of the dream, she tries to invent a more Jewish interpretation. While Puttermesser reflects on the mystery, Lidia naively notes that the dream took place in her *home*, not a prison. But for Puttermesser, home is a prison—for it, like her relationships, cannot last. No past, people, or place on Earth can satisfy, so naturally, Puttermesser must leave Earth.

Jerry Walls explains that a widely prevailing notion of Heaven is “the perfect home,” (340) in which you would achieve “perfect happiness” (which, according to Thomas Aquinas, means happiness that can never fade) forever (333). This notion of Heaven, or Paradise, is, while a long-standing one, a notion that has fallen out of favor upon the death of David Hume, which Walls claims ushered in the era of postmodernity. For Walls, Hume’s objections to a “future state,” or life after death in Paradise, are incorrect in many religious worldviews but influential in their modern iterations and has led many thinkers and writers to dissect the perfectness of Heaven. The final chapter of *The Puttermesser Papers* does just that, and in deconstructing the idea that Heaven could be perfect as an ideal home that reflects a Platonic form of your past,

Ozick is criticizing Puttermessenger's recurring emphasis on Paradise, and in the larger sense, her acceptance of a Christianized view of Paradise.

Geddes MacGregor writes that Judaism “does not speak with a single voice on the subject” of the afterlife (42). The tricky thing about tackling the afterlife in a novel about a Jewish woman's life is that the writer must essentially choose how that afterlife will look. Ozick then creates an afterlife that both resembles Christian elements of the afterlife, which will challenge Puttermessenger to face the lesson she has been ignoring through all of her adventures: that Paradise is *not* the goal, as it does not actually exist. Everything Puttermessenger does in some ways pushes her towards Paradise, which is one issue Ozick takes with Puttermessenger's actions; but the larger issue, the target of Ozick's satire, is her desire and demand for these connections taking over her life on Earth. Simcha Paull Raphael states that modern Jewish thinking “[values] life, here and now, over and above a future death and eternal life” (11). This is what Puttermessenger never learns while alive. She accepts a more Christian view of the afterlife and models her pursuits after it; Puttermessenger has “made” some sort of “holy future” in that she has grasped on to a thought that is inherently un-Jewish: a final renouncing of her Jewish heritage.

To get her to Paradise, Ozick opens the final chapter of with a dark turn of events. Puttermessenger is graphically murdered and raped and is transitioned instantly into Paradise, stripped from everything she experienced on Earth. She explores Paradise: “It was plain, then . . . that Paradise was the place—though it was not exactly a *place*—where she could walk freely inside her imagination, and call up anything she desired” (222). Here, Puttermessenger has no place to fear, and she can even live in her imagination, something the narrator would not allow her to do with her Uncle Zindel. “But anything she might call up would inevitably be from the past. Yet if, as she now somehow knew, there was, in fact, no past or future in Paradise—and only a

puzzling present . . . then what was it she was actually calling up?” (222). Puttermesser is *unable* to live in the past still, for she realizes that it is not the reality of the past. Puttermesser discovers that she has one final chance to do what she had always *tried* to do: she is calling up “not the record of her life as she had lived it, but as she had failed to live it” (222-223).

Once given this opportunity, Puttermesser returns to a relationship that ended during her life. She marries a man whom she fell in love with and was rejected by on Earth; this relationship acts as a “what if” for Puttermesser. They have a child together and for a while Puttermesser lives in a fantasy, a true “perfect happiness.” She is given her happy ending, and all is well . . . until it is not. As Ozick writes, on Puttermesser’s new understanding about her Paradise: “There is no flaw in Paradise . . . but it has its Secret . . . It is integral to, coextensive with, the very grain of Eden, which is timelessness. Timelessness does not promise the permanence of any experience. Where there is no time, there is no endurance. Without the measure of clocks, what is lastingness?” (234). Puttermesser discovers that the fleeting nature of these relationships on Earth, even the imagined ones, to Zindel, Xanthippe, Rappaport, Rabeeno, Lidia, and even with her apartment, her home, was what made them special. On Earth she could be whatever she wanted. In Paradise, not only can she no longer be with people or find a home, but she can no longer “be a Jew”—because her curse is that once this lesson is learned she will never have a person, she will never have a place, and she no longer owns a past: and “surely a Jew must own a past.”

Learning her lesson is the glue that binds the novel together, and the warning that Ozick so desperately wishes to put forth. I believe it would do scholars well to rethink the ways that some of these chapters connect and look to Puttermesser’s demand and ceaseless attempts to recover connection as the key theme. If we give this novel a second look, we can finally see the

real weight to what Puttermesser finally learns, all too late, that “Paradise is a dream bearing the inscription on Solomon’s seal: *this too will pass*” (Ozick 234). Ozick seeks to reaffirm a Jewish teaching that this life is the one we ought to live, and if scholars fail to acknowledge that lesson, we risk missing the Jewishness at the heart of the text.

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Aspects of Humans and the Ecosphere in the Old English *Maxims II*

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The Old English poems *Maxims I* and *Maxims II*, each consisting of a series of strung-together maxims, would appear on few people's "top ten" lists of medieval poetic compositions. As Tom Hill notes, "The question which often occurs . . . is how these apparently self-evident truisms can be 'read' as anything other than manifest evidence of an apparent Anglo-Saxon taste for banalities" (170). Indeed, much commentary on them (and especially on *Maxims II*) expresses distaste for their apparent lack of structure or purpose, mines them for insight into a universal medieval English zeitgeist, or both. Odd as the poems initially seem, I will argue, focusing primarily on *Maxims II*, that our response stems from two main features of our own culture: first, Present-Day English's trouble conveying verbal aspect and second, our obligatory binary between human and nonhuman areas of inquiry. If we adjust our mindset for these, the poems shed light on how the early medieval English saw themselves in the world, similar to other Old English works of knowledge production.

I should first explain the term "maxim." Maxims are often discussed in connection with proverbs, as both are understood to convey some universal truth, but the two kinds of statements are not identical. Proverbs are often metaphorical, and the form of their verbs can vary. They can be conditional (if you lie down with dogs, you get up with fleas) or imperative (don't throw the baby out with the bathwater) and appear in the future tense (a hungry dog will eat a dirty pudding) as well as the present (a stitch in time saves nine). The main purpose of a proverb is usually to encourage or discourage certain behaviors. In "lie down with dogs," snuggling with one's pup and thereby encountering parasitic insects isn't really what is being warned against—associating with unsavory people and acquiring an ill reputation is. In proverbs, animals are

metaphors for humans and human interactions. Observing that “a hungry dog will eat a dirty pudding” makes little sense as a statement of canine behavior—quite well-fed dogs will eat far worse—but instead comments on human responses to scarce resources. Likewise, “a stitch in time saves nine” instructs its audience about the importance of prompt action more than it does the actual rupturing patterns of woven cloth under stress—“nine” at the end is chosen for its near-rhyme with “time” and not because 1:9 is an observed ratio in material science.

Maxims, on the other hand, are not metaphoric, imperative, or conditional. While they may implicitly encourage certain attitudes, they do not expressly attempt to guide behavior. A statement such as “tomorrow is another day” shades more towards a maxim than a proverb—while it encourages a desire to keep working towards one’s goals, it also makes a true statement of light / dark patterns as they map onto human cultural divisions of time. Contemporary maxims such as “haters gonna hate” may foster resignation to the bad behavior of our fellow humans, but their basic function is to observe and (to some extent) categorize such anti-social habits.

Maxims are widespread in Old English literature, including of course *Maxims I* and *II*. Old English maxims are characterized by a modal verb of *sceal* [shall] or a main verb of *byð* [is]: “Cyning sceal rice healdan” [A king shall hold (i.e. rule) a kingdom]; “Wind byð on lyfte swiftest” [Wind is fastest in the air] (*Maxims II* 1a, 3b).¹ *Sceal* is often translated “must,” but the sense is not actually imperative. *Byð* seems more straightforward but *is* also misses a quality I believe is present in the original. P.B. Taylor tries to argue that the two are different, that *bið* “suggest[s] universality” and *sceal* “futurity, desire, and uncertainty” (388-89). However, most of the *sceal* statements in *Maxims II* seem pretty certain—for instance, “Brim sceal sealte weallan” [the sea shall surge with salt] (45b). What I think has been missed is that *sceal* and *byð* here are

¹ All quotations are from Robert Bjork’s edition; translations are my own.

not conveying tense but verbal aspect. Aspect (to simplify) indicates how long or how often an event occurs, whether it is habitual or transient—a quality for which formal Present-Day English verbs have no markers. The statement “After class, he practiced piano” conveys when the action occurred—before the current time—but not whether or not it is continual or expected. Does he always practice after class, or did he do so just once? Did he practice after class regularly last semester, but this semester that isn’t the case? Without considerable context or the addition of adverbs or other specifiers, we don’t know. In fact, the complex temporal and durational understanding of verbs are an imperfectly understood areas in linguistics:

A remarkable point about tense and aspect is that, although they belong to what we may regard as some of the most basic parts of language, their interpretation . . . is not obvious, even to a first approximation. Native speakers, unreflectively, get things right; but what they are getting right is a matter for research.

(Higginbotham 126)

Byð and *sceal*, I argue, are so hard to translate in maxims because they express habitual aspect, which makes present and future non-critical distinctions—and, as there are no native speakers of Old English, it is unsurprising that we struggle with their interpretation in maxims.² Stanley Greenfield and Daniel Calder come close to this idea discussing *sceal*, noting that in maxims it can denote “what is characteristic, customary or inherent,” although they do not discuss *byð*, leaving it to be understood as a transparent present-tense to-be verb *is* (261). I argue that both *sceal* and *byð* show habitual aspect. “Wind is fastest in the air”—not just right now but in the future, generically, by its nature. “A king shall rule a kingdom”—a habitual feature of the political scene. To convey the habitual aspect of Old English maxims, the best translation I can

² On the problems of distinguishing habitual and generic aspect, see Greg Carlson 830-831. I will use the terms interchangeably in this paper.

think of employs a grammatical structure which became popular following Taylor Swift's song "Shake It Off" (released in 2014) with its chorus of "haters gonna hate / players gonna play." In informal speech, we can now indicate habitual aspect with a plural subject plus the modal "gonna" "crafters gonna craft," "moms gonna mom" and so on. The meme's popularity and durability perhaps sprang in part from an unconscious recognition that such aspective use filled a semantic gap in "standard" Present-Day English.³ In this regard, "kings gonna rule kingdoms," would be a more accurate translation of the Old English maxim, even though the informality of this statement badly mismatches the tone of the original. Understanding the aspective sense of many maxims helps us make sense of their point. The poem doesn't tell us that "The sea shall surge with salt" to indicate futurity, but to note a habitual (even defining) quality of oceans.

The poems' "lack of a discernible structural order" (to quote Taylor) has also puzzled readers: each is a long list of statements intermixing observations about human cultural norms, animals, plants, seasons, and so on—which most readers find disorienting (387). As I mentioned, much previous study of the Old English maxims has considered the two poems together as if they were a unitary composition conveying some early medieval *zeitgeist* and have simply selected maxims on a single topic—at times with insightful results (Deskis, Lees and Overing). However, the poems appear in different manuscripts with different contexts. Brian O'Camb argues that *Maxims I*, which appears in the Exeter Book manuscript of Old English Poetry, is actually three different poems, the last of which "repeatedly invokes animals to critique antisocial behavior in human society" ("George Hickes" 21). O'Camb, emphasizing the separate nature of *Maxims I* and *II* as well as the three parts of *Maxims I*, points out that the Exeter Book

³ In contrast, African-American English has a robust and nuanced aspect system, briefly described in Lerer 225-26, as do some other dialects.

contains other poems from the physiologus tradition which discuss animals in terms of the spiritual lessons humans can learn from them. *Maxims I* fits its context.

Extending O’Camb’s argument, I argue that *Maxims II*, which appears in London, British Library Cotton MS Tiberius B.i between an Old English metrical calendar and a version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, also fits its context (O’Camb, “Georges Hickes 15). *Maxim II*’s statements about living and inorganic phenomena offer encyclopedic statements about life on earth. Lines 24b-35a give the flavor of the whole:

	Mæst sceal on ceole
Segel-gyrd seomian.	Sweord sceal on bearme,
Drihtlic isern.	Draca sceal on hlæwe,
Frod, frætwwum wlanc.	Fisc sceal on wætere
Cynren cennan.	Cyning sceal on healle
Beagas dælan.	Bera sceal on hæðe,
Eald and egesful.	Ea of dune sceal
Flod-græg feran.	Fyrd sceal ætsomne,
Tir-fæsta getrum.	Treow sceal on eorle,
Wisdom on were.	Wudu sceal on foldan
Blædum blowan.	Beorh sceal on eorþan
Grene standan.	

A mast, a sail yard, shall on a ship be supported. A sword, lordly iron, shall [be] on the bosom. A dragon shall [be] in a mound, wise, rejoicing in treasure. A fish shall in the water give birth to its kind. A king shall in the hall distribute rings. A bear shall [be] on the heath, old and fearsome. A river, water-grey, from the hill

shall travel. An army, a company of glorious men, shall assemble. Good faith shall [be] in an earl, wisdom in a human. The woods shall on the soil grow with fruit. A mound shall on the earth stand green.

This awkward translation tries to highlight a recurring feature of most of these statements—they not only state a function or key property of each clause’s subject, but also its location. In the original, this is much more apparent, as each line except 30 and 31 end with an *on-* phrase: *on ceole, on bearme, on wætere, on healle, on hæðe* and so on. The thrust of these lines is to make observations not only about customary behaviors but habitats, we might say—not just what, but where—and the repetitive sentence structure helps unify the passage.

Most modern readers would find little else that does so, as *Maxims II* has often frustrated scholars with its conjoined statements on various areas of inquiry. The passage above begins with human cultural and technological artifacts (ships and weapons); leaps to zoology (dragons and fish); zooms to human political behaviors (ring-giving); returns to zoology (bears); considers geology (rivers); comments on human military structures and moral traits; and ends with botany and / or geography (forests and hills). What are we to make of this dizzying array of subject matters? How can we understand a poem that jumps from fish to kings?

Let me turn the question on its head, though—why *not* conceptualize and discuss these things together? What prevents us (once we’re no longer toddlers) from comfortably contemplating swords, bears, rivers, and kings in rapid succession? When framed that way, the main objection that comes to mind is the admixture not of different branches of science, but the failure to clearly separate the human from the non-human. Our culture insists on strong distinctions between what is “us” and what is “the environment”—a word that itself reflects our understanding of humans as central and other aspects of life on earth as existing only in a

conceptual and physical space around and separate from ourselves. We separate discussions of humans and discussions of the ecosphere—a term I will use in preference to “the environment”—mentally, bureaucratically, and physically. Even in the smallest schools art and botany are not in the same department. When pressing ecological issues force us to recognize the overlap between humans and other species, discussions often follow a pattern of “we need to halt [say] the pollution of our wetlands because these chemicals can seep into our drinking supply, and they can also disrupt the life cycle of [some species]. We still talk about the consequences to humans and then to other life forms and systems. Contaminated drinking water in human communities and decreased reproduction of some bird or mammal are, to us, just not the same.

This mode of thinking was not necessarily shared by the culture of early medieval England. In that culture, to go from fish to kings did make sense. Heide Estes has argued that some OE riddles “show the instability of the categories of human and animal” and even those of living and non-living; recognizing a similar mindset in *Maxims II* extends this instability to texts which participate more directly in early medieval knowledge production (121; 147). Riddles are written to conceal their subject while revealing it; *Maxims II* straightforwardly enumerates habitual qualities of various parts of the ecosphere. In the *Maxims II* passage, the commonality of locating information clearly ties the passage together. Whether that is a bear’s preferred habitat away from human populations or the localizing of faith and wisdom in a human⁴ makes much less difference to the poem’s original audience than it does to us. The lack of an obligatory binary between human and animal also informs lines 18b-19a, “Wulf sceal on bearowe, / Earm anhaga” [A wolf, wretched solitary dweller, shall [be] in the forest]. The adjective *earm* [wretched] makes a value judgement, one that is not repeated in the observations about bears or

⁴ See Leslie Lockett, especially chapter 2, for the somatic model of human emotion and cognition.

has changed *weax* to *wea*.⁵ Going from a meditation on human aging to a statement about an insect by-product has just seemed wrong. This feeling, though, arises from *our* sense of what subjects are fittingly juxtaposed. For the culture of early medieval England, there need not have been a conflict between the habitual tendency of geriatric humans with much experience to know things; the habitual tendency of wax to be sticky, and the habitual tendency of clouds to move. The passage can be read perfectly well as it stands.

Let me emphasize that this essay is *not* arguing that the Germanic inhabitants of pre-Conquest England lived in some sort of utopian harmony with nature, or that they never regarded humans as distinct from other animals. As noted earlier, O’Camb argues that the last section of *Maxims I* presents animals in a much more symbolic way, reflecting back to humans their own concerns and values. What it does argue is that a strict human / non-human binary was not obligatory in early medieval culture and its literature, as it generally is in the Anglo-American world of the 21st century. What’s more, if we approach *Maxims II* with that in mind, we better see some of the text’s ideological work. If we take the statements about animals, plants, seasons, climate, geology, and, yes, wax as observations in their own right rather than try to force them to symbolically comment on human affairs, then the matter-of-fact catalogue of inherent and fixed qualities of the ecosphere implies that the human culture described is also “natural” and inevitable. I can think of a modern analogue that might help elucidate this, one where in certain situations, a question about expected human actions might provoke a rhetorical question that implies an underlying zoological maxim. For example: Q “Do you think the deans will read their PowerPoint slides to us again this meeting?” A. “Does a bear shit in the woods?” Although the vulgarity makes this somewhat tongue-in-cheek and usually restricts the first topic to something

⁵ In addition to Robert Bjork’s edition which I have quoted above, see Roy Liuzza 53 and S.A. J. Bradley 513.

negative, the two statements could be grammatically adjusted to: Deans shall in meetings read PowerPoint slides; a bear shall in the woods defecate. The latter presents the former as inevitable. If we can imagine this without the jocularity we evoke with this discourse, we approach some of the force of *Maxims II*. Human culture and non-human behaviors are equally part of the ecosphere, the poem implies, and—to use another of our modern maxims—it is what it is. The poem normalizes the ideologies governing gender, political roles, the legal system, morality, and warfare in its presentation of these ideologies in a continuum with observations about the ecosphere.

Ultimately, the two *Maxims* poems display a conceptual range for encountering the non-human: observational, somewhat mediated by cultural and social beliefs and systems, or entirely symbolic. In practice, we have some of the same opportunities now. I might, on a November day, observe wild turkeys foraging near the road as I drive to the store. At the store, I could purchase a frozen turkey, my interaction with which is mediated by consumer capitalism and cultural and personal associations with holiday dinners. Back at home putting my groceries in the fridge, my son might tease me, causing me to say, “Look here, you turkey!” For us, the first type of interaction, observation and study, is generally viewed to be discrete from any human realm, which is why *Maxims II* has been regarded as illogical. Once we move past the binary, however, and understand the habitual aspect which the statements communicate, the poem is fascinating, rich, and gives us much to consider.

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Wish-Fulfillment: Growing Agency in Edith Nesbit's *Five Children and It*

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Edith Nesbit's 1902 story of five siblings and the wonderful Psammead—a grumpy, genie-like creature buried for millennia—answers a familiar writing prompt: what would happen if all your wishes came true? The children, dazzled with possibilities, make a multitude of wishes, but they soon discover that things never turn out the way they expect. Limited to a single request of the Psammead a day, with the magical changes lasting only until sunset, the siblings must repeatedly fix catastrophes of their own creation. All ends happily, however, as they eventually let the Psammead burrow back into the ground.

English author Nesbit was a popular writer for children, and her Psammead trilogy has never gone out of print. Her books, including *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1899), *The Railway Children* (1906), and *The Enchanted Castle* (1907), are in many ways typical of the concurrent boom in children's writing. Contemporary critics, beginning with Roger Lancelyn Green in 1965, term this boom the Golden Age of children's literature, as the period of the mid-nineteenth through early twentieth century turned away from the didacticism of earlier children's lit and toward a celebration of the child's subjective experience and entertainment. Notable texts include Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883), Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911), and J. M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* (1911). Golden Age narratives feature many of the qualities we see in juvenile lit today: the stories are focalized through young characters' eyes, sometimes through first-person narration; there is no explicit moral or lesson to be learned; the stories are set in child-centric settings, including schools, gardens, and faraway, adventurous lands; there are often, though not always, elements of fantasy; and the relationship with adults is adversarial.

What is notable about the Golden Age is its investment in the figure of the child; during these eighty or so years, in both discourse and literature for all ages, the child was a hugely popular yet overdetermined subject, one whose subjecthood was a vexed site of debate. Writers explored the question of who got to be children, and, importantly, by what means that child ceased to be—in other words, became an adult. Joining her Golden Age peers, Nesbit crafted young characters whose experiences and thus identity formation were to be taken seriously. More specifically, I argue that *Five Children and It* uses wish-fulfillment in order to explore a form of child development grounded in repetition, particularly repetitive failures, where youthful adventures create capable adult subjects.

Writing at the fin de siècle, Nesbit drew on long-nineteenth-century theories of the nature of childhood. The Romantics had written of the child of innocence, kept away from adult influence and locked in a state of purity. This angelic youth remained a popular paradigm of childhood through the Victorian and Edwardian eras, exemplified by such characters as Jo in Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* (1852–53). But such innocence was often so extreme as to seem like brainless simplicity, a developmental dead end: critic Alan Richardson has noted that the Romantic child was so “naturally resistant to the adult attempts to form (or deform) [him]” that he was killed off rather than corrupted (71). The Romantic paradigm helped erect a barrier between adulthood and childhood: their alterity meant children should be cherished but also sequestered literally and figuratively in a space and literature of their own.

At the same time, Britons held onto the older, Enlightenment paradigm that viewed the child as a rational miniature adult who understands such grown-up fare as the theater or political commentary. William Makepeace Thackeray, for instance, in his 1854 fantasy *The Rose and the Ring*, showcases sharply literate children who enjoy satire, slang, and pop culture references. Not

separate from adult society at all, this version of youth was quite comfortable as a pint-sized adult (though that could be from poverty and child labor as much as from education and socializing). In fact, a particularly Victorian fear was of the overly precocious child, who was not just aware of the mores and subjects of adult society but actively invested in them—twens calling Shakespeare “over-rated” in a *Punch* cartoon, or the pregnant eleven-year-old in Frederick Engel’s *The Condition of the Working-Class in England* (1845) (qtd. in Gubar 18). In their knowingness, these children muddied the supposed barrier between child and adult, ignoring innocence in favor of experience. In fiction, they could meet disaster as easily as their rustically innocent peers: neither Miles, in *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), nor Little Father Time, in *Jude the Obscure* (1894–95), make it out of their stories alive.

In the dispute to define proper childhood, Victorian and Edwardian writers debated, essentially, how capable the child should be. The Romantic child was so appealing primarily because it could not do much for itself; the child’s very innocence prefigured its victimization. Conversely, the child-as-miniature-adult could be too competent, able to navigate experiences, emotions, and spaces that Britons felt should be adults’ domain. This debate led Victorians to sometimes contradictory remarks. John Ruskin, writing an 1868 introduction to a collection of Grimms’ fairy tales, argued that a child “should not be capable of wrong,” and instead should be “so trained” to be “obedient . . . strong . . . [and] self-commanding,” all at once (232–233). With the language of training and “should,” Ruskin suggests that capability is normative, in that there is a proper degree and kind of competence the ideal child possesses, and that adults are obligated to create and enforce it in their young charges. But Ruskin, even in a single sentence, cannot coherently combine the two paradigms of childhood: somehow, the ideal child is so innocent as to be incapable of wrong, and yet, at the same time, must be trained in their conduct.

Ruskin's contradictory remarks illustrate the slippery task of attempting to define what childhood should be by what it can and cannot, should and should not, do. Indeed, the question of capability is not merely a nineteenth-century phenomenon but has been, and still is, at the heart of children's literature, and is captured by today's critics with the term "agency." Agency, as I define it, is the capacity for intentional movement through the world. "Movement" may certainly be physical, but it can also be intangible, internal work: one can just as easily "move" by making decisions, imagining alternative lives, challenging conventions, or expressing preference. Similarly, "the world" can expand or contract depending on the situation, encompassing such spaces as physical location, institution, culture, or ideology.

Childhood has typically been defined as a realm of little agency, since the child is born into a world of adult-created "discourse and specific social conditions" that materially and ideologically constrain their identity production (Christensen 11). Adults possess greater agency than the child does: as parents, authors, political leaders, educators, and law enforcement, grown-ups more easily move intentionally through the world because so much of the world is built and maintained by grown-ups.

Critics today have persuasively shown that a major characteristic of the Golden Age is the way its authors engaged with the question of children's agency in an adult-centric society. While their contemporaries worried about what one sneering columnist called a "Babyolatry" that made pets and idols of cosseted children, and activists like Dickens advocated for child labor reform laws based on children's abused preciousness, children's authors like Carroll, Barrie, and Dinah Craik proposed that children could productively balance innocence and experience. Critic Merah Gubar has compellingly written that Golden Age stories "frequently suggest that young people have enough resourcefulness or recalcitrance to deal with (and even profit from) worldly

influences” (6). Meanwhile, Victoria Ford Smith has called Victorian children “intergenerational collaborators” who cocreated their literature with adults (17), and Robin Bernstein notes that children of the nineteenth century could adroitly adapt the “scripts,” or expectations of childhood, that adults expect children to follow (28). These scholars argue that, trapped neither by innocence or experience but instead moderately capable, child readers and plucky protagonists like Alice, Sara Crewe, and Jim Hawkins possess agency, inscribed as it may be.

Let us return to *Five Children and It*. At first reading, it seems that this story does not quite reach the gilded heights of the Golden Age literature that features agential protagonists. Faced suddenly with nearly unlimited power, siblings Cyril, Anthea, Robert, Jane, and baby Lamb nevertheless find themselves bullied, tricked, kidnapped, and attacked by real and conjured-up adults. Their wishes lead them consistently into mayhem; their first wish, “to be as beautiful as the day,” makes the kids unrecognizable to the servants, who refuse them food and drink (17). Wishing for wings, the siblings fly onto the roof of the church, only to get stuck there when their wings disappear at sunset. And though living in a castle sounds like a fairy tale dream, the children find their wished-for fortress besieged by armed knights. Only through a pact with the Psammead—who agrees to grant multiple wishes at once, rather than sticking to its rule of one a day—do the children avert a final disaster.

The five children live very much in a world where adults possess more agency than kids, and even their newly granted magical abilities cannot raise them to equal footing with grown-ups. For critics, the wishes are thus “careless” (Gubar 140); the children make “immature child-wishes” (Knoepfmacher 302) that “illustrate their immature view of the world” (Anderson 314). The Psammead itself crossly calls the wishes “silly” (241). Such a perspective assumes that the recurring failures of the wishes’ outcomes demonstrate the children’s youthful incapability: the

children gain power, lose it, and recover it only to lose it yet again in a long series of mishaps. The highly episodic composition of the plot seems to disparage the consistent heedlessness and irresponsibility of youth, a position highlighted by the fact that eight of their nine big wishes cause the children to go hungry.

I argue, however, that critics have missed the fruitfulness of repetition in the novel, and in Golden Age literature more broadly. The repetitive nature of the children's experiences—even when those experiences are minor calamities—allows the kids continual agential rehearsal. Again and again, the siblings must contend with the messy consequences of their actions and decisions having an effect on the world. Nesbit's novel thus bridges the gap between youthful inability and adult capability precisely through the repeated, supposedly "careless" wishes: a child must constantly exercise their agency, the story suggests, in order to develop into the capable adult society imagines they will be.

The first wish, to be "as beautiful as the day," recognizes the paradigm of Romantic innocence. Upon the sudden granting of Anthea's wish, the children look at each and see "perfect strangers," a play on the word "perfect" meaning both *utter* and *faultless* (19). The siblings must take a moment to recognize one another, and when they do, they are irritated at what they see: "'If you're Cyril, I liked you much better as you were before,' said Anthea decidedly. 'You look like the picture of the young chorister, with your golden hair; you'll die young, I shouldn't wonder'" (19). Anthea here acknowledges that youthful beauty has a short shelf life: the "golden hair" of a "young" choir singer aligns Cyril with an angel, not a robust and imperfect boy on Earth. The Romantic paradigm, then, looks good on the surface, but cannot offer real children a path through life. Such a beautiful, "perfect" child can only be a "stranger" to all who encounter it, its future immediately foreclosed. When the children, at sunset, at last revert to their usual

visages and go home, their nursemaid asks why they did not return home earlier. ““We couldn’t because of *them*,”” the children say, ““And we’ll take jolly good care we never *do* see them again”” (25, 26). Emphasizing that the Otherness of idealized Romantic children is hateful, not endearing, the siblings assert their capability in the face of powerless beauty.

To be agential, however, requires more than simply recognizing the problems of beautiful incapability. Agency must be experienced, repeatedly. We are reminded of this by the narrator, who directly and affably addresses her readers, a not-uncommon move in long-nineteenth-century works; while earlier narrators might primly instruct audiences on educational or moral lessons, Golden Age narrators work to get their young readers thinking critically about the narratives they are reading. Our narrator here follows suit. Beginning a lecture on Roman history, she quickly stops, admitting, “I fear I am getting too instructive” (60). What’s important in life does not come from instruction, especially not instruction from adults. Instead, children must figure things out on their own—making decisions, performing actions, and facing the aftermath.

That which looks to be merely play is perhaps the most powerful tool of repeated experience. The children are taken to a toy shop by their uncle, who “let them choose exactly what they wanted, without any restrictions about price, and no nonsense about things being instructive. It is very wise to let children choose exactly what they like, because they are very foolish and inexperienced, and sometimes they will choose a really instructive thing without meaning to” (87). In a book so much about children’s foolish choices with no restrictions, these sentences seem hardly to be a casual remark about toys. The narrator encourages the reader to see that the children’s playful wishes are, in fact, absolutely “immature,” as critics say, but that immaturity is the whole point. Having piles of money, a castle, wings, and enemies “just about the right size . . . to fight” is what allows the kids the chance to repeatedly play with world

capabilities: managing finances, tending one's home, traveling, and facing opposition are all part of leading a capable, grown-up life (208). By being "foolish and inexperienced" now, the children will be wise and experienced as adults.

The siblings themselves discuss the nature of their experiences, too. Facing an army of knights, Jane asks, "I think I'm glad it's only a game; it *is* only a game, isn't it?" . . . But no one answered" (147). With a time limit (i.e. sunset), opponent, and straightforward goal, defending the besieged castle does seem like a game. But as Cyril, Anthea, and Robert's silence suggests, the penalties of losing are quite real, maybe even deadly. Here is perhaps why the wishes so consistently lead to disaster: true agency means facing the consequences of one's actions. Being capable requires understanding the sensation of capability, which comes from repeated experiences. It also requires understanding the stakes at hand.

A more thorough discussion occurs twelve pages later:

[Cyril said,] "We found a Sammyadd. We have had wishes. We've had wings, and being beautiful as the day—ugh!—that was pretty jolly beastly if you like—and wealth and castles, and that rotten gipsy business with the Lamb. But we're no forrader [forwarder]. We haven't really got anything worth having for our wishes."

"We've had things happening," said Robert; "that's always something."

"It's not enough, unless they're the right things," said Cyril firmly. (159)

It is an understandable frustration: faced suddenly with nearly unlimited power, Cyril, Anthea, Robert, Jane, and the Lamb nevertheless find themselves constantly outmatched and overwhelmed. A fight ensues, won by Cyril. Though Robert is partly right—"things happening" is indeed better than nothing—what matters most is getting "forrader." For children, forward movement is the path toward adulthood. Cyril longs to have some form of success, which he

feels the wishes' bestowal of agency should have given him, and which the adults around him (parents, Martha the nursemaid, police, the church warden, armored knights) have easily.

In fact, this easy agency is the subject of the next wish, which makes Robert an eleven-foot giant. Unlike previous wishes, this one goes well: finally powerful, Robert gets revenge on an older bully, and the children show Robert at the local fair for money. The wish that then follows delves into adult agency even more thoroughly: in a fit of annoyance, Cyril wishes that two-year-old Lamb would ““grow up now,”” which he does, “suddenly and violently . . . in a terrible moment” that turns a toddler into a self-interested, mustachioed young man (188). The Lamb appears unaware that he has ever been anything than the eldest brother, leaving Cyril, Anthea, Robert, and Jane distraught. He eagerly hopes to fill his afternoon with grown-up activities: he attempts to go to his club in London for lunch, cycle into town, and flirt with a young woman. Each time, the children interfere, to the Lamb's petulant irritation. Finally, at sunset, he returns to his baby self. Relieved, the children debate whether to soon bully the Lamb or treat him kindly, whichever method works best ““so he mayn't grow up like *that*”” (205). Robert takes a plainer view: ““If he grows up in the usual way, there'll be plenty of time to correct him as he goes along. The awful thing today was his growing up so suddenly. There was no time to improve him at all”” (207). The Lamb, unable to take part in most of the previous wishes, bypassed the painful, repetitive experience of growing up “the usual way,” leaping straight into every child's dream of magically transforming into an adult. The result is a spoiled young “tyrant” who attempts to ditch his siblings at every opportunity, patronizes his sisters with sexist insults, and mooches Robert's fairground earnings (199). If innocent beauty leads to death, then sudden adulthood leads to selfishness and the breakdown of communal and familial bonds. Improvement may only come with experience, which only comes with time.

The final calamitous wish leads a kindly gamekeeper to be suspected of theft. With Cyril and Robert stuck at the house, Anthea and Jane hurry to the Psammead, who agrees to grant them several wishes in a row if they allow it to leave and never make requests of it again. The sisters, in a quick series of wishes, put everything right. As they do so, the Psammead demands that they keep its existence a secret, explaining, ““If you told grown-ups I should have no peace of my life. They’d get hold of me, and they wouldn’t wish silly things like you do, but real earnest things . . . [like] old-age pensions . . . and free secondary education, . . . and the whole world would be turned topsy-turvy”” (241). Are retirement funds and free schooling truly so bad as to upend the order of things? Nesbit, a socialist, likely did not think so. This, then, is the story’s final message: the real, adult world is “dull” (in the Psammead’s opinion), and it also needs a lot of improvement (241). Like Nesbit and child readers, however, the siblings now have no access to magical solutions; the hard work of fixing the world’s ills can only be done by capable people committed to making change, who are willing to suffer failure after failure in their pursuit.

When Anthea and Jane return home, Robert and Cyril are relieved their adventures are done. Like their many Golden Age counterparts, the children have enjoyed their agency, despite the surrounding adults’ greater power, and they have become more capable as a result. Golden Age works are rife with capable kids who became more capable as their stories advance. This, I argue, is a key innovation of Golden Age literature that critics have not yet explored: child agency is not a static asset that one either has or lacks. Rather, it is a developing acquirement whose practice ultimately constitutes the process of growing up.

I would like to conclude this essay by turning to the present. *Five Children and It* does not view itself as a story of all children: it speaks in benevolently sexist terms to its girls, and an entire chapter indulges in terribly racist stereotypes of Native Americans. I would hesitate to

assign the book in class. But the classroom may be where *Five Children and It's* story best applies. The narrative's model of developmental growth guides my own pedagogy as I consider how much, and in what ways, my students perform agency. By seeing students as developing yet capable agents, I can ask them to put their skills, decisions, and choices into practice, again and again. I can watch them grow as they try, fail, and recover, realizing their growth along the way. And I can encourage them to see that their work in my classroom is preparing them for a life after school, where they must take part in creating the world they wish to inhabit.

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“We are not just those persons, which we were”: Donne, Transience, and the Morality of Seduction

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There are two commonplaces one quickly encounters when surveying the critical literature on John Donne, both with enough truth to persist but enough ambiguity to severely compromise themselves. One is that there is a clear distinction to be made between Jack Donne, the satirist and notorious author of erotic, even libertine, verse and Dr. Donne, author of *Devotions on Emergent Occasions* and beloved Dean of St. Paul’s. The other is that Donne is always both an insider and an outsider in whatever social, literary, or intellectual milieu he is placed: born into a famously defiant Catholic family, he became the symbol of politically sanctioned spiritual authority; a dashing and somewhat pretentious gentleman who scorned publishing his poems as beneath him, he spent the bulk of his adult life desperately poor and writing on commission; a fickle seducer of women, he threw away his career to marry for true love and fathered thirteen children before preaching against sensuality.

These biographical distinctions seem to emerge naturally from critically examining the defining features of Donne’s poetry; as far back as Samuel Johnson, critics have noted and fixated on the idea that chief attraction of Donne’s method is that by which “heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together” (Johnson 304). However, I will argue here that Donne has another abiding interest beyond paradox and heterogeneity; in both his prose and his poetry he thought well and deeply about which aspects of the human condition are mutable, which are eternal, and the differing ethical responsibilities humans have to one another and to God in light of this tension. While it may be said with

enough truth to persist that Donne writes of sex in divine terms and the divine in sexual terms, he often writes of both in carefully considered moral terms. An examination of his most controversial prose work, *Biathanatos*, reveals that the moral logic Donne uses in that text can also be used to illuminate areas of his love poetry.

Likely composed in 1608, John Donne's prose work *Biathanatos* was not published until 1647, long after his death. Donne's refusal to publish was not in any way surprising, as the subject of the work was controversial enough to give the career-minded Donne pause at any point of his life: suicide. It was, nevertheless, a subject Donne found sufficiently compelling to dedicate his considerable intellect to, and one that was intimately bound up with his own research; as the editors of the only modern edition of the work point out, "Since Donne rejects support from what were at the time the only pro-suicide elements in the Western tradition,¹ his own defense of suicide is wholly original, and not derivative from earlier defenses in any way" (*Biathanatos*, lxxxvi).

Donne had a very personal reason for composing this work at the time he did, with his career at its lowest ebb, his health failing, and his growing family growing increasingly desperate; the question for him is not an idle one. Within the first paragraph of the work he admits "I have often such a sickly inclination; and whether it be ..that there be a perplexity and flexibility in the doctrine itself, or because my conscience ever assures me that no rebellious grudging at God's gifts, nor other sinful occurrence, accompanies these thoughts in me, or that a brave scorn or that a faint cowardliness beget it, whensoever any affliction assails me, methinks I have the keys of my prison in mine

¹ By this the editors are referring to a body of Stoic philosophy with which Donne was surely familiar yet did not cite, as they support forms and occasions of suicide Donne did not consider ethical.

own hand, and no remedy presents itself so soon to my heart as my own sword” (39). If we take Donne at his word throughout the work, this is an earnest attempt to discern if he could both take his own life and still achieve salvation. His logic leads him to answer that question negatively about himself, for he ultimately comes to condemn suicide born of physical or emotional pain. However, along the way he does formulate a view of suicide that allows him to grant that the common objections against it are based on faulty reasoning. As Daniel Gordon has observed, “By no means, however, was Donne trying to foster suicide. His book is "deliberately inconclusive" and saturated with "relativistic reasoning." However, precisely because Donne did not recognize the power of any religious authority to adjudicate the individual's claim to divine inspiration, each person is free to believe that the dictates of his or her personal reason represent the voice of God.” (43)

Gordon is astute to note Donne’s relativism. Throughout the essay, Donne dispenses with three of the main objections against suicide: that it is against the law of nature, the law of reason, and the law of God. Interestingly, and especially in refuting the idea that suicide is against the law of nature, Donne appeals to a form of relativism: what is appropriate or accepted in one place may not be in another, but there is no set reference point from which we can judge other times and places to be in conformity with or to have deviated from. In the midst of detailing various times and places that laws his contemporaries took to be immutable and fore-ordained, Donne sums up his view: “No law is so primary and simple, but it foreimagines a reason upon which it was founded; and scarce any reason is so constant, but that circumstances alter it, in which case a private man is emperor of himself” (61). It requires some intellectual work for a modern reader to understand the

implications of Donne allowing himself to conceive of morality as something that could be changeable according to situation rather than fixed and immutable; as John Stubbes notes, “It also took him down deeply heterodox passages of thought – it occurred to him, for example, that the God-made universe was not, perhaps, innately moral: . . . If it had got around, such a relativistic sentiment would have been the death knell of any hope Donne held of a public career; but at this time, there seemed no hope of one anyway, so he set it down” (228).

Donne’s introduction to the work also mentions the second pillar of his view of morality: intentionalism. It is not the consequence of an act that is to be judged, but rather the intention of the doer, as when Donne clears himself of any concern that he is considering taking his own life out of scorn or cowardice. Again, while he will ultimately determine that his own intentions do not clear the bar for ethical suicide, he cites many examples where intentionally dying for the greater glory of God is a laudable act. As the editors of *Biathanatos* explain “Thus it is the *intention* under which an act of self-killing is performed which determines the moral status of that act. For Donne, this is not an *ad hoc* assumption concerning suicide alone; he holds that the moral properties of *any* act inhere primarily in its motivation. . . . No act, for Donne, is inherently evil, and no class of acts can be said to be evil as a whole” (Rudick, lxiii). While Donne applies these ethical frameworks to determine the times it is permissible to take one’s own life, it is reasonable to see if the same ethics prevail in his love poetry, some of which was presumably written about the same time and often concerned with the duties one owes to another and how far one person can make a vow given the changing nature of ourselves and our circumstances. These questions are, of course, at the center of a moral sexuality

concerned with the integrity of others as well as personal pleasure, and it is precisely this element of Donne's love poetry that is too often overlooked.

While the uncertain dating of many of Donne's works may cloud the issue, there is no real reason to suppose that his thinking on any subject ever calcified. He was undoubtedly a Roman Catholic at the beginning of his life, and undoubtedly the Dean of St. Paul's at the end, and there is evidence in his letters, treatises, and poetry of the many points of belief he occupied along that continuum. In the same vein, even his writings about love span the whole spectrum from hedonism to an ascetic rejection of human sexuality. Importantly, each step along these scales reflects careful thought and consideration; his ideas are always evolving, but they are also always grounded in contemplation and study.

Just as Donne refused to avail himself of the readily available Stoic tradition to buttress his arguments about suicide or to toe the orthodox Christian line, he did not allow himself the poetic crutch of whole-heartedly embracing Petrarchism or fashioning himself as an anti-Petrarch in the matter of his love poetry. Rather, he brought the same questioning mind, and in fact some of the same questions, to bear on the morality of how humans can promise and share their bodies in sexual love that he did on the relationship between the human body and the divine soul. Heather Dubrow has written insightfully of Donne's unique relationship to the the Petrarchan tradition that so thoroughly dominated the love poetry of the 1580s and 1590s: "Donne's approach to Petrarchism are distinctive. In particular, he neither embraces Petrarchism enthusiastically... nor rejects it under the guise of participating in it... Rather, complicating—but not canceling—his debt to that tradition, Donne uses modes of distancing here, as he does throughout his canon, to

establish himself as both inside and outside Petrarchism (204). The main currents of of Petrarchism are indeed alien to the kind of love Donne interrogates in his poetry; his mistresses are not distant, chaste, and inaccessible, and his speakers have very little interest in quietly suffering abstinence. Like the sonnet sequences he surely was familiar with, Donne's love poems do not tend towards marriage; unlike those sequences (saving Shakespeare's), Donne's characters engage in the full spectrum of sexual activity: they are either trying to argue one another into sex, engaging in sex, or ruminating on the sex they have just had. While in any one individual poem it may be depicted as trivial, or regrettable, or as a life-changing spectacle that must be enacted in the heavens and made subject of hymns, the totality of the emphasis on human sexuality and its benefits and consequences in the *Songs and Sonnets* is unmistakable; as Katherine Rundell notes, "For a mind like that, sex – real sex, true sex – would allow a singleness to hush the multitudinous mind. It's why so much of Donne's imagery around sex is so totalising: the man and woman become one, the woman becomes a state, a country, a planet. Sex, for Donne and those like him: permission, for those who watch the world with such feverish care, to turn one person into the world and to watch only them" (loc. 1603). In a very real way, Donne is exploring the annihilation of the self in sexuality as seriously as he explores the annihilation of the self through the act of suicide, and in neither case is he willing to be bound by orthodoxy, as his doubts and fears are both real and exist beyond the pale of what orthodoxy, religious or poetic, will allow as legitimate questioning. The total surrender of the self means total vulnerability, and Dubrow correctly observes "One of the most recurrent fears in Donne's poetry and so many other texts of sixteenth-and

seventeenth-century England—that the woman will betray her lover with another man—is also foreign to Petrarchism” (214).

How, then, to explain the various attitudes Donne’s personae adopt towards sexual relationships? It is easy, and tempting, to foist the most socially sanctioned and constrained progress through sexual exploration, then and now, onto Donne, and there is some warrant to do so. We can say that the early work is the work of a playboy bachelor, while the later work is that of the passionately committed husband. Catherine Gimelli Martin sees a distinct change in Donne’s love poetry as he matures: “Donne’s imaginative efforts to transcend time and change seem to accompany his monogamous maturity” (38). I would argue, though, that what might be seen as maturation could also be explained by Donne applying the same moral logic developed in *Biathanatos* to different sexual situations. With the possible exception of death, the navigation of obligations between sexual partners is the most common topic in *Songs and Sonnets*, and this moral framework is also informed by the concepts of relativity and intentionalism.

An examination of two poems will serve to illustrate this idea: “Woman’s Constancy,” often considered an earlier work of the libertine Donne, and “Love’s Growth,” which has been claimed to have been inspired by his mature and monogamous love for his wife. These texts are highly individual and composed for specific and carefully considered audiences; Arthur Marotti, in perhaps the most important contribution to Donne scholarship of the last fifty years, has shown that “Donne’s restriction of his contemporary readership was a deliberate act. For the most part, he designed his poems specifically for a succession of social environments in which he functioned between his arrival in London in the early 1590s and his ordination in 1615,

for himself and for the individuals with whom he chose to associate” (xi). The poems, serving a variety of rhetorical contexts and audiences, are bound not so much by a persona as by a pervading set of ethics.

Part of Donne’s great success as a poet is his ability to convincingly convey the emotion appropriate to a very wide set of rhetorical contexts; these personae are often so lifelike that it is easy to imagine Donne himself as the speaker expressing his personal thoughts. Read this way, it is seductively easy to posit the following equation: “Donne writes confidently, Donne writes of love, therefore Donne’s love poetry is a boisterous record of conquest.” To do so, however, is to simplify to the point of distortion. To a greater degree than his contemporaries (other than Shakespeare in the *Sonnets*), Donne explicitly and continually separates the idea of a sexual relationship from the idea of a monogamous and lasting companionable relationship. There is a continuum in his love poetry with emotionless sexual release on one end and the enfolding of the souls for all eternity on the other, and the rhetorical situation can occupy any point on the continuum. Equally importantly, each kind of relationship calls for a different moral approach; what matters is the intention of the lovers towards one another in the context of how each understands the relationship. In this way, as well, the image of Donne as all conquering seducer misleads the reader from the reality of individual poems; as Stubbs points out, “Donne imagined himself as a sexual explorer and colonist, but equally as a small stupid fowl in a masochistic forest of bondage, a rabbit caught in a ‘springe’ – a hunter’s trap” (65).

“Woman’s Constancy” illustrates the doubt of the speaker at the outset of a new relationship. The title, while not given by Donne himself, adds to the sense of confusion

and hesitancy in the piece, as the poem has been interpreted both as a meditation on the potentially fraught sexual fidelity of women by a male speaker and as a female speaker imagining the likely excuses her male lover will make to terminate the relationship and what her moral duty is in the face of this likely rejection. The ambiguity of the speaker's gender helps focus the reader's attention on what promises, implied or explicit, each half of a sexual partnership based on mutual attraction brings to that relationship; without the socially sanctioned structures of courtship and marriage to enforce gendered power dynamics, either half of the partnership may dissolve it at will. The inherent mutability of humanity is immediately raised alongside the legal and societal constructs we have devised to govern that mutability: "Wilt thou then Antedate some new made vow? / Or say that now / We are not just those persons, which we were?" (3-5). While there is no question that Donne's highly praised wit colors the poem, the examples he gives of the arguments the wandering lover could make are of a piece, and point to a serious examination of the moral trust one must place in a lover outside of a more or less strictly contractual relationship. By placing the vow of a lover in direct comparison with the marriage vows, Donne's speaker is explicitly highlighting the distinction between the two and the delicate element of trust involved:

Or, that oathes made in reverentiall feare
Of Love, and his wrath, any may forswear?
Or, as true deaths, true maryages untie,
So lovers contracts, images of those,
Binde but till sleep, deaths image, them unloose? (6-10)

The fear of the speaker is clear: his or her lover will equate the nature of their relationship to a minor marriage and judge it by that morality. Once one spouse has died, the other is free to remarry; as a sexual liaison is but a marriage in miniature, a night's sleep, death in miniature, is sufficient to dissolve it. The speaker rightly recognizes that by this argument the lover would be claiming all of the benefits of marriage without accepting any of its obligations, and that their relationship must be governed by a different private morality that respects the individuality of each. For the relationship to be in any way equitable, the arguments for ending it must be equally available to both parties, and the speaker ultimately refuses to engage these hypothetical arguments:

Vaine lunatique, against these scrapes I could

Dispute, and conquer, if I would,

Which I abstaine to doe,

For by tomorrow, I may thinke so too. (14-17)

This kind of relationship needs to be bound by a morality that recognizes contextual differences and the role of intention in the actions of the participants. As Margret Fetzer would have it: "Depending on who you are and whose truth you are talking about, truth may be highly desirable or fiercely regrettable. As 'Womans Constancy' hints, being true or not is not beyond our own control:... For 'by to morrow, I may thinke so too' (l. 17), the 'may' hinting that his being true is subject to a consciously made decision, partly dependent on his mistress's remarks and her possible 'falsehood' (l. 13) the morning after" (52).

A poem that occupies a very different rhetorical situation, "Love's Growth," displays a very similar examination of the moral obligations of the lovers. Its first stanza grants

the mutability of the lovers that the potentially false lover from “Woman’s Constancy” potentially asserts: “Me thinkes I lyed all winter, when I swore, / My love was infinite, if spring make’ it more” (5-6). This lover, finding himself not the person he was before, is cognizant both of his changeability and his capacity to grow more fully in love through his intentions towards his beloved.

“Love’s Growth” is more stereotypically metaphysical than “Woman’s Constancy”; the proliferating conceits compare love to the compounding of medicine, the firmament, the changing seasons, the music of the spheres, and the propensity of taxes to go only up, never down. If this poem were written for his wife, as Marotti and others surmise, we can be sure she was delighted to be compared to an ever heavier tax burden, especially if it were written during one of her thirteen pregnancies. Even in his mature, metaphysically dense style, Donne still focuses on love as a practical concern requiring different emotional responses in different situations:

Love’s not so pure, and abstract, as they use
To say, which have no Mistresse but their Muse
But as all else, being elemented too,
Love sometimes would contemplate, sometimes do. (11-14)

Here, as in “Woman’s Constancy” and many other of the *Songs and Sonnets*, we have a reminder that the love Donne writes of in his poetry exists as a series of promises, actions, and intentions between two unique individuals. If there is an abstract love that exists independently of human morality and interaction, we can only partake of it through our moral responses and obligations to one another. To return to *Biathanatos*, Donne’s

view of morality in love, sex, and our own relationship to our mortality is relative and intentionalist, as the love that would sometimes contemplate, sometimes do:

Because, as in oaths and vows, so in the law, the necessity of dispensations proceeds from this: that a thing which, universally considered, in itself is profitable and honest, by reason of some particular event becomes either dishonest or hurtful, neither of which can fall within the reach or under the commandment of any law...It doth only succor a person, not wound nor infirm a law--no more than I take from the virtue of light or dignity of the sun if, to escape the scorching thereof, I allow myself the relief of a shadow. (62)

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Gertrude Means ‘Strong Spear’: The Queen’s Change of Heart and Self-Sacrificial Triumph

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The agency Queen Gertrude exerts over the plot of *Hamlet* is considerable, particularly in relation to her number of lines. Despite recent criticism acknowledging Gertrude’s importance, her overall image has been slow to change. Readings of Gertrude done in classrooms typically focus on her brief period of grief over King Hamlet and her commission of what was historically considered incest by marrying Claudius. While more nuanced or interesting readings might exist, they are underexplored and do not reach students. This is a pity, because Gertrude is a strong female character who demonstrates redemption from wickedness, including a conscious self-sacrifice so that her son might live.

The most common pre-existing interpretations of Gertrude are that she is unresolvable, defiant toward God, and soiled. Richard Levin believes Gertrude’s character is obscured by Old Hamlet and Prince Hamlet’s biased interpretations of her (323). Cayla McCollum understands Gertrude through Hamlet’s Niobe allusion, positing, “Gertrude defied a higher power” (115). Stephanie Chamberlain argues that Gertrude is an immoral alcoholic like Claudius who dies because she cannot resist Prince Hamlet’s unattended wine (32).

However, Robert M. Smith and Abigail L Montgomery propose that Gertrude redeems herself. The most complete analysis to date is Montgomery’s, which states Gertrude and Hamlet

share the plot of gaining enough momentum to oppose Claudius: “Gertrude is always capable of independent action, and her story in the play is one of gathering the dramatic power to . . . make her most deliberate, defiant, and final choice . . . Gertrude's story parallels her son's” (101). The flaw in Montgomery's analysis is a lack of historical grounding or textual comparison to be truly convincing in her departure from the usual interpretations.

The view that Shakespeare crafted Gertrude's progression as a parallel to Hamlet's will be explored and built upon here. Removing ambiguities and settling whether redemption is the intended character arc for Gertrude requires more context. A comparison between Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and the original text is required, and background historical information about Shakespeare's own time is necessary in order to interpret his references to his own culture's concepts.

The inspiration for Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is one of the epics about Danish royal history, originally part of oral tradition but written down in the 12th Century by Saxo Grammaticus, a monk working to preserve Danish culture in much the same way that the more famous Snorri Sturluson worked on the Norse and Icelandic *Edda*. Julie Maxwell points out that a contemporary of Saxo's, Snaebjorn, also attempted to preserve the Danish oral history, but Snaebjorn's work has been lost while Saxo's survives (518). Thus, all the interpretations of Prince Hamlet's story can be traced back to Saxo Grammaticus' *Historiae Danicae*, or *The Danish History*, which was eventually translated into more readable English by Oliver Elton. Maxwell goes into detail in her argument about the value of Saxo Grammaticus' account to peoples throughout the 1500s as source material for political debates pitting Danish and Swedish royalty against each other (524-525), which certainly suggests that the text remained relevant in the literary canon. This makes it no surprise that at least one previous version of a play about Hamlet

existed in Elizabethan England. The crux of the modern problem of how to interpret Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is that Saxo Grammaticus' account has since dropped from the literary canon.

Starting from the beginning, with Queen Gertrude's title, not many instructors or students appear to know that it is Gertrude's lineage that is royal, not her husband's. Claudius refers to her as "Th' imperial jointress to this warlike state" (1.2.9). Katherine Eggert explains that jointure supplanted dowers in 16th century England: "Viewed this way [as a prenuptial agreement], jointure became a way of sequestering the husband's entire estate away from the widow's use, except for the share that accompanied her into the marriage" (104). Therein lies the problem for the men of the play: Denmark is Gertrude's property. In *The Danish History*, the King of Denmark, Rorik, gives a duke named Horwendil his daughter's hand in marriage as a reward for having slain Kroller, the King of Norway. "For by his [Horwendil's] rain of blows he destroyed Kroller's shield and deprived him of it, and . . . drove him lifeless to the ground . . . His friendship with Rorik enabled him to woo and will in marriage his daughter Gerutha, who bore him a son Amleth" (Grammaticus 206-207). Shakespeare uses the detail of King Hamlet having slain the King of Norway and refers to Gertrude as Denmark's jointress, establishing that he is using *The Danish History* and interpreting property law through his own cultural lens. Due to the jointure agreement, Denmark passes back to Gertrude upon King Hamlet's death.

Further, Shakespeare's conception of Gertrude as a jointress establishes his sympathy for Gertrude's love affair with Claudius. Eggert points out that a jointure agreement "could not be withdrawn on the grounds of the widow's being proved to have committed adultery, elopement, or fornication" (104). Even if accusations of her adultery are true, they are a moot point as it concerns whether Gertrude is worthy to retain her place as Queen. This undercuts claims of

Gertrude's irredeemable sin of adultery with and marriage to Claudius. In Shakespeare's mind, Gertrude's right to the throne is unimpeached.

Complicating matters, Gertrude is not fully at fault for committing adultery with Claudius. *The Danish History's* Gertrude, Gerutha, is tricked by Feng, the original Claudius, after Feng murders Horwendil, the original King Hamlet. Feng succeeds in marrying Gerutha when he is her husband's killer by "such hardihood of cunning . . . Gerutha, said he, though so gentle that she would do no man the slightest hurt, had been visited with her husband's extremest hate; and it was all to save her that he had slain his brother . . . Nor did his smooth words fail in their intent" (207). Feng convinces Gerutha, and the rest of the Danish court, that Horwendil treated her badly and wished her further harm and that he was only protecting his Queen. The grateful Gerutha marries her supposed savior. Shakespeare echoes this portrayal. Old Hamlet declares Claudius used "witchcraft of his wits" (1.5.50) to overcome "The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen" (1.5.53). Therefore, Claudius' tactics are like his prototype Feng's. Unlike Saxo Grammaticus, Shakespeare does not specify what Claudius said to convince Gertrude to commit adultery. The audience is left to fill in the blanks with their knowledge of *The Danish History*. The implication is that Claudius convinces Gertrude that Old Hamlet treats her cruelly.

Further, Shakespeare establishes that Gertrude is not without a conscience and thus is redeemable. This is shown during Gertrude's change of heart, which occurs in Act III, Scene 4 and is the turning point of her story. Act III, Scene 4 is Shakespeare's retelling of one of the events in *The Danish History* almost beat for beat. The original text reads:

But a friend of Feng, gifted more with assurance than judgment, declared that the unfathomable cunning of such a mind could not be detected by any vulgar plot . . .

Amleth should be closeted alone with his mother in her chamber; but a man should first be commissioned to place himself in a concealed part of the room and listen heedfully to what they talked about. (Grammaticus 212-213)

What happens in *The Danish History* is echoed in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Gertrude accepts through the power of her own intellect what her son is telling her and experiences a change of heart. Hamlet first brings up murder vaguely (ln. 35), then spells out the revelation about who Claudius is: "A murderer and a villain" (ln. 110). The Ghost of Old Hamlet appears at this point and commands Hamlet to win Gertrude over to their side. "O, step between her and her fighting soul./Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works./Speak to her, Hamlet" (lns. 129-131). This embellishment by Shakespeare is not present in the original. However, at the Ghost's encouraging, Hamlet once and for all convinces his mother that he is not mad, contrary to how he has been behaving, and that his accusations against Claudius are the truth (lns. 160-176). Gertrude's "O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain!" (ln. 177) corresponds with *The Danish History*: "With such reproaches he rent the heart of his mother and redeemed her to walk in the ways of virtue; teaching her to set the fires of the past above the seductions of the present" (Grammaticus 214). As Shakespeare's retelling is not the first in England, he does not have to be more clear; his audience is familiar with the story and how Amleth/Hamlet redeems Gerutha/Gertrude. The redemption is signaled by Gertrude's line, "What shall I do?" (ln. 202). She is now taking direction from Hamlet.

In reaction to Gertrude's change of heart, Hamlet's first order to her is to resist Claudius' attempts to seduce from her the information that Hamlet is sane and plotting against Claudius: "Not this by no means that I bid you do:/Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed," (lns. 203-204) and "Make you to ravel all this matter out/That I essentially am not in madness,/But mad in

craft” (lms. 208-210). In the original, Amleth says, “And thou, who hadst been better employed in lamenting thine own disgrace, know it is superfluity to bewail my witlessness; thou shouldst weep for the blemish in thine own mind, not for that in another's. On the rest see thou keep silence” (Bk. 3). This is the end of the scene. Unlike the original, Shakespeare underscores Gertrude’s sincerity by having her reply instead of ending the scene: “Be thou assured, if words be made of breath/And breath of life, I have no life to breathe/What thou hast said to me” (lms. 219-221). That pact ends Gertrude’s time in the plot as one of Hamlet’s aggressors. After the play within a play, Claudius and Gertrude’s contrasting reactions split the characters apart. Claudius confesses privately that he cannot repent and does not have a conscience. Meanwhile, Gertrude has repented and now sides with her justice-seeking son. There should not be any doubt at this point about the difference between these two characters. Claudius is the villain, and Gertrude is not.

At this point, Gertrude begins plotting against Claudius. When Claudius sees her next, he says, “There’s matter in these sighs; these profound heaves/You must translate; ’tis fit we understand them” (4.1.1-2). The reason Gertrude is sighing is because she now knows Claudius to be a murderer, and true to her word to Hamlet, Gertrude refuses Claudius the truth:

KING What, Gertrude? How does Hamlet?

QUEEN

Mad as the sea and wind when both contend

Which is the mightier. In his lawless fit,

Behind the arras hearing something stir,

Whips out his rapier, cries “A rat, a rat,”

And in this brainish apprehension kills

The unseen good old man.

(4.1.6-12)

Compared to Hamlet's admission that he is attempting to kill Claudius—"Is it the King?" (3.4.32)—what Gertrude has done is fail to warn Claudius that Hamlet is trying to kill him. This is an immense betrayal. Claudius immediately deduces the conclusion Gertrude has attempted to keep him from reaching: "It had been so with us, had we been there" (4.1.14). Claudius then postures for Gertrude, saying, "His liberty is full of threats to all—/To you yourself, to us, to everyone./Alas, how shall this bloody deed be answered?" (4.1.15-17). Gertrude does not panic, does not give Hamlet away, but neither does she play along. Insisting that Hamlet is mad and meant no one any harm, she says, "he weeps for what is done" (4.1.28). Claudius is disgusted: "O Gertrude, come away!" (4.1.29). He then complains that he and Gertrude must now clean up Hamlet's mess (4.1.33). When Gertrude is still unresponsive, Claudius excludes her from sending Hamlet to England. Gertrude does not appear in Act IV, Scene 3.

Unfortunately, Gertrude is not a good liar. Claudius senses she has switched sides and expresses his anxiety about Gertrude's possible disloyalty, saying to Laertes, his co-conspirator, "The Queen his mother/Lives almost by his looks" (4.7.13-14). He begins excluding Gertrude from his plotting. In this way, Claudius himself acknowledges that Gertrude is no longer on his side. When Gertrude enters with the news that Ophelia has drowned, she interrupts Claudius and Laertes discussing the murder of Hamlet with a poisoned rapier. However, Claudius lies to Gertrude about the nature of his lengthy discussion with Laertes:

KING Let's follow, Gertrude.

How much I had to do to calm his rage!

Now fear I this will give it start again.

Therefore, let's follow.

(4.7.218-221)

Claudius was not calming Laertes' rage; he was inciting it, saying, "Laertes, was your father dear to you?/Or are you like the painting of a sorrow,/A face without a heart" (4.7.122-124). Claudius lies to Gertrude because she is now Claudius' enemy, and he knows it.

A crucial but unseen detail in the play is what Hamlet wrote to his mother in Act IV. The messenger who speaks with Claudius says, "Letters, my lord, from Hamlet./These to your Majesty, this to the Queen" (4.7.39-41). Given that Hamlet knows his mother is now on his side, he may have written to her the same details he shares with Horatio. His accounting to Gertrude would be omitted because the audience has already heard Horatio's letter from Hamlet. If Hamlet did share similar details with Gertrude, she now knows that Claudius lied to her about his reasons for sending Hamlet to England.

A detail of the final scene that has often been overlooked in terms of its significance is that Gertrude likely knows an underhanded attempt on Hamlet's life has already been made. The customary reading of Gertrude drinking the poisoned wine is that it is an ironic coincidence engineered by Shakespeare in order to punish Gertrude and Claudius: the poisoner poisons the object of his sexual desire in his desperate attempts to murder the hero. This reading places the agency with Claudius and posits that Gertrude herself is trivial. She is merely the object that Claudius and Hamlet war over. However, this reading does not answer a crucial question: Why does Gertrude drink the wine after Claudius expressly tells her not to? Despite being ordered, she ignores him, and she does so with the entire Danish court as their audience:

KING Gertrude, do not drink.

QUEEN

I will, my lord; I pray you pardon me.

(5.2.317-318)

Gertrude drinks the wine because she distrusts Claudius and deliberately interferes in Claudius' plans. She has accepted that Hamlet tells the truth and knows that the play was a re-enactment of the poisoning of her husband. Claudius' insistence on trying to make Hamlet drink the wine, "Give him the cup" (5.2.308), reveals something is amiss with the wine. When he orders her not to drink the wine set aside for Hamlet, Gertrude is more suspicious still. In effect, she dares Claudius to reveal himself. For Gertrude, everything she has believed about Claudius is tested in this moment: if he loves her, then he will give himself away. Remember that Claudius is watching the woman he claimed to love grow weak and faint as her blood pressure drops and her heartbeat slows, and he pretends not to notice, even exchanging words with Laertes about killing Hamlet (5.2.322-337) and behaving solely engrossed in the duel:

HAMLET How does the Queen?

KING She swoons to see them bleed.

QUEEN

No, no, the drink, the drink! O, my dear Hamlet!

The drink, the drink! I am poisoned.

(5.2.338-341)

When Claudius shows her that he expects her to die without exposing him, she betrays Claudius as best she can. She gave Claudius every chance to admit the truth, and in doing so, is once and for all betrayed by him. However, Gertrude keeps Hamlet alive long enough to fulfill his revenge against Claudius. After all, Hamlet did not decline to drink unequivocally. What he says is, "I'll play this bout first. Set it by awhile" (4.7.309). Once Hamlet had triumphed over Laertes, he

would have let down his guard and drunk the wine, and in doing so, perished. Gertrude prevented that outcome.

Another reason to suppose Gertrude's protection of Hamlet is deliberate is that Gerutha conspires with Amleth to murder Feng's allies. "Amleth, on departing [for England], gave secret orders to his mother to hang the hall with woven knots, and to perform pretended obsequies for him a year thence; promising that he would then return" (Grammaticus 215). In the original version, there is no Ophelia; the funeral Amleth returns to join is his own. After Amleth reveals himself, Feng's allies drink to Amleth's health, pretending they are glad to discover he is still alive. Once Amleth's enemies drank themselves into alcoholic blackouts, "he brought down the hanging his mother had knitted . . . This he flung upon the snorers . . . that not one of the men beneath, however hard he might struggle, could contrive to rise. After this he set fire to the palace" (Grammaticus 220). With no one to support Feng, Amleth hunts Feng down in his uncle's chambers, and there is no one to save Feng because Gerutha ensured that apparently harmless decorations on the wall were used to ensnare Feng's allies and kill them. Gerutha's participation was adapted by Shakespeare into Gertrude protecting Hamlet from being poisoned.

In conclusion, Gertrude is often read as being Claudius' victim or as a transgressor against nature, yet she experiences a change of heart in the closet scene, and her last act in the play is to defy Claudius, extending Hamlet's life so that he has enough time to avenge his father before he dies of Laertes' poisoned rapier. There is no reason to suppose that Gertrude dies in disgrace. Gertrude sincerely repents her marriage to Claudius and dies in the course of seeing justice done. Students and instructors alike who become caught up in their disgust at Gertrude's adultery or incest miss the larger point about Claudius' predatory nature and Gertrude's valiance in facing the catastrophic mistake she makes. Gertrude is better utilized as an example of a

redemptive figure in a larger discussion of a mother's loyalty to her child needing to take precedence over her loyalty to her second husband.

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“They Had Forgotten the Language with Which They Had Always Spoken”: Imagined
Community and Linguistic Identity in the Catalan Children’s Book *Tramuntana a la granja*

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Language is a deep-rooted aspect of personal identity. In Catalonia, a region of northeastern Spain that is similar in size to Belgium, linguistic identity influences the national consciousness in a way that is increasingly rare in Western countries. The historical and native language of this region is Catalan, not Spanish. Though it exhibits many lexical and grammatical similarities with Spanish and other members of the Romance family, Catalan evolved from Vulgar Latin as a distinct language and is found in documents dating back to the twelfth century. Still spoken by approximately ten million people, it remains vibrant and active, both as a means of everyday communication and within the professional and academic spheres. Thus, the people of Catalonia have a language, but they do not have a sovereign political entity that corresponds to this language. They also have a strong literary tradition. Literature—including children’s literature—is deliberately promoted in modern Catalonia, and since the Catalan *Renaixença* of the nineteenth century, it has been integral to the recovery of Catalonian identity and culture. Catalonia is a striking example of the “imagined community” theorized by Benedict Anderson, and Catalan children’s literature manifests this community and reinforces it within the hearts and minds of future generations. This is especially true for works that address the very core of this community, namely, Catalan, the *mother tongue*, which young and old alike have inherited. I argue that *Tramuntana a la granja*, an award-winning illustrated children’s book by Carles Sala i Vila, belongs in this category. In my analysis, *Tramuntana a la granja* presents a playful story about farm animals that are unable to “speak their rightful language” in order to impress upon young readers that the loss or displacement of a native language can expose a community to

external danger, generate internal strife, and create generational barriers. In doing so, it emerges as a noteworthy example of twenty-first-century children's literature that teaches members of the next generation not only *how to use* their native language, but also why they should valorize it and, if necessary, defend it.

The people of Catalonia have a strong sense of shared culture and national identity, and since they lack political independence, their language is a profound expression of their existence as a coherent community. Indeed, language is a vitalizing force in Catalan society and is explicitly recognized as such in Catalonia's Linguistic Policy Law:

The Catalan language is a fundamental element of the formation and the national character of Catalonia, a basic means of communication, of integration, and of social cohesion, . . . and the privileged bond between Catalonia and other Catalan-speaking lands, with which it forms a linguistic community that has made . . . a valuable contribution to universal culture. Furthermore, it has been the testimony of fidelity of the Catalan people toward their land and their particular culture.¹

The relationship between the Catalonian people and their language evokes the scholarship of Benedict Anderson, who perceived the modern nation-state as an "imagined political community": despite the fact that the members of such nations have personal relationships with only a very small proportion of their fellow citizens, "in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6). Though Anderson's complex, multifaceted analysis is not easily

¹ Generalitat de Catalunya. "Preàmbul." Llei de política lingüística, <http://llengua.gencat.cat/ca/detalls/article/Preambul-00004>. My translation.

summarized, his work helps us to recognize that “in the modern era, nations are no longer created in blood but imagined in language” (Norton and Pavlenko 4).

In this paper, I adopt Anderson’s concept of the linguistically constructed imagined community as the theoretical foundation for my analysis of *Tramuntana a la granja*, though the edifice that I will build upon this foundation departs from his seminal vision. First, Anderson focused on the contemporary nation-state and its tendency toward “administrative centralization” (42), situating both within a nexus that includes printing-press technology and capitalism’s “restless search for markets” (36). I, however, see the role of imagined community as more potent and enduring within the context of *stateless* nations such as Catalonia; the absence of political autonomy deprives a nation of symbolic elements and discourse conventions that help to create and maintain the group’s perceived unity. I also decouple the imagined community from market forces and the technological embodiment of language, instead foregrounding the formative role of language itself—as Ferdinand de Saussure affirms, “language . . . is social in its essence and independent of the individual” (19), and furthermore, “it is in great part the language which makes the nation” (21).

Second, Anderson’s conceptualization gains much of its force from the permanence, standardization, and cultural status of specifically *written* language. Peter Wogan claims that “language associations predispose western readers to accept Anderson’s argument that the nation was originally formed through print reading” (411). The ascendancy of printed language and “literacy,” in this context meaning the ability to read and write, is thoroughly intertwined with the scientific, bureaucratic, empirical orientation of the cultures from which certain influential nation-states emerged. Indeed, Wogan argues that “literacy symbolism has been at the heart of modern western identity” (412). I examine *Tramuntana a la granja* through a lens in which

orality—that is, language spoken and heard—exists in generative union with literacy yet ultimately supersedes it as the more energetic element in the psychological and emotional dynamic that gives birth to the imagined community. I believe that this approach harmonizes with Saussure’s view of orality as “a language’s natural sphere of existence” (22). It harmonizes also with *Tramuntana a la granja*, which is a story that revolves around *spoken* language but is shared with children through *written* language.

The *tramuntana* is a strong, cold wind that blows from the Pyrenees mountains, and a *granja* is a farm (primarily a livestock or poultry farm). Thus, the title of Sala i Vila’s work could be translated as *North Wind at the Farm*. Published in 2010 by Editorial Barcanova, a major publishing house that describes its activity as intimately linked to the diffusion of Catalan language and culture, the book won first prize in Barcanova’s “children’s and youth literature” category. This lighthearted but by no means frivolous tale takes place in a great plain, somewhere between the high mountains and the sea, that is so regularly buffeted by strong winds that a day of calm weather is enough to make the inhabitants uneasy. The protagonists are two farmers, Ramon and Teresa, who manage a *granja* called *mas Repòs* in the windiest portion of the windiest town in this hopelessly windy region. One night, an earlier-than-expected onslaught of the *tramuntana* catches Ramon and Teresa unprepared; they hadn’t locked the pets and livestock in their shelters, and thus the animals were not protected from the “unforeseeable consequences of the wind” (15).² After cleaning up debris and making repairs, the farmers are settling back into their agricultural routine when they discover that the animals have not emerged unaltered from their harsh encounter with the *tramuntana*. First a goat clucks like a chicken, then

² All quotations from *Tramuntana a la granja* are my translations of the original Catalan.

a cat crows like a rooster, and soon Ramon and Teresa realize that they have a problem on their hands. The rooster barks, the hens meow, the dogs bray like donkeys, the donkeys grunt like pigs—though everything looks normal at *mas Repòs*, the voices of the animals tell a story of deep confusion.

If we return to the theoretical framework of an imagined community made possible by the inherently social and unifying qualities of language, this brief introduction to *Tramuntana a la granja* reveals intriguing parallels. We can describe the farm as a microcosm, a micro-community representing the larger linguistic community that envelops it. And something has introduced disorder into this community. The cause of the disorder—an act of nature that is normal and familiar but has come too suddenly and with excessive force—could be interpreted in various ways, and the text itself does not provide clues that would strongly favor one reading over another. The effect, however, is much less ambiguous: the north wind has introduced a *chaos of orality* into the farm community. The pleasant chorus of contented livestock has been replaced by cacophony, but this cacophony derives not from the sounds themselves—for the sounds have not changed—but rather from the shattered identities that the sounds signify. The animals have lost the voices that belong to them, voices that are inextricably bound, especially in the minds of children, to their identities. When exploring the world of animals with a child, we don't ask, "What is the Latin name for a horse?" Instead, we ask, "What does a horse say?" A horse that has lost its true voice has lost something essential, and if it speaks with the voice of a cat, or a goat, or even of a mule, a child may refuse to acknowledge that it still can be called a horse.

In the preceding discussion I used the word "voice" to refer to the sounds that the animal makes. The term is accurate enough, and the equivalent word in Catalan, *veu*, can be used

similarly. However, the author of *Tramuntana a la granja* more frequently chooses a different word. When he describes the misfortune that has befallen the livestock, he uses the word *llengua*: tongue, language, as in *a* language, not language in general, which would be *llenguatge*. The animals have lost *their* language, their mother tongue, the language that reaches deep into their identity and whose loss or replacement signals rupture, fragmentation, dissolution—for “an imagined community presupposes an imagined identity” (Norton and Pavlenko 11).

The word *llengua* appears three times in the book, and two of those instances are charged with a connotative force that resonates intensely within the imagination of those who understand what the Catalan language means to the people of Catalonia. One instance mentions, in literal translation, the “language that corresponded to” the animals (77), but I believe that the concept is more clearly expressed by the English phrase “their rightful language.” In the other instance, we read that the animals “had forgotten the language with which they had always spoken. Or rather, they had exchanged it for another” (39). The emotive depth of this excerpt far surpasses the deceptive simplicity of the words. They *forgot* their language, their mother tongue—a tragedy, perhaps, for an individual person, but a fatal lapse for an imagined community that draws its very life from that language. And then we have something that is perhaps worse than a fatal lapse, namely, betrayal: “they had exchanged it for another.”

My argument thus far is that *Tramuntana a la granja* metaphorically portrays the loss of one’s native language and the confusion that this creates within an imagined community, especially when linguistic loss is accompanied by linguistic displacement. However, this message is not presented in isolation; rather, it is elucidated and amplified by three sections of the narrative that convey the negative consequences that arise when a community forgets its “rightful language.”

The first of these events marks a highly significant shift in the book's plot. Up to this point, the events at *mas Repòs* are bizarre and unsettling, but the farm faces no serious threat; the animals can still lay eggs, produce milk, and so forth. The tone changes, though, when a boy from a neighboring farm brings news that a fox has been making trouble in the area. He advises Ramon and Teresa to keep a close eye on the poultry, especially since their dogs won't offer much protection: the fox might get nothing more than a good laugh from two dogs that bray like donkeys. This very morning, Ramon had decided to stop worrying about their curious predicament. "Four days from now we won't even notice it," he says to Teresa. "When all is said and done, it makes no difference whether a rooster barks or sings" (44). Here Ramon plays the part of the pragmatist who, as Saussure says, "sees a language merely as a nomenclature" (16). His optimism begins to fade, however, as he realizes that in losing their language, his dogs have also lost their ability to defend the other animals from predators. Thus the first consequence is revealed: the community that loses its native language is prey to external enemies. The Spanish dictator Francisco Franco (1892–1975) prohibited the Catalan language in an attempt to suppress Catalan identity (Miller and Miller 113), and in the earlier stages this suppression was severe enough to elicit the term "cultural genocide" (Webber and Strubell i Trueta 15). Thus, older members of the Catalan nation may intuitively recognize the importance of language in protecting the imagined community from outside forces that seek to dominate or subsume it. And for children, the power of story can be enlisted to instill what personal experience has not yet made known.

The second consequence emerges when, in the following chapter, Ramon takes a tractor-load of animals to market and then returns with the tractor "more full than when he left" (54). Though for all practical purposes the animals were as valuable as ever, their confusion of voices

caused serious trouble with the customers. No one wants to buy a piglet that “speaks like a horse” (55), because surely it must have some strange disease. One man is interested in a colt, but when the animal moos like a cow, he becomes offended and leaves, thinking that Ramon had disguised calves as young horses. Finally, a woman even returns hens that she had purchased the previous week, saying that she “doesn’t want to make deals with fakes” (57). Now we see that the survival of *mas Repòs* is uncertain, but more importantly, the local market and all that it represents—cooperation, conviviality, interdependence, social and economic exchange—has been undermined. The loss of a native language exposes the imagined community not only to danger from without but also to dissension from within.

The third and climactic event in the series begins when a group of school children, accompanied by their teacher, arrives at *mas Repòs*; Ramon and Teresa had forgotten that a class was scheduled to visit the farm that day. The students are soon confused by the mixed-up voices of the animals, eventually declaring that “everything at this farm is wrong” (67). The beleaguered farmers explain the strange situation to the teacher, now readily acknowledging that since the animals exchanged languages, they’ve had one problem after another. The teacher’s terse response is reasonable enough, but one of her statements falls upon the community of *mas Repòs* with the weight of an ominous and poignant condemnation: “We’ll have to look for another farm. Yours is no longer a place where the children can learn” (69).

At this point we have reached the third and culminating consequence: a native language that is lost and replaced becomes a barrier between the generations of an imagined community. Saussure affirms that “in the lives of individuals and of societies, language is a factor of greater importance than any other” (7). A native language permeates all aspects of life, imprinting its unique character upon customs, values, self-expression, music, literature, education, and

spirituality. To exchange one language for another is to initiate a pervasive and multidimensional fragmentation that will leave the older estranged from the younger and the entire community in danger of death. Children's literature scholar Clémentine Beauvais reminds us that a child is a truly powerful member of society; though only adults have *authority*, meaning the power to legitimately seek and procure the submission of others, children have *might*, which Beauvais describes as "a form of power intrinsically linked to the 'possession' of a future" (81), and more specifically, "a future . . . in which to act" (82). Adults who create children's literature exercise their authority, but in so doing they also inevitably submit to the might—that is, the potential for future authority—of the child. In the scene of the students' visit to the farm, this dynamic is memorably conveyed through a convergence of the narrative mode with the textual reality of the book itself. The author of *Tramuntana a la granja*, in writing the book for children, manifests his authority and conveys his intended message, but within the story we confront the children as those who have authority over the *future* of the imagined community, and when the chaos of orality at *mas Repòs* leads them elsewhere, we see that the loss of the community's "rightful language" makes this future an uncertain one.

Tramuntana a la granja is an engaging, thought-provoking, and vibrantly illustrated example of children's literature that draws vitality from the confluence of language, identity, and national culture. These transcendent dimensions of the human experience cannot simply *exist* as though in stasis; rather, in order to endure, they must mature and reproduce. The maturation of language, identity, and national culture occurs in the minds and hearts of adults who reify them through acts of folkloric, aesthetic, or literary creation. Reproduction, on the other hand, culminates in the minds and hearts of children, for here is born the desire to valorize—and the will to preserve—these intangible treasures that, though unable to feed or clothe the body, have a

unique power to nourish the spirit, enlighten the intellect, and enrich daily life. The ongoing controversy surrounding Catalonia's independence movement is, I believe, an energizing force within the realm of artistic and literary creation. Catalan children's books are a valuable resource for further study of modern children's literature as a response to the linguistic hegemonies that have long accompanied political power structures and that exercise an increasingly constitutive function in the economic regime of twenty-first-century global capitalism.

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Between the Rows by Nancy Jentsch: Poems of Intimacy and Presence

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the wind whipped so hard
that stars shivered stones cowered

while silent breaths of will
just as inscrutable unfolded

the opaline petals
of my kitchen orchid

“Overnight” by Nancy Jentsch

Between the Rows by Nancy K. Jentsch was published in October 2022 by Shanti Arts, a self-described “fiercely independent publishing company whose work is grounded in nature, art, and spirit.” These three areas of interest fittingly capture Jentsch’s main sources of inspiration for her writing. Nature figures prominently in *Between the Rows*. The poet most often writes on the front porch of her rural home in Northern Kentucky, mining her creativity in her family surroundings and the hilly landscapes neighboring her historic home.¹ She regularly composes ekphrastic poetry and has engaged with varied artworks from Germany, France and the United States. *Between the Rows* includes seven poems written in response to German mixed media artist Bianca Artopé’s artwork. And spirituality, as a sacred interconnectivity of all life, unequivocally informs all of the poet’s writing. In this collection, Jentsch welcomes us “between the rows” in a space of mindfulness and intimacy with nature, ancestors, art, each other, ourselves. Her poems invite us to slow down, pause, be touched by the everyday gifts and ordinary wonder of our world; share in loss, grief and disquiet; attend to the vulnerable beauty of the nonhuman world. My reading of *Between the Rows* hopes to honor the dedication the author often inscribes for her readers when signing her books: “Reflect and enjoy.” Gentle yet clear imperatives that carry the author’s hope of joy for her readers, but foremost of a heightened

perception of the world brought forth through poetry. This study analyzes *Between the Rows* as a work of ecopoetry that engages with a vast network of multiple presences, spaces and temporalities: a web of interconnected organisms, human and nonhuman, past, present and unborn.

In his introduction to *Ecopoetry*, Scott Bryson identified three primary characteristics of ecopoetry: “an emphasis on maintaining an ecocentric perspective that recognizes the interdependent nature of the world”; “an imperative toward humility in relationships with both human and nonhuman nature”; and “an intense skepticism concerning hyperrationality, a skepticism that usually leads to an indictment of an overtechnologized modern world” (6-7). The poems highlighted in this study evidence all three characteristics of ecocentrism, humility and concern over repairing our connection with the natural world. Furthermore, my textual analysis embraces ecocritic Scott Knickerbocker’s aesthetic concept of “‘sensuous poesis,’ in which, rather than mirror the world, ... poems enact through formal devices such as sound effects the speaker’s experience of the complexity, mystery, and beauty of nature” (13). Knickerbocker argues that ecocritics have favored subject matter and mimetic realism at the expense of aesthetic expression. He proposes instead a reading of nature poetry based on “the process of rematerializing language specifically as a response to nonhuman nature” [...] “Ecological poetry posits a relationship between ethics and aesthetics. Poems best succeed at awakening one to the natural world through the emotive and rhetorical power they have over readers, and this power derives from the particular form that content takes” (2-3). If Jentsch’s poetry reveals her deep engagement with social and environmental justice—she warns of looming environmental threats and exposes the plight of migrants left out at the door of opulence--ethics never eclipses aesthetics in her writing. Jentsch is first a lover of words passionately searching for the most

expressive poetic form in order to create meaning. Her poetic voice is nothing less than epiphanic, the result of a rigorous craft, an unwavering attention to form, a painstaking quest to “slit the chrysalis / of English” (83) and to “rainbow words through prisms” (67). “Pen on Paper” (2019) shares the thrills and the uncertainties of the creative journey:

pen-touched paper
should burst with words
that tie-dye my page
in cerise suns
inch-worm whorls
cerulean loops
with a pinch
of sobering ochre
inescapable bittersweet

but sometimes
pen leaves only a blot
of ravenous darkness

The poems presented in *Between the Rows* are performative: they demand to be heard for their sound effects (alliterations, assonances, onomatopoeia); they must be visually observed on the page for their physicality (stanza length, breaks, lineation, enjambments); and they must be closely read for their figurative language.

Between the Rows is comprised of sixty poems arranged in four sections.³ The titles of the first three sections, “Unexpected,” “Into Uncertainty” and “Overnight” admit to a lack of certainty and clarity. Loss runs through these sections: loss of life, home, habitat, species, peace. In counterpoint, the fourth section titled “Every Day has Something in It” affirms presence, the certainty of “something” to be found. “Bucket list” (14), the poem opening the collection, sets the tone for the rest of the volume. The poem is written in the form of ten couplets cleverly paralleling the consecutive format of a numbered list. To the twenty-first century imagination, the phrase *bucket list* evokes lists of must-sees and must-dos to accomplish before one dies:

exotic destinations, thrilling experiences, measurable achievements. Nancy Jentsch’s list is far different. It does not locate meaning and substance outside, in some far-away place or in the accumulation of restless pursuits, but rather in the place where we stand and the things we have been gifted. The poet writes with all five senses on alert. “Bucket List” takes us on a sensorial day journey, smelling the hay at hand in a barn, anticipating the sweet taste of milk and blueberries, feeling the cleansing and electrifying power of the rain, sighting both the knobby burl and the perfect sphere of a blueberry, waiting patiently for the opening of the four o’clocks. Jentsch’s bucket list foregrounds intimacy with the natural world and invites us to experience its beauty and bounty at “half [our] normal speed.” In contrast to the frantic race of a to-do list, the very composition of the poem urges us to pause and breathe, inscribing a respiration between each couplet to allow for presence in the now and the here:

Sit by the four o’clocks
to watch them unfurl

when they join night’s first sighs
exhaling hue and scent

“Bucket List” is echoed by the poem closing the first section: “On an analog walk” (31) takes us on a similar journey of the senses. The poem launches with three short verses using assonances and one- or two-syllable words to sound out the incessant repetitive and fractured rhythm of the digital world:

no thumbs drum
no earbuds pulse
no Fitbits tick

The anaphoric negatives cast away the pulsating throb of the digital world to make room for the analog walk of five flowing verses, rich in alliterations and consonances, giving space and time for an exhilarating feast of the senses:

but champagne breeze prickles skin
birdsong bounces between wires
the bend ahead promises Oz
musky smells and sapsucker tapping
braid with the shade of a stand of trees

The third stanza of the poem visually disrupts both the monotonous throb and limited range of the first tercet and the leisurely pace and indulging length of the second stanza, heralding the unexpected:

Deer's stare
salamander's surprise
freeze time
so that
now
gains depth and breath
to sustain beyond
drumming pulsing ticking
at walk's end

This last stanza challenges us to Presence, undistracted by either the numbing of constant technological feeds or the euphoria of escape into nature. Presence is attentiveness and availability of the mind and heart for that split second in time when we may have the opportunity to connect intimately with our nonhuman partners. The sole capital letter of the poem--Deer--signals the momentous occurrence. The irregular lineation of the stanza prepares us for this encounter of the unexpected and converges in its middle core on the single word verse "now." Unadulterated presence in the place and time of our "now" is essential.

Jentsch's poetry aims at rediscovering and repairing that connection with our habitat. In "A Kind of Nothing is Prominently There Instead" (58), the poet offers her own perception and interaction with the living world. Whereas nature utterances are perceived by some as sheer annoyances--noisy bird calls, untamed weeds, invasive succulents--Jentsch approaches her surroundings with receptivity and alertness, reverence and wonder, delight and euphoria. She is

the in-the-know accomplice of birds, hearing “their knot of jocularities / in morning birdsong.” She “gasp[s] at first spring blooms” and “kneel[s] by Pheasant Eyes.” She “thrill[s] at succulents swabbed soft with rain.” Nature is not a mere backdrop to the poems, but an ecosystem of presences to engage with and learn from. For example, Jentsch portrays geese as “selfless leaders” who know “to peel back to the ranks” (34), alluding to the fact that geese travel in V-formation to conserve energy and birds take turns leading the formation. Welfare and safety of the community take precedence over individuals’ egos. Similarly, “All Brains and Thumbs” (68) illustrates the values of attentiveness, patience, and determination modeled by a cardinal:

an arched branch fell
with the first winter storm,
now anchored by inch
after inch of snow—a cardinal’s
perch where he awaits
a place at the feeder,
keeps clenched claws dry

if only I, with my brain-stuffed skull
and opposable thumbs could
grasp at chance as
firmly as he

“Virtual Sleep” (34) which opens “Into Uncertainty,” the second section of the volume, amplifies the message of mindful presence. It sounds the alarm of an earplugged humanity increasingly removed from any connection with nature, the characteristic that Bryson identified in ecopoetry as the “indictment of an overtechnologized modern world.” In this poem, the author, waiting at a bus stop, is noticing a young student “earplugged into virtuality” and oblivious to her natural surroundings, at that specific moment the raucous calls of geese, “masked ambassadors” “angled to scissor sky.”³ The poem warns of the emergence of a human

species dangerously disconnected from all other living entities, walled up and entrapped into its own esotropia and hypoesthesia:

And then the briars grow
seal the body's fortress
till nothing startles, wakes
not a kiss or even the geese
still plotting their course
 spring and fall
 north and south.

A strong sense of place anchors Jentsch's poetry. *Between the Rows* displays her deep ties to her immediate Kentucky surroundings: "Redbuds burst luminous" (74) in April; scents of "skunks, toads, voles" (15) linger in the valley; "peepers tsk a know-it-all taunt" (19); deers freeze time with "whole-note eyes" (46); "fresh-laid eggs [...] warm chilled hands / the scent of sweet clover spilling into lungs" (76). The poet paints for us aspects of our world that we are not able or not willing to see. She opens herself to a world of nonhuman presences that are manifested through colors, scents, sounds, shapes, temperatures and she invites us to become partners in this interconnected living web. Jentsch's deep engagement with the specifics of her local surroundings does not make her a regional poet, nor limits the range of her poetic landscape. Thus, in the whimsical alliterative "Landlocked Luck" (16), the poet's imagination wanders to seascapes and beaches. She compares the aerial acrobatics and loud calls of starlings to the rise and fall of waves: an avian "show and encore" echoing the "crest and crash" of ocean swell. Her musings have bridged and enhanced each geographical and time location and happily conclude with this query:

Or am I lucky living landlocked
by bluegrass and limestone
pinning a second stanza,
blue-green, to the poem the starlings
paint above our hills?

Place rootedness does not preclude mobility of space and time. Just as migratory birds plot their route “spring and fall / north and south” (35), the poet travels back and forth in space and time and transcends boundaries without losing her fundamental connections to her home. Her poetic engagement with the Kentucky natural world has uncovered affinities and linkages with distant places. Christine Gerhardt explores the notion of a mobile sense of place, particularly through migratory phenomena. The critic points out the growing number of environmental poems that “challenge all-too stable notions of place and place-connectedness as ecological ideals, from the perspectives of a genre that is uniquely suited to transcend place and time, without necessarily relinquishing literature’s referential dimension” (421). *Between the Rows* takes readers to war-torn Gaza and poverty-ridden Managua, to London, June 1940, as the city is being bombed and to New York, 1889, as the author’s ancestor disembarks to start a new life.

Birds figure prominently in *Between the Rows* and give the collection a dynamic sense of place and time. The author is a fervent birdwatcher who has been participating in the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Project Feederwatch for twenty-three years, faithfully counting winter birds at her feeders. Starlings, doves, nuthatches, juncos, woodpeckers, goldfinches, cardinals and their songs inhabit the space of the poems. We hear the *garooo* of the cranes (55), the *kikiriki* of the rooster (62), the cooing of the doves, the honking of the geese. Metaphors abound and help us visualize the “flying Vs” of the geese “angled to scissor sky” (34) and the “cartwheel” of starlings (16). However, this boisterous hub of colored feathers and distinctive sounds is under threat. The poem “Fall from Grace” (43) underlines the ecological fragility of our living habitat and foresees an environmental apocalypse:

What will become of us
when all the birds are gone,
when earth’s days tangle and riot, dreams

pale and dusk bestows mere darkness?

The question is posed in unambiguous terms. It is not a hypothesis; it is not “what would” but “what will”; it is not “if” but “when.” Damaged habitats, deaths of species, damaged “us.” The extinction of this world will mean the loss of images and the loss of language.

Jentsch uses the topic of avian migration to highlight the precarious situation of migrating creatures, human and nonhuman. In “Cranes’ View” (55), the poet alludes to the “last line” of cranes becoming refugees in a camp allotted to their kind:

Will its instinct
Pinpoint the plot
Allotted the species
As refuge?

“Cranes’ View” and “Fall from Grace” are companion pieces to the seven ekphrastic poems interspersed in the four sections of *Between the Rows*. Jentsch engages with activist artwork by German mixed media artist Bianca Artopé. The series “hanging hopes from chandeliers” was created in response to the refugee crisis in Germany in 2016. Artopé juxtaposes poignant images of tired, homeless, desperate refugees against images of pristine, luxurious, vacant dwellings for the rich. In “hanging hopes from chandeliers I” (40), Jentsch’s poetic interpretation emphasizes the human dimension of the crisis through words like “pulsing blood,” “quivering limbs” and “smelly wounds,” yet the tragedy remains unnoticed by the absent unconcerned wealthy: “polished opulence / sneers, veiled stairways / deceive, lamps / hoard light.” The artwork and Jentsch’s poem “hanging hopes from chandeliers V” (64) specifically represent human migrations due to climate change. Human and nonhuman species are either forced to abandon their native habitat that can no longer sustain life or become extinct. What is/will be the response of our entangled world? “Must our lives be stunted?” Or:

Let’s imagine it dancing

awash in clever colors
welcoming
even our wounded warmth

Jentsch writes from spaces of intimacy that nourish and sustain her artistic imagination. Her poetry shows her deep reverence for the vegetal and animal intelligences she shares life with. Similarly, her family provides a rich terrain of deep thinking and inspiration: we hear the voice of a wife, a mother, a grandmother, a daughter, a grand-daughter, a descendant. This voice speaks in all emotional registers from the inconsolable to the hopeful, and back. It opens a space of intimacy, between the rows, where author and reader connect with each other and where vulnerability and resilience conjoin. Nancy Jentsch's ecopoetic voice matters for our world, our now and our here. *Between the Rows* concludes with "Sometimes for a Moment" (85), a reminder to cultivate presence:

Then the firmament's
core uncurls
sap creeps up trunks
branches sway
cradle the still
unbridled blue

Notes

1. Some information in this essay is drawn from an interview Nancy Jentsch granted me on December 30, 2022, following the release of *Between the Rows*.
2. All poetry quotations are drawn from *Between the Rows*, unless noted otherwise. The titles and quotes in this essay reproduce capitalization, spacing and punctuation of poems exactly as they appear in the original.
3. Nancy Jentsch taught German and Spanish for thirty-seven years at Northern Kentucky University and regularly rode public transportation. Anyone familiar with the NKU area has seen the flocks of geese populating the campus. Since reading *Between the Rows*, the honking of the geese and their flying in V-formations has taken an entirely new meaning for this reader.

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The Intersection of Humanism and Religious Thought in Milton's Epic: Raphael as the Central
Figure of *Paradise Lost*

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John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is the product of humanist perspectives combining with religious thought and, much like the purpose of ancient mythology and religion, it too functions to provide an education about the human experience. The didactic aspect of *Paradise Lost* is most clearly notable in Raphael's discourse with Adam in books five through eight, when the angel educates the first man about heaven, hell, the cosmos, and the human condition. Ironically, it is neither God nor the Son but the divine messenger who is positioned as the great teacher of humanity. The archangel Raphael is positioned as the true protagonist who embodies Milton's own humanistic and didactic perspective that serves to educate us, the "fit audience find, though few" (*Paradise Lost* 7.31). Milton's perspective of what it means to be human provides a surreal definition that suggests that humanity often goes against what it knows to be right because humans are eternally flawed and are doomed to continue the cycle of falling like the original parents. The poem suggests that humans are defined by the guilt of the original sin and that the purpose of every person is to ascend toward the light of God through the education of their fallen state as Raphael's discourse reveals. *Paradise Lost*, then, becomes a lesson where Milton projects his own humanist agenda through the vessel of the archangel.

To better understand the humanistic nature that Milton constructs in *Paradise Lost*, one ought to consider the influence of epic mythology and Hellenistic literature. The poem is rife with echoes of the ancient epics. This is easily noted from the very start of the poem, as the beginning of book one mimics the opening lines of some of the most famous epics in literary history. Homer's *Iliad* begins with, "The wrath sing, goddess, of Peleus' son, Achilles" (1.1),

The Odyssey opens with, “Tell me, O Muse, of the man of many devices” (1.1), and Virgil’s *Aeneid* follows the opening statement with, “Tell me, O Muse, the cause” (1.8). Quite similarly, Milton also harks aid of the divine muses in his opening lines, “Sing Heav’nly Muse, that on the secret top / of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire / that shepherd” (*PL* 1.6-8) Immediately, the audience is made aware that Milton is relying on the epic form used by poets such as Homer and Virgil. This also provides information about his own classicist education—and he uses this powerful status of knowledge in crafting his own epic.

Mythology and epic often function to explain a specific culture’s curiosity and/or understanding of the world around them and to better explain humanity’s purpose within that world. Milton seems to consider a similar logic, especially when we look at the function of Raphael and the motives behind his education of Adam. In book eight, Raphael addresses Adam’s curiosities on the creation of the universe and the archangel also addresses the purpose of humanity. Raphael replies, “From Man or Angel the great Architect / Did wisely to conceal, and not divulge / His secrets to be scanned by them who ought / Rather admire” (*PL* 8.72-75). Much like the purpose of mythological accounts that contemplate the curiosities of the universe, Milton uses the same approach in puzzling over the creation of the cosmos. After attempting to explain things that cannot be explained in human terminology, Raphael summarizes the didactic lesson to Adam, “Be strong, live happy, and love, But first of all / Him, whom love is to obey, and keep / His great command; take heed lest passion sway / Thy judgement to do aught” (*PL* 8.633-36). Many myths follow a similar model: acknowledge a phenomenon, illustrate a story where divine beings have influenced said phenomenon, and then conclude with a moral philosophy for humanity.

The sheer amount of literary time that Raphael is present in the poem supports the idea that the angel is the true protagonist of *Paradise Lost*. God dispatches Raphael in the fifth book and the archangel becomes the key speaker from that point through the end of the book eight (*PL* 5.219-8.653). Yet, somehow, Raphael's significant presence through the four middle books does not warrant too many nods of recognition as the possible protagonist. The reason Raphael holds such a key position is likely an extension of his function: he becomes the great teacher of humankind. However, he still mirrors the position of the messenger god Hermes, as it is God who gives him his mission, "Go therefore, half this day as friend with friend / Converse with Adam" and "such discourse bring on, / As may advise him of his happy state, / Happiness in his power left free to will, / Left to his own free will, his will though free, / Yet mutable" (*PL* 5.230, 233-37). Raphael appears to simply be following the orders of God, yet the orders are overly vague. The angel is given free rein to convey God's message and to educate the first humans of their lot in life, the dangers of evil, and to advise them of the freedoms they have been given. This is all news to Adam and, rightfully so, he has numerous questions for the divine teacher and messenger. Milton positions Raphael as the teacher and the lesson takes up the greater span of the poem. But why choose Raphael as the character responsible for this task? The angel, in fact, fulfills a minor role in biblical doctrine and only appears in the Book of Tobit as a guide to Tobias, and in the First Book of Enoch. These books are part of the Apocrypha, which are a dozen or so books that appear with the Old Testament of particular bibles. However, in the First Book of Enoch, Raphael is said to cleanse the earth of the fallen angels' wickedness. God commands Raphael to "heal the earth which the angels have corrupted, and proclaim the healing of the earth" (Covenant Christian Coalition 1.10.5-9). However minor his role in biblical texts, Milton illustrates his knowledge of the angel, "and to him called / Raphael, the sociable spirit,

that deigned / To travel with Tobias” (*PL* 5.220-22). We know that Milton did not consult these two texts alone because his Raphael shares so many traits with Homer’s Hermes and Virgil’s Mercury, even referring to Raphael, through the voice of God, in terms comparable to Hermes on several occasions.¹

The reasoning behind Milton’s choice for Raphael as the great teacher could be due to the ease in which he could craft such a character from past and present traditions, that was familiar to his fit audience, and in such a way that he could convey a single truth—blending biblical and mythological narratives—by employing the literary method of Christian mythology.

Anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski argues that “the really important thing about the myth is its character of a retrospective, ever-present, live actuality. It is to a native neither a fictitious story, nor an account of a dead past; it is a statement of a bigger reality still partially alive” (126). One could argue that Milton’s project follows a similar purpose: his epic lives in the “ever-present” Christian moment that provides a retrospective account of the origins of humanity that, through the construction of Raphael, connects to a bigger reality, the “one true history” (MacCaffrey 14) that calls upon the ancient moments portrayed by varying myths. Myths have always functioned as learning devices that help people understand the puzzling world around them (Leftkowitz 1), and Milton’s Christian myth is no different. Mythology has played an important role in the development of our conscience and understanding humankind’s role in the world. As Kathryn Bennet explains, “that man, being conscious of himself, was nagged by the necessity to explain himself as part of all life and the universe, and that consequently myths, rituals, and religious ceremonies are rich resources for teaching man’s growing understanding of himself” (Bennett 25). The biblical story of Genesis accomplishes just that, it is a story of self-

¹ For a comparison of these figures, see: *Paradise Lost* 5.247-53, 266-70, *The Odyssey* 5.47-59, *The Aeneid* 4.298-321.

awareness and how humans originated in a world they did not yet understand. This is similar to the ancient texts of Homer, Virgil, and even Ovid and Hesiod.

Unlike the epic mythologies of the ancient writers, Milton included much more conversation between characters to share information with his audience. Rather than simply sharing a fantastic narrative, Milton chose to employ colloquial language as the main means for conveying information. God commands Raphael to “Converse with Adam” as the method in which to educate (*PL* 5.230). Sharon Achinstein discusses Milton’s use of the conversation mode because it permits “human expressivity through talk” and it is the mode “by which human consciousness comes into being within the impersonality of the epic genre” (592). The power of speech in *Paradise Lost* has been the focus of much scholarship, specifically as it relates to Satan’s inner dialogue and his slithering tongue of temptation. But the potency of Raphael’s language as it has the power to educate Adam and Eve, and in turn, every following generation of humanity, does not receive its fair amount of attention.

When considering the speech found in classical epics, it is generally centered on the central figure. That figure dominates the narrative and most speech is either filtered through that character or concerns that character in some way. For instance, the language in the *Odyssey* is focused on Odysseus in a narrative style more often than being expressed *through* him. The epic even begins with a dialogue on Mount Olympus between Athena and Zeus, but their conversation considers the wellbeing of Odysseus. Odysseus is the epic hero and primary protagonist, and he takes a commanding role in the story by being present (in one way or another) in every character’s speech. Perhaps this is because the ancient epics were originally orated by bards in public spaces. *Paradise Lost*, however, did not originate as an oral narrative and its speech was designed to be read. This slight difference in audience intention could be the

reason why the colloquial speech is more frequent and the dialogue between characters seems more natural, especially between Raphael and Adam. The Renaissance has been considered by many as the period of transition from the “ear” to the “eye.” But regardless of the intended audience, the ancient epics and Milton’s poem function to educate audiences of their humanity and their position within this world.

Raphael and Adam converse with one another for nearly a third of the poem. Adam is put into an advantageous position and realizes this unique opportunity to learn from the angel, “sudden mind arose / In Adam, not to let the occasion pass / Given him by this great conference to know / of things above this world” (*PL* 5.452-56). Raphael is faced with a difficult task of teaching Adam all the things he wants to know, but the archangel must translate his divine knowledge into language that is comprehensible to the first man, “Sad task and hard, for how shall I relate / To human sense the invisible exploits” (*PL* 5.564-65). Much like Raphael’s task in teaching Adam, the authors of epic myths are faced with similar difficulties—educating audiences by relating mysterious phenomena through use of divine intervention while making the lessons accessible to general human understanding. But the “heroic virtue,” as Karen Edwards phrases it, “that saturates the poem from beginning to end is the desire to learn. According to *Paradise Lost*, learning is the great adventure of life, the whole of life. It incorporates into itself every part of lived experience, including most especially the experience of loving other human beings” (250). The desire to learn is within every reader of *Paradise Lost* and it is the nature of the reader, though select and few, to be challenged by the epic.

Perhaps the calculated difficulty of the poem is the reason for Milton to call upon his muse in hopes to locate the “fit audience find though few” (*PL* 7.31). Stanley Fish addresses this exact question meticulously: “The fit reader, then, will regard the difficulty of the poem as a

compliment to his own powers, and his reward will be commensurate with the effort: the poem is not only a vehicle for sublime ideas, it is an instrument by which the reader's mind can be educated to receive them" (54-55). The difficulty of the poem and its demand upon the audience's mind and intelligence is quite the gift to receive; it is an education unlike any else. After reading the epic and comprehending all of the information and coming to terms with the precepts that Milton has just provided his readers, one can't help but resonate with Adam after he was taught his own humanity by the great angelic teacher, Raphael, when the first parent says: "divine / Historian, who thus largely hast allayed / The thirst I had of knowledge, and vouchsafed / This friendly condescension to relate / Things else by me unsearchable, now heard / With wonder, but delight, and, as is due / With glory attributed to the high / Creator" (*PL* 8.6-13). Complex literature like *Paradise Lost* ultimately becomes a reward in itself and serves as a "tribute to the education and culture of the readers whom he challenged" (Liebeschuetz 208). It is this power of knowledge that Milton is trying to instill in his fit audience that is illustrated in the discourse between Raphael and Adam.

Although Adam and Eve ultimately fall from grace, Raphael's position as the divine teacher can still be viewed as successful and the fall is merely a necessary step for the original parents in discovering their own humanity. Modern concepts of learning are often intrinsically tied to evaluations of the student's mastery of the lesson. This is an unfair procedure to employ when evaluating the learning process of Adam and Eve and judging whether Raphael is a successful teacher or not. The reason for this is because *Paradise Lost* is essentially an episode in Adam and Eve's lives. In fact, the first humans were immortal beings until they were led through the eastern gate and toward the subjected plain, which occurs nine lines before the poem's end (*PL* 12.640). To know whether or not they mastered the lesson would be to look forward into the

future of Adam and Eve, which is beyond the scope of *Paradise Lost*. However, even though the first humans were banished from the garden, Raphael's teaching can still be viewed as a successful venture.

Adam and Eve's fall from grace and banishment from the garden were necessary factors in learning the power of their own freewill. Freewill is a dangerous power as God mentions to Raphael in his initial charge to the angel (*PL* 5.233-37). Raphael follows through with God's command by advising Adam of his current situation in the garden, the dangers that come with disobeying God, and teaches the first man that he has the power to make his own choices but that they will come with consequences. By doing as God asked and successfully teaching the first man the pros and cons of freewill, Raphael succeeded in educating Adam. Some scholars, such as Kimberly Johnson, have argued that Raphael can be interpreted as a trickster figure and that he is the one responsible for the fall because his education and powerful speech tainted Adam's ignorant bliss (Johnson 205-18). This is partially agreeable because Raphael is in part responsible for Adam and Eve's fall, but he did not do this with malicious intent as some have suggested. The fall was beneficial because it was the first step in understanding our own humanity. Achinstein argues that by falling, Adam and Eve receive "the right to have rights" (592). The lesson taught by the archangel was never about remaining subservient to God; it was more about teaching the first humans that they have choices, and that God wants them to choose him and his love, not just to obey as mindless slaves. Furthermore, Raphael explains that although angels, too, have freewill, they do not have the ability to ascend back into God's grace after falling. Adam and Eve discover their humanity through the education of Raphael. He gives them the knowledge needed to be flawed, to make mistakes, to choose for themselves, but he also gives them the knowledge that they should always choose God's love: "take heed lest

passion sway / Thy judgement to do aught, which else free will / Would not admit; thine and all thy sons / The weal or woe in thee is placed; beware. / I in thy persevering shall rejoice, / And all the Blest: stand fast; to stand or fall / Free in thine own arbitrament it lies. / Perfect within, no outward aid require; / And all temptation to transgress repel” (PL 8.635-43). Raphael followed God’s instructions, educated Adam, and the archangel’s closing comments summarize his deliverance of human self-awareness to Adam.

Milton’s initial claim in *Paradise Lost* is that he will accomplish “Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme” (PL 1.16). This quote has been the center of numerous scholarly discussions that focus on things like the composition, the poetry, the idea of a new epic or dying genre, a reimagining of the books of Genesis and Revelation, etcetera. But what if Milton was talking about his hero? Maybe what has not yet been attempted was to build a character that was so vital and *subtly* powerful that even in a narrative that included such powerful personas as God, Christ, Satan, Adam, and Eve, that this other character would surmount them all. Milton seems to have done this with his character of Raphael. The traditional idea of an epic hero—like Aeneas, Odysseus, or Achilles—does not present itself in *Paradise Lost*. Perhaps this explains why so many scholars debate who the real hero is, with many leaning in favor of Satan. The true hero in Milton’s poem may be said to be something different, an archangel that is positioned somewhere between God, Satan, and Adam. Raphael willingly serves God loyally, defends heaven, he bars Satan and the fallen angels within the gates of hell after the war in heaven (PL 8.238-41) and he educates the first humans and delivers the gift of humanity to them. Raphael thus educates Adam in the meaning of humanity: it is freewill, the right to choose for oneself and to accept the consequences of those actions, it is the right to fall, to fail, to struggle, to rise to the challenge of

any occasion, to choose God's love and ascend from the state of fallen grace, in short, Raphael teaches Adam what it means to be human.

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“I read it in the grammar long ago”: *Titus Andronicus* and the State of English Studies

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In “Presentism, Anachronism and the Case of *Titus Andronicus*,” Cary DiPietro and Hugh Grady argue that “presentism” offers a useful methodology for inquiry in Shakespeare studies, an area all but exhausted by a quarter century of New Historicism. Using *Titus Andronicus* as a case study of sorts, the authors contend Shakespeare’s bloodiest play “stages [twenty-first century] experiences of terrorism in mediated, aesthetic form” (44).

DiPietro and Grady are far from the first critics to see contemporary relevance in this previously disparaged drama. Julie Tamor’s 1999 adaptation was borne out of the director’s belief that Shakespeare’s most violent creation spoke to the excesses of the postmodern era, and, more recently, David Sterling Brown has articulated the racial dynamics of the Elizabethan tragedy in relation to Critical Race Theory.¹ Any person cognizant of the post 2015 rise of populist politics in America can discern uncanny echoes in the play’s representation of a weary country, weakened by tribal grievances, prone to violence in the name of perceived patriotism.

Whether presentism can further Shakespeare studies remains to be seen. An unabashedly presentist take on *Titus Andronicus*, though, can provide a productive lens for students to analyze English Studies itself. The play of contested authorship,² set during the obvious decline of the Roman empire, is an apt vehicle for exploring a once dominant profession that is contracting as its academic authority is assailed.³

My own “presentist” take came from an unexpected pedagogic turn. In 2021, I was tasked with constructing a revised capstone for the English program, one that was to offer a summative experience of the degree as well as vocational guidance. The best way to achieve this in a *seminar* setting, I figured, was to grant students experience in forms of business writing and

other practical modalities while they explored the political exigencies that forged the study of English literature.

English, as a discipline taught to native speakers in Anglo-American universities, arose in a response to 19th-century labor riots in England. One of the reform efforts designed to quell this unrest was the expansion of educational opportunity. Because working class students lacked the classical training of their wealthy peers, they were provided a “civilizing” curriculum centered on English history, language, and literature.⁴ The new accreditation pathway would eventually displace its classical progenitor in terms of availability, cultural significance, and even prestige.⁵

To discuss this educational evolution in my class, I wanted to start with Euripides’ *The Bacchae*. This play seemed a proper professional touchstone because its ritualistic dismemberment can signal divine (and disciplinary) rebirth. I intended to conclude the course with a contemporary take on the ancient Greek tragedy, Wole Soyinka’s *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite*, a work that asks audiences to consider the classical antecedent as an eternal present. *Titus Andronicus* was, in comparison, a pedagogic afterthought. My English Education students needed an opportunity to craft practical, work-related materials in the course, and a study of Shakespeare was the best option for this. Almost every English teacher addresses the Bard in the classroom in some way, so I included Shakespeare’s bloodiest play because it fit the course theme, sparagmos.

In retrospect, *Titus Andronicus* was all but assured a central prominence in the fully realized course. In many ways, Shakespeare IS the core of modern literary studies, so any discussion of his widely analyzed work has implications that can be linked to professional norms, and easily turned to metanalyses of literary studies itself. Any advanced study of Shakespearean drama requires careful consideration of:

- the nature of authorship
- the need for scholarly editions
- the evolution of language
- the complex relation between the stage and the page.

Simply put, any inclusion of Shakespearean play will aid professional and programmatic ends.

That said, *Titus Andronicus* is particularly germane to an exploration of English Studies in the second decade of the twenty first century. The play's fractious politics mirrors the state of higher education today. We too are in the midst of uncertainty and upheaval, where old certitudes (regarding the value, purpose, and function of a college education) no longer hold sway. Ambition, demagoguery, and contestation over natural order dominate educational discourse, as would-be rulers war over who has the right to restore order. And all of this is occurring while a mostly mythic and off-stage populace is invoked, provoked, and purportedly quelled by pious pronouncements that masquerade as virtue and merit.⁶

Even more interestingly, Shakespeare's bloodiest play literalizes the construction of the western tradition in ways his other Roman tragedies, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, *Cymbeline*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Coriolanus*, do not. As Cora Fox remarks, "characters, plot, and imagery" in *Titus Andronicus* "are self-consciously defined by classical fictions, and the characters seem strangely and horrifyingly aware of this" (Fox 113). Cunning speeches are secured, and devious deeds are designed, in the *textual authority* of obviously canonical works.⁷ Words are quite literally made weapons in performative violence that achieves a visceral impact.⁸ The final feast could even be said to embody the unsavory aspects, and unintended consequences, of translating the universal over time.

A motivated instructor, like the world-weary Marcus Andronicus, can “teach” students “how to knit again” the “broken limbs” of *Titus* into one embodied approach that foreground the exigencies of English Studies (*Tit.* 5.3.71-73). And this can be achieved by framing the dramatic diegesis in disciplinary debates.

***Titus* showcases citation as action.**

Chiron and Demetrius’ heinous crimes are crafted through a selective reading of Ovid. Exploiting the young men’s unchecked desire for political advancement, physical conquest, and maternal approval, Aaron convinces them to rape Lavinia by referencing canonical characterization of Lucrece⁹ and Philomela. Clearly cognizant of Ovid’s transformative tale, they choose to remove their brutalized victim’s hands when they cut out her tongue, attempting to save themselves from Tereus’ fate.¹⁰ The excision of Lavinia’s extremities, though, does not forestall her ability to use the written word to identify her assailants. She frightens her young nephew by repeatedly pointing to the relevant pages in Ovid’s work, and she uses her mouth and wrist stumps to hold a stick she uses to write her rapists’ names in the sand.

Metanalysis to be explored with students: This brutal scene can be used to explore why we cite authors, even in our hyperlinked age of cultural sampling—and how canons and canon formations control who can speak.

***Titus* suggests literary art is both autotelic and actualized.**

Lavinia’s written testimony will prove fatal for her assailants,¹¹ in ways that further enmesh them in the transformative tale they assumed they could exploit to their own advantage. When Titus gets ahold of his daughter’s rapists, he slaughters them and cooks them into pies that

he feeds to their mother and her emperor husband, adding layers of literary reference by transmogrifying these later-day Tereuses into the children who were cannibalized for their parent's crime.

Metanalysis to be to be explored with students: Here students can see the long lineage of metafiction, and how and why a modern interest in language as palimpsest undergirds the formalist study of literature in general. Lavinia's use of the *written* word, and Titus' fatal pronouncement, can also be used to explore the intersection of literary and legal authority.

***Titus* literalizes the potential violence of interpretation.**

The cunningly literate Aaron is the first to recognize the significance of Titus' "weapons wrapped about with lines" (*Tit.* 4.2.35)¹² because he himself uses the written word to wound.¹³ The elaborate set up of Quintus and Martius is secured through a forged letter Aaron presents Tamora in Act 2 scene 3. With a few well-placed words,¹⁴ Aaron and Tamora dispatch Bassianus and frame two of Titus' sons for the murder.

Metanalysis to be to be explored with students: Aaron graphically demonstrates the weaponization of literature (and culture). Students should be asked to explore this weaponization in relation to the current war on public education, especially the bloody battleground of "cultural indoctrination." Students can and should be asked to consider why there are so many newly emergent groups seeking to legislate what students read.

***Titus* questions the Western tradition it affirms.**

Tamora the Goth Queen and Aaron the Moor, her lover, are supposed to be barbarians, yet they are highly literate individuals who espouse values that align with those of Titus. The play begins with the vanquished queen asking Titus to abide by his own rules of conquest, and the denouement includes Aaron trying to save his own son from the emperor's wrath, just as Titus has been doing throughout. Chiron and Demetrius are not as clever, complex, or cunning as their mother or her lover, but even these immature braggarts are familiar with famed lines of Latin literature.¹⁵

Quite significantly, Act 4 scene 2 limns a lingua franca that subtly undermines the "civilizational" claim of a western tradition. What truly separates the Romans from the Goths when they share the same literature, beliefs, and cultural references? Contemporary Rome has become, from Titus' perspective, "wilderness of tigers" (*Tit.* 3.1.57), so what can rightly distinguish the savage?

Metanalysis to be to be explored with students: Students should be asked to analyze what the "west" is in this play and discuss the "classical tradition" this Renaissance drama stages. They should be encouraged to consider Shakespeare's own "classical" (and canonical) standing in relation to the Roman tradition he references.

***Titus* asks what lessons we are to learn from literature.**

As J.K. Barret notes, "Literary history sets the temporal scene" in *Titus Andronicus* "but it is the interpretation of that literature that proves crucial to the play" (454). And it is Titus's interpretation that impels the plot. Alarbus is sacrificed for the same reason King Turnus was in *The Aeneid*: to remove conflict and restore Rome in peace. Titus sees no problem promising his betrothed daughter to Saturninus because Rome itself was founded on a broken betrothal (when

the previously promised daughter of the King of the Latins, another Lavinia, is married to Aeneas). Titus will also end the play enacting a scene from Livy's famed *History*.

In Act 5 scene 3, Titus poses a question regarding Book 3 chapter 44 of Livy's *History*. Turning specifically to Saturninus, he asks the emperor if it were it right for Virginius to slay his daughter after Verginia had been "enforced, stained, and deflowered" (*Tit.* 5.3.38). Saturninus proclaims it was "[b]ecause the girl should not survive her shame" (*Tit.* 5.3.41). When Titus then kills his down defiled daughter in front of the emperor, a horrified Saturninus exclaims: "What has thought done, unnatural and unkind?" (*Tit.* 5.3.48). In conversation, Titus and Saturninus agreed on the "pattern, precedent, and lively warrant" (*Tit.* 5.3.44).¹⁶ The literalization of that warrant, though, elicits distaste and disgust (and that is even before Saturninus learns what is in the pies).

Metanalysis to be explored with students: Students should be asked to consider the function literary pronouncements serve "in life." What is the purpose of literature, and how does (or should) it guide us?

***Titus* underscores fatal flaws in noble ventures.**

This really is the space where the "broken limbs" come together in an embodied analysis of an embattled, but not blameless, English Studies.

The returning hero, who sacrificed so much for Rome, also set the stage for its undoing. He brought the Goth queen back to the imperial center, and he named Saturninus emperor. In each case, the good soldier was merely following the established order that had been provided to him. Unthinkingly following a tradition he deems inviolable, he seals his family's fate, sacrificing almost all of his remaining sons along the way before he kills his daughter.

The metanalysis possible here comes from considering the good soldier Titus as an embodiment of a seemingly secure profession that only sensed the importance of vocational reflection, cultural engagement, and strategic uses of political unity after much carnage and death. Confident in a proscribed order where our own authority would always be recognized, English scholars spent decades acting as though the sacrifice of our tenured positions and the loss of our young scholars would ultimately serve the greater good of an academy that would still stand as a cultural center, despite all the losses in the hinterlands. The profession did not perceive its loss of authority (or the precipitous decline of academe in general) until it was too late, and we still often fail to see the way our discursive pronouncements empower enemies.

Students should be encouraged to explore what is (or should be) professional pride, and what proper political relations are, in the context of literary tradition that has to be flexible as well as fixed. Students, after all, are the young scholars who are left, as Lucius is, to heal harm and wipe away woe, so they should study the fatal flaws of their professional progenitors so they may “knit again” in these dark times.

Notes

¹ Brown discusses his various studies of the play in the November 5, 2020 Folger Shakespeare Library podcast “Black Lives Matter in *Titus Andronicus*.” Eric L. DeBarros’ 2022 analysis of the “uncurling” of Aaron’s hair provides a slightly different take on the textual lives that matter in the play.

² For a recent overview of the authorial debate, see Hulse’s work.

³ For the latest work of longform journalism on decline of the discipline, see Heller.

⁴ See Viswanathan’s *Masks of Conquest*. Successful colonial education efforts were applied in the imperial center when the lower classes got restless.

⁵ The area of study that was risible in the Edwardian period (see *Brideshead Revisited*) would become one of the embodiments of culture mid-century, as the career of F.R. Leavis demonstrates.

⁶ Ron DeSantis' aggressive overhaul of education in the state of Florida is the most visible example. Funded by wealthy donors and relying on out of state foot soldiers from conservative think tanks, the emboldened governor is attempting to reshape the public school system in his image.

⁷ See Chaudhuri, Holderness, Oakley-Brown, Pivetti, Rudd, Weber, and West.

⁸ See Bahr's essay on "interpretive violence."

⁹ Marcus also references the legendary Lucretia after he finds the mutilated Lavinia and he vows vengeance for his niece (*Tit.*4.1.89–94). While this allusion lacks the "argument" supplied in Shakespeare's narrative poem, it adds symbolic resonance to the play's quest for a proper ruler of Rome.

¹⁰ See Weber's "Worse than Philomel."

¹¹ As Anderson notes, what is written is "executed" in the play, and this execution can be linked to the playwright's understanding of legal precedent: "A shift in how early modern legal theorists understood just what was at stake in the act of making a contractual obligation allows Shakespeare to recast how the period made sense of its obligation to the past" (303).

¹² Culhane differs with most critics in suggesting that even Aaron subtly misreads Titus' intent. There is, in his estimation, a third way to read Horace's lines. This intriguing take is offered in an overview of the play's treatment of Livy.

¹³ See Pearson.

¹⁴ See Kerr's study of Aaron's letter (and act of reading).

¹⁵ This familiarity does not render Chiron or Demetrius terribly good readers. They do misquote famous works, and clearly lag behind their mother in understanding. Most critics consider Tamora as clever as Aaron believes her to be. An interesting exception is Danielle A. St. Hilaire, who argues Tamora "status as an outsider" is evident in her misreading of foundational Roman texts.

¹⁶ See Dickinson.

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