

The background of the cover is a light green color. It features several small, black line-art illustrations of insects, including flies and bees, scattered across the upper half. The lower half of the cover is dominated by a dense, intricate line-art illustration of various plants and flowers, including large daisy-like flowers, smaller blossoms, and tall, feathery seed heads.

Intersections and Interruptions  
English Honours Essays 2022

Department of English  
Dalhousie University



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*Cover Art by Emmelia A. Sharples*

# Intersections and Interruptions

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## Foreword

In the Fall Term of 2021, I had the privilege of teaching our department's Honours Capstone course. As the course instructor, one of my responsibilities was to guide our fourth-year Honours students as they worked closely with their supervisors to produce the essays that appear here. Though we have always had excellent Honours English students at Dalhousie, this group deserves special recognition. Not only did they excel as they dealt with the many challenges brought by the Covid-19 pandemic, they also moved through the final two years of their degrees with remarkable industry, alacrity, and grace. Though the pandemic years have been challenging for us all, they have been especially so for students isolated from their classmates and professors and forced to adapt to new ways of learning and being. Their resilience and determination can be seen not only in the ways they managed to thrive in difficult and unprecedented circumstances, but also in the quality of the research, writing, and thinking that is so amply on display here.

As the students talked to one another about their work, and as they presented it to their fellow students and professors, we were all struck by how much their essays share in common. Though writing about topics ranging from the struggle for identity in nineteenth-century representations of women, to the poetics of contemporary prairie poetry, to the use of sound in twentieth-century drama, to the connections among ideas of beauty and those of communism, and to the advantages of two-eyed seeing in reading Indigenous writing, it became clear that all were deeply concerned with issues of social justice and the importance of recognizing – and hearing – alternative points of view. Though it has been said that teachers stand to learn much from their students, I think we can all learn from work that reflects a deep commitment to a future more equal, just, and sustainable. Indeed, the quality of the work our students produced, and the ideas and issues that intrigue them, should give us all reason to hope.

– Lyn Bennett

Many 19<sup>th</sup>-century British novelists wrote versions of the *Bildungsroman*, or novel of development. If their protagonists were male—like the eponymous hero of Sir Walter Scott’s *Waverley* (1814)—this meant following their path from uncertain youth to established adult, a transformation typically marked by their abandoning romantic daydreams, wising up to their responsibilities, and making the right choice of a wife. For female protagonists, however, this model was fraught with difficulties, because of women’s relative lack of autonomy and the hard fact that, however loving their relationships, they gave up their independent identities on marriage. As a result, novels focusing on women’s development often show it as an ongoing and unresolved struggle. In this essay, Emmy Sharples examines two novels—George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and George Gissing’s *The Odd Women* (1893)—that follow their heroines’ complicated and ultimately thwarted efforts to find a fulfilling place in the world, one that serves both their needs and their desires. Even though their stories are separated by nearly a century, Eliot’s Maggie Tulliver and Gissing’s Rhoda Nunn both live in a society that severely restricts the options they have for shaping their own identities: their educations do not serve them well, their options for pursuing work or finding a vocation are limited, and marriage is detrimental to their flourishing rather than a fulfilling culmination. Sharples’s essay astutely lays out the ways Eliot and Gissing treat the central themes of the *Bildungsroman*, engaging with theories of the form as well as with a range of other critical analyses of *The Mill on the Floss* and *The Odd Women*. Rhoda, the more modern woman, has more options than Maggie, but Sharples concludes that ultimately both novels show the need for wider social change if women are to grow into their true identities and claim their place in the world.

– Rohan Maitzen

## The Incomplete Female Bildungsroman

The Unconventional Heroine’s Struggle for Identity in the 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Novels *The Mill on the Floss* and *The Odd Women*

Emmelia A. Sharples

*The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot and *The Odd Women* by George Gissing revolve around their unconventional heroines’ failed attempts at identity formation. Despite *The Mill on the Floss* being an early 19th-century British novel and *The Odd Women* being a later 19th-century British novel, both Eliot and Gissing focus on identity development. Arguably, this focus leads their stories to be subversions of the German novel of development or *Bildungsroman*. To date, there is no exact English translation of the German word *Bildungsroman*, although versions of English translations exist. The closest English equivalent that critics like Lorna Ellis and Barbara White convey is a “novel of development” (Ellis 16) or “a coming-of-age novel” (White 14). Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* resembles the *Bildungsroman*’s developmental structure by following the unconventional female character, Maggie Tulliver. Throughout the novel, Maggie continuously tries and fails to identify with her society. She searches for a sense of meaning in various areas of her life

but does not solidify a purpose or a sense of intimacy before her untimely death. Likewise, in *The Odd Women*, Gissing portrays the unconventional woman Rhoda Nunn, who attempts to develop her identity through teaching women independence and basic office skills. Although Rhoda finds autonomy in teaching, she remains in a state of uneasiness over her romantic relationships, causing uncertainty about her function in life and a sense of dissatisfaction from a lack of desired intimacy. In both the novels, it is clear that the heroine desires an identity beyond Britain’s traditional female marriage plot, causing them to search for identity in ways that do not resemble this female model. Neither Eliot nor Gissing can offer a complete solution to the uncertainty around women’s identity formation. Although their characters search for identity, societal factors do not enable a synthesis between unconventional identities and complete satisfaction. This lack of synthesis is maintained as the traditional marriage plot structure goes against

Maggie and Rhoda's desired agency. Thus, for Maggie and Rhoda to create an identity and achieve happiness, they must subvert the traditional marriage plot structure.

*The Mill on the Floss* and *The Odd Women* can be read as unique versions of the Bildungsroman. They mirror a Bildungsroman model by conveying the development of a young character throughout the process of becoming an adult or growing in some format. In simpler words, they follow their heroines' lives as they face and overcome challenges. Where the novels differ is in the stage of life in which their characters are introduced, demonstrating individualized versions, or subversions, of the development story. Eliot chooses to follow Maggie from her time "as a little girl" standing "on the edge" of the Mill through her struggle and failures to identify with an intellectual life (Eliot 8). Unfortunately, Maggie does not develop into her adult life, representing Eliot's inability to overcome the societal challenges around scholarly women that Maggie faces. Contrastingly, Gissing dives into the end of Rhoda's development at a point in her adult life where she struggles to conceptualize "dwell[ing]" with a potential marriage partner, Everard, "for the rest of [their] lives" (Gissing 259). Unlike Maggie, Gissing can bring Rhoda's development into her adult life but fails to demonstrate a way for Rhoda to keep her identity and achieve the intimacy she desires. Despite focusing on different growth stages, both novels have a developmental structure as the women must learn and overcome their challenges to move towards happiness. Their inability to do so creates subversions of the Bildungsroman model as identity is strived for but not fully achieved.

As both novels subvert the Bildungsroman model, neither Eliot's nor Gissing's heroines fit into the category of the traditional Bildungsroman. Critics of the Bildungsroman, including White, define how the traditional Bildungsroman explores the growth of male characters and involves grooming "the young hero for marriage" through wealthy societal means like education and vocation (14). Nor do they fit into the critic's perception of the traditional female Bildungsroman that typically follows the development of "younger girls" as they must pass "tests in submission" (White 14). The traditional female Bildungsroman outlines a process of

women "growing down" rather than "growing up" in society, meaning that the women are encouraged to conform to traditional ideas of motherhood and femininity like staying in the home instead of joining the workforce (White 14). As the critic Elaine Baruch appropriately states, the whole female Bildungsroman model "takes place in or on the periphery of marriage" to direct the heroine towards a domestic life (335). In this traditional female model, the woman "seeks upward mobility in marriage," not in education like her male counterparts (Baruch 336). The workforce is, thus, seen as a male domain and actions like "opening up all professions" and "women's education" are thought to lead to a "decline in motherhood" (Baruch 337). Maggie and Rhoda, who equally desire something beyond marriage, search for identity in a subverted model rather than developing into traditional 19th-century British women. In doing so, both heroines reject the traditional female Bildungsroman model.

The female Bildungsroman shifted through many variations across 19th-century Britain. Although most heroines in Bildungsroman stories follow the process of "growing down," critics like Lorna Ellis emphasize variations of female agency and "positive images of female development" in subversions (17). Such images can exist in "growing down" and "growing up" novels as heroines are instructed, "to understand themselves and their relation to the environment" (Ellis 18). This understanding allows heroines to "maintain some form of agency" and "learn to work within the [patriarchal] system," like Maggie's adoption of a ladylike appearance despite maintaining her ambiguous inner-unconventional nature by pursuing knowledge (Ellis 18). Ellis furthers the understanding of the female Bildungsroman by showing how overt versions of the female Bildungsroman, used in the latter half of the 19th-century, outline "self conscientious" women learning to "cope with society," but stresses the "ambiguous and continuing nature of such compromises" (Ellis 138, 139). Rhoda exemplifies aspects of this overt Bildungsroman by rejecting Everard and having an ambiguous relationship with Monica's orphaned baby. Ambiguity allows both novelists to suggest societal change as a factor in women's complete development by displaying the need for societal change but being unable to

demonstrate what that change may be. Eliot and Gissing play with this ambiguity to subvert the traditional female Bildungsroman and imply the need for change by creating subversions of the novel of development.

At the core of the Bildungsroman, and its subversions, is a character struggling to find their societal position. This sense of struggle is particularly true of characters who stray from societal norms and values. *The Mill on the Floss* and *The Odd Women* criticize 19th-century societal norms outlined by critic Ali Gunes. They specifically comment on the expectation that women's lives are "culturally and ideologically predetermined" for "marriage and domestic duties" by portraying unconventional heroines (Gunes 104). These unconventional heroines, Maggie and Rhoda, subvert the traditional Bildungsroman as neither aligns with their society's values and struggle to identify with them. This subversion particularly applies to Maggie, who faces more pressure from her society than Rhoda to maintain a lady-like appearance. In *The Mill on the Floss*, George Eliot establishes Maggie as atypical, not having a traditional English form of femininity. Maggie has dark features with "brown skin," "dark heavy" hair "that won't curl [at] all," and "gleaming black eyes" (Eliot 12, 13). These darkened features set Maggie apart from Britain's 19th-century view on feminine beauty as having skin like a "white kitten," "a rosebud mouth," "hazel eyes," and "blonde curls" arranged neatly on the head like her cousin Lucy (Eliot 58). Gunes rightly argues that Maggie "attempt[s] to find her own voice and way of life beyond what is culturally and ideologically decided for her" due to her unconventional qualities (104). Gunes's theory aligns with the fact that Maggie cannot, and does not want to, change her physical appearance. Therefore, it is likely that Maggie's struggles to identify with her society lead her to strive to find a place in society that accepts her as untraditionally beautiful. Subsequently, Maggie changes her course of development in the process.

Maggie's physical appearance is not her only unconventional trait. She has a sharp mind and an atypical longing for scholarly knowledge, a knowledge based on intellect. Maggie's desires express themselves through her attempts to "read the books and understand [them]" (Eliot 17). The books that Maggie wants to read, including *The*

*History of the Devil* by Daniel Defoe, contain violence and gore that was atypical in books written for Victorian women (Eliot 17). Therefore, her desire for knowledge sets Maggie apart from seemingly proper women like her cousin Lucy, who enjoys the simplicity of drawing-room conversations with apricot puddings and custards (Eliot 62). Maggie does not desire to attend to womanly duties like drawing-room conversations but rather yearns for a knowledge that was inaccessible and considered unfeminine in the early 19th-century. As the critic Gunes outlines, traditional or "patriarchal Victorian society [does] not let girls have any kind of formal" or scholarly knowledge (105). Maggie "yearns for her own freedom in her life" and bends cultural expectations of adhering to the "female [or domestic] sphere," thus demonstrating a natural subversion of womanhood (Gunes 105, 106). Maggie embodies a woman who is not only unconventionally feminine in looks but also in intelligence. Therefore, to thrive, Maggie needs to find an aspect of society that will accept her mix of traditionally masculine and feminine qualities.

Maggie's subversion of traditionally feminine traits is highly criticized by other characters, representing a challenge to her identity development. Mrs. Tulliver is foremost in her criticisms of Maggie. She believes that Maggie is "half an idiot" on domestic duties like "patchwork" and continuously attempts to convert her into "a little lady" by brushing her hair (Eliot 12, 13). Similar perspectives on Maggie's physical traits are taken by her aunts who criticize her hair, saying it should be "thinned and cut shorter" to make her look less "brown skinned" (Eliot 59). Maggie's intelligence is also criticized by Mr. Riley when he speaks to her "in a patronizing tone" and tells her to "read some prettier book" (Eliot 18). The only character who admires her unconventional traits is Maggie's father. Mr. Tulliver believes Maggie's appearance is "healthy enough" and her desire for knowledge is "a match for the lawyers" (Eliot 59, 19). However, although Mr. Tulliver is proud of Maggie and defends her to family and friends, he never endorses a lifestyle for Maggie that matches her unconventionality. Thus, Mr. Tulliver demonstrates a societal issue around Maggie's development. Maggie's society negatively views unconventional feminine traits in women. Mr. Tulliver shows a slight shift in this viewpoint but

ultimately conforms to societal rules and imposes those rules on his daughter. Therefore, Eliot emphasizes Maggie's struggle for acceptance but does not solve her inability to identify with societal values.

Despite facing endless criticism from those around her, Maggie does not give up searching for identity. However, Maggie's early attempts to find an intellectual identity are flawed by the perception that appearance equals belonging. The critic Mary Elizabeth Hayes accurately portrays Maggie's dramatic attempt to escape to a village, referred to as a gypsy village, to contrast Maggie's identity and intellect with the exclusivity of knowledge. Maggie is encouraged by her self-perception of not fitting into society to go "seeking [of] her unknown kindred, the gypsies" (Eliot 101). Hayes describes how Maggie's family endorses this seeking because "her mother['s]...family, the Dodson[s], think she is as dark as" a gypsy (Hayes 118). The Dodsons influence Maggie's false idea that looks equal belonging. Maggie, therefore, thinks that she can teach the gypsies her knowledge of books and be their "Gypsy Queen," as they are both outliers on looks (Hayes 120). However, the gypsies "return her home," representing her "failed mission to head a matriarchy" (Hayes 130). As a result, Maggie ends up "feeling quite weak among" the gypsies as they do not listen to her knowledge and send her home (Eliot 104). Thus, Maggie is an outlier, and her fantasy of being a scholarly woman fails. Maggie learns that she cannot identify with the gypsy community despite having a similar physical appearance. In this way, she develops her identity as she realizes that she must learn to work from within her society, aligning with the overt female Bildungsroman mentioned by Ellis that addresses women learning to fit into their society just enough to work within the societal system. To note an observation by Hayes, Maggie learns to work from within society when she "deserts her childhood pledge" to stay true to herself and "remains true to her father" (Hayes 130). This development represents Maggie's attempt at a female Bildungsroman as she realizes she must try to change her domestic path from within the domestic sphere. Maggie, thus, understands that she is isolated from traditional knowledge and discovers that she must find a way to change her path from within the model she is given.

Maggie's reading of *The History of the Devil* by Daniel Defoe can be contrasted to Hayes's argument that Maggie fails to find belonging in the gypsies. Early in the novel, Maggie describes "the book" she is reading to Mr. Riley (Eliot 17). She addresses an image in the book of an "old woman in the water" who is "not a witch" because "she drowned" instead of floating in the river (Eliot 17). Maggie's "triumphant excitement" towards the witch book could represent an attempt to identify with these "ugly" witches as well as the seemingly intellectual Mr. Riley (Eliot 17). Like Hayes's example of the gypsies, Maggie attempts to connect with another individual through her knowledge. She goes into an in-depth explanation of "witches" and "the devil" with Mr. Riley, who Maggie believes is an intellectual man (Eliot 17). In this way, Maggie tries to parallel his assumed knowledge by teaching him, but like Hayes's example where she is rejected and taken home, Maggie is denied by Mr. Riley. Mr. Riley says her readings are "not quite the right book[s] for a little girl" (Eliot 17). When combined with her rejection by the gypsy community, her dismissal furthers her position as an outlier because she cannot identify with intellect in multiple areas of society.

Additionally, building on Hayes's argument that Maggie attempts to connect with societal outliers, Maggie tries to relate to the witch. Witches are generally portrayed as "black" or dark figures with a certain "fire inside" (Eliot 18). Maggie is also of darker features with a sense of eagerness in her stubborn nature, which could cause her to seek out knowledge on witches as she outwardly resembles these figures. Yet, Maggie does not identify with the witch but rather the false witch. Her failure to identify with the witch connects to the notion of the subverted Bildungsroman as Maggie tries on different identities and learns that she does not fit into either of them. In other words, Maggie tries to find a story to make sense of her life in outliers but fails. Though it does not occur till the novel's end, Maggie drowns, demonstrating a parallel relationship with the drowned false witch. This relationship could represent Maggie's ultimate failure to identify with witch-like figures as she identifies with a victim of societal norms, not an actual witch. This connection says something important about her Bildungsroman: like the false witch, her identity is not accepted by society,



inhibiting her growth, and leading to her eventual death. Perhaps it is not only Maggie who needs to learn to adapt to her society's ideal of women being domestic, but also her society that needs to learn and adapt so that unconventional women can survive.

Another unconventional heroine, Rhoda Nunn, is the focus of George Gissing's novel, *The Odd Women*. From her first appearance, Rhoda emerges as untraditionally feminine. Like Maggie, she possesses a dark complexion with a "tall, thin, and eager-looking" appearance, but unlike Maggie, Rhoda's looks "might or might not develop [into] a certain beauty" (Gissing 3). This darkened appearance contrasts Gissing's other female characters, like the conventionally beautiful Madden sisters who are "gentle mannered," "bright-eyed," and "pretty" (Gissing 1, 2). Yet, as critics like David Deirdre outline, although "all the characters in the novel are shown to be victims of the dominant ideology," many women of the 19th-century "found themselves denied the usual Victorian means of economic support" [i.e., marriage] (Deirdre 119, 120). Deirdre accurately demonstrates how this lack of support led to more acceptance of unconventional women, and "intellectual independence became" a choice for them (120). Hence, Rhoda is not concerned with her different looks and accepts them as a part of her identity, something Maggie cannot do. However, like Maggie, Rhoda also differs from traditional femininity in her intellect. Maggie approaches knowledge in an affectionate and eager capacity, where Rhoda is forward in her pursuits and intelligence. Rhoda is described as having a "good head" with "fruits of intellect" that she uses in her "hustling of inconsequent thoughts" and attempts to "imitate her seniors" (Gissing 5). This forward "hustling" and the attempt to place herself in the positions of "her seniors" exemplify Rhoda's rejection of a traditionally female role (Gissing 3). She tries to take her place "at the table" of the intellectual and is not concerned with appearing unwomanly (Gissing 3). Although she is more direct than Maggie in her rejection of femininity, like Maggie, Rhoda is unconventional in her physical appearance and eagerness to express intelligence.

As the late 19th-century shows decreases in women's conformity to Britain's traditional standards on femininity, Rhoda consequently faces

less criticism from other characters than Maggie. Rhoda's darker appearance is viewed as features that "might...develop [into] a certain beauty," suggesting that dark features are beautiful (Gissing 3). The beauty in her appearance becomes prevalent when the Madden sisters start "presenting a sorrowful image" of "old-maidhood" (Gissing 18). At the same time, Rhoda remains in "fairly good health" with "pale skin," "a vigorous frame," and a walk of "self-confidence" (Gissing 20). As these dominant and youthful attributes are associated with Rhoda's appearance, the Madden sisters view her as beautiful and healthy. The Madden sisters, along with the husbandless women Rhoda helps, also react positively to Rhoda's intellect. Therefore, although she does face some societal pressures, Rhoda's unconventional traits are viewed positively, allowing her to act on her cleverness in ways that Maggie can not like vocational teaching. As Deirdre addresses, Rhoda can "demand work, [and] train other women for work" (Deirdre 120). This agency enables Rhoda to endorse her unconventional identity and find a place in the working world through her vocational teaching.

Maggie's society, on the other hand, predates Rhoda's society and consequently restricts her ability to explore her identity traits. Indeed, Maggie's unconventional qualities initiate her identity development, but there is a sense of uncertainty over the trajectory and end to Maggie's growth. This uncertainty connects to the novel's structure as a dual Bildungsroman. The development of both Maggie and her older brother Tom is simultaneous, allowing for noticeable differences between them. Critics, including Henry Alley, comment on the differences between these structures to suggest possible endings of the two siblings' developments. Alley suggests that the end to Maggie's development immediately follows her time at Stelling's school. During her time at Stelling's school, Maggie is "attracted towards the Latin" teachings and has several "literary" "interview[s] with Philip" (Alley 191). These experiences align with Maggie's desire for scholarly knowledge as she is given a hint into the daily activities of scholarly life. Under Alley's narrow view of Maggie's visit to Stelling's school, some portion of Maggie's development ends. It appears that Maggie's eager attraction towards creative intellect comes to an "untimely end" at

“her father’s downfall” and “family bankruptcy” as “her lively imagination is pushed towards escape” of reality (Alley 192). Her family’s bankruptcy prevents Maggie from visiting Tom at Stelling’s school as she goes to boarding school, preventing her from pursuing this mockery of a scholarly path.

Although Alley suggests Stelling’s is the end, this unfortunate circumstance is not the finale of Maggie’s development. As Alley proposes, Maggie’s unfortunate economic situation briefly inhibits her creativity. Yet, when Maggie’s development is viewed beyond purely intellectual development, growth is present. Specifically, there are clear examples of Maggie’s growing imagination beyond her father’s bankruptcy, contrasting Alley’s theory that her growth ended. Maggie’s reading of religious texts is one example of such increased imagination. Therefore, her reading of religious texts becomes more than an attempt to “live in the dreams,” as Alley suggests, and becomes a new form of development (Alley 201). The genuine ending to Maggie’s development thus occurs at the flood. Maggie’s potential for progress is “uprooted in the flood” but quickly ends at her untimely death (Alley 201). As her development is reinstated and ended in the flood, Maggie’s Bildungsroman is incomplete. She is not able to develop before her untimely death. Alley’s ideas support this notion as he exemplifies how Maggie dies before she can grow. Regardless of if the flood is the start to her development or something that ends her life partway through developing, it subverts her Bildungsroman by stopping her growth.

Relatively, in her article “*The Mill on the Floss*, the critics, and the *Bildungsroman*,” Susan Fraiman represents an alternative and more encompassing perspective than Alley on *The Mill on the Floss*’s dual Bildungsroman. Like Alley, Fraiman comments on how neither Tom nor Maggie’s Bildungsroman is complete, aligning with the idea of the subverted Bildungsroman. However, Fraiman portrays the “rivalry between the sibling narrative” of Tom and Maggie Tulliver as a critique of the Bildungsroman (141). Tom and Maggie equally contrast each other in their desires and educational opportunities. This contrast represents an equal misalignment between their identities and desired roles. Tom receives a “conventional narrative” of “individual agency” despite being naturally passive, whereas Maggie’s “counternarrative” is continuous

attempts and failures to reach an “individual agency” (Fraiman 146, 147, 146). To this extent, Fraiman suggests that the flood causing Maggie and Tom’s “simultaneous deaths” is a collision of “Tom’s upward Bildungsroman” and “Maggie’s downward spiral” (147). The implication is if these narratives cancel each other out, both development paths are flawed. Tom and Maggie’s society does not seem to offer an alternative developmental path to unconventional individuals. Correspondingly, Fraiman outlines the “issues of female development” as relational, suggesting that change is essential to Maggie’s growth (147). Therefore, her ideas align with Alley in that Maggie’s development starts and ends with the flood. When Maggie’s development is combined with Tom’s, she momentarily experiences an upward spiral but ultimately dies. In this way, Maggie’s Bildungsroman is subverted as it is not complete. Overall, neither Fraiman nor Alley explores the momentary upward developments that Maggie gains throughout the novel.

Perhaps the most evident moment Maggie’s imagination is pushed towards escape, and she experiences a downward spiral, is at her entrance to Miss Furniss’s boarding school. Maggie’s family forces her into attending a boarding school to learn etiquette and housekeeping. They believe that these teachings will “subdued [the] other vices in her” like her intelligence (Eliot 121). The school is imposed upon Maggie by her aunt Pullet, who turns Maggie into a “half-formed project” of removing her “weakness” (Eliot 121). The weakness aunt Pullet is referring to is Maggie’s traditionally unfeminine qualities. In a way, this schooling does inhibit Maggie’s development as her etiquette increases, and she starts to reject impulses like her “promise to kiss” Philip, as the “boarding school” teaches her to see this act as “out of the question” (Eliot 174). However, the school also teaches Maggie to survive within her society, and correspondingly her aunts start to respect her. Although it outwardly appears that this school is inhibiting her development, it allows her to search for growth in other ways as society stops viewing her negatively. Thus, the boarding school subverts the traditional Bildungsroman by having Maggie conform to societal values and move forward and grow in other ways.

Maggie never stops searching for her identity. Even though Miss Furniss’s boarding school

teaches her to conform to her community's standards on women's identity, Maggie attempts to identify with other sources. It is important to note that Maggie's attempts to find identification stay within the confines of her restrictive society as she does adhere to social norms. With this in mind, one of Maggie's primary sources is a religious text. Although Maggie failed to identify with the witch book, she revisits text as a form of identity guide with a hymnbook by Thomas à Kempis. As noted by editors Gordan S. Haight and Julie Atkinson from an edition of *The Mill on the Floss* released by Oxford University Press in 2015, the text is *Christian Year*, Richard Challoner's 1737 translation of Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ* (502n268). In "the little, old, clumsy book," Maggie finds "a secret of life" that teaches her to take "her stand out of herself and look...at her own life as an insignificant part of a divinely guided whole" (Eliot 269). The book allows Maggie to experience what she describes as "a hurry of imagination," contrasting Alley's theory that her imagination ends at her father's bankruptcy (Eliot 269). In experiencing imagination, Maggie displays creativity that influences a re-found search "for happiness," an upward form of development (Eliot 270). Thus, when combined with a "hurry of imagination" the phrase "stand out of herself" becomes crucial as it represents a method for Maggie to maintain imagination and happiness within her restrictive society (Eliot 269,270). This new enlightenment contrasts Fraiman's theory of a downward spiral as Maggie builds a sense of identity by learning to keep her imagination. However, Maggie's growth is limited as she is restricted by the confines of her community demonstrating how the religious text does not solve Maggie's incomplete development. She cannot achieve complete happiness, but it does allow her to achieve some.

Maggie's attempts to achieve happiness and identity fall short in her desire for an intimate relationship. Before the potential partners Philip and Stephen enter Maggie's adult life, she starts to "be less haunted by her sad memories" and "life was certainly very pleasant" for her (Eliot 370). Yet, the mention of Philip's name brings memories of love for him back into Maggie's head. Upon their actual meeting, Maggie and Philip clasp their hands together "with a sad look of contentment" on their faces (Eliot 381). Tom, "who had insulted" Philip many times as a child, rejects the idea of Maggie

having an intimate relationship with him (Eliot 381). Maggie, influenced by her teachings to be a lady, does not desire to defy her brother's wishes. As ladyhood is derived from a traditionally masculine model of femininity, Maggie conforms to societal values. This conformity inhibits her ability to have unconventional romantic love and suggests that unconventionality and love cannot co-exist.

Maggie's only other option for intimacy, Stephen, is close to an engagement with her cousin Lucy and does not respect Maggie's autonomy. Stephen tricks Maggie into a situation where he can "deprive [her] of any choice" in marriage (Eliot 431). He takes Maggie on a boat ride, "la[ys] down the oars," and lets the tide carry them out to sea (Eliot 430). In doing so, Stephen inhibits Maggie's choice in marriage as he understands the connotation of elopement his actions have and does them without Maggie's consent. Stephen becomes an embodiment of the traditional marriage plot, and consequently, his trap initiates a downward development as Maggie loses her agency. Neither man represents an ideal marriage match for Maggie. Tom does not accept Philip. Stephen looks to take away her agency. This lack of appropriate men complicates Maggie's development as by rejecting marriage, she attempts to move forward in life, but her society does not allow her to. As Maggie cannot maintain her values and acquire intimacy, Eliot demonstrates that societal change in marriage needs to occur for the unconventional women's satisfaction. Something needs to change so that Maggie can develop an unconventional identity and find love.

Unlike Maggie, Rhoda Nunn is introduced near the end of her development. Gissing briefly presents Rhoda in her youth to stress her unconventional qualities before skipping beyond her education of "learn[ing how] to use a typewriter" (36). Rhoda is properly met by the reader in her established vocation of helping "many girls to find a place" in society (Gissing 35). Rhoda believes that women "undertake one of the most difficult and arduous pursuits" by "offering themselves up as teachers" as they have no other skills of occupation (Gissing 98). She seeks to change women's lack of skills by preaching practical skills like typewriting. Rhoda focuses her teachings on the Madden sisters, Monica and

Virginia. Monica immediately rejects Rhoda's teaching philosophy and thinks it is "a worse form of bondage than what she had suffered at the shop," her old occupation (Gissing 36). Monica follows a traditional British model of femininity and is described by Deirdre as an "advocate of the Victorian belief in male direction and protection of women" (Deirdre 121). Contrastingly, many "middleclass women" are successful under Rhoda's guidance and find happiness in their newfound skills (Deirdre 121). These women label themselves "New Women" or "Odd Women" (Deirdre 121). The reason Monica rejects Rhoda's teaching likely has to do with Rhoda's identity as an odd woman. Rhoda's philosophy is connected to her sense of identity. Rhoda believes that women should "have as wide [of] a choice" as men (Gissing 98). She attempts to form an identity for herself and the other women by educating them to be like her and have choices. Though this works for many women, her philosophy does not prove helpful for Monica as it contrasts her model of femininity. Rhoda's philosophy attempts to subvert the female Bildungsroman into a model that encourages women's vocational skills.

A clearer understanding of Monica's rejection of Rhoda, and Rhoda's identity as an odd woman, can be reached through a critique of Patricia Comitini's arguments. In her article, "A Feminist Fantasy: Conflicting Ideologies in *The Odd Women*," Comitini identifies the differences between "Mary Barfoot's philanthropy, Rhoda Nunn's radical feminism, and Monica Madden's radical domesticity" (530). Comitini's framing of the characters as ideologies reveals the purpose of the women and their identities. For Rhoda, this purpose connects directly with her identity as an unconventional woman. Rhoda attempts to create her Bildungsroman based on unique qualities but fails. Comitini picks up on this failure by suggesting that Gissing does "not offer real solutions" to the woman question but rather "failed attempts at female emancipation" (531). She describes Mary and Rhoda's identities as two different forms of radical feminism. Under this description, Rhoda represents a "more revolutionary" feminism, and the "failure of [her] experiments" demonstrates how radical feminism is not the primary solution to the woman question (Comitini 535, 536). However, Rhoda's subverted Bildungsroman is more of an untraditionally feminine

development than one of radical feminism as her actions fall within a general acceptance by her society.

Contrary to Comitini's theories, Gissing appears to offer fractions of a solution to the issues surrounding women of the time. It is unlikely that Gissing purposefully shows failed attempts to demonstrate what women shouldn't do as aspects of his female characters are progressive. Further, Rhoda takes on a more untraditionally feminine development than a radically feminist one. Although aspects of radical feminism apply to Rhoda, the term under a modern lens often implies a complete subversion of society in which men hold no power, though this was not its original meaning. To Comitini, it is a "revolt against the sexual hierarchy" and the "socio-economic relationships between genders" (Comitini 535). At first, Rhoda does seem to want these things, but her views do change to suggest a free-union-style marriage. Therefore, Rhoda's subversion is directed at equality between men and women rather than a matriarchy. Comitini's term does address an aspect of Rhoda's identity, making it beneficial. Rhoda is radically feminist in the way that she has a lot of revolutionary ideas, like her concept of womanhood as being a gender "in which celibacy is the only possible option" (Comitini 535). Likewise, Monica is radically domestic due to her concept of womanhood as having a husband and home-oriented life. The contrast between the two core values Comitini outlines demonstrates why Monica rejects Rhoda's teachings, though the terms she uses to outline their identities don't exactly fit. Rhoda's teachings mirror her core values and identity and are unfeminine and revolutionary as they do not align with domestic ideals.

When Rhoda's ideals are beside Comitini's theory, Rhoda's self prevention of her life satisfaction becomes evident. Rhoda's incomplete happiness connects to her incomplete development. Arguably, Rhoda's subversion of the Bildungsroman is lacking in its ideals on women's relationships. Rhoda's philosophy is radical in the sense that it rejects marriage as an option for independent women. She argues that when women dismiss or delay marriage to focus on their education, "she stands on an equality with the man" (Gissing 99). Thus, to Rhoda, marriage is an issue as there is "a greater number of unmarried



women” who “are obliged to remain at home” serving their husbands (Gissing 99). Rhoda would “have no girl, however wealthy her parent, grow up without a profession,” so for proper female vocation to emerge marriage is no longer an option (Gissing 99). In other words, Rhoda’s Bildungsroman does not hold a place for marriage and marriage does not become a part of a female’s identity. Yet, as Rhoda learns throughout the novel, a lack of relationships is contradictory to her development.

Perhaps the most prevalent example of Rhoda’s rejection of marriage is with Everard. Everard is undoubtedly Rhoda’s primary love interest. From their first meeting, there is an intense physical attraction when Everard “gazed at her with close attention” and she “looked up [at him] with interest” (Gissing 79). It is for Everard that Rhoda debates marriage, though she backs out of his proposal. Everard claims to want a “free union” style of relationship, but Rhoda suspects that he would “sooner or later” want her to “become his legal wife” (Gissing 148). If he does not, Rhoda believes that “love would no longer be a privilege of other women” and that she could love and marry him in this free situation (Gissing 148). As Rhoda suspected, Everard does eventually propose a traditional and legally binding marriage. After Rhoda confesses that she loves him, Everard slips “a ring upon her finger, a marriage ring” (Gissing 266). Rhoda immediately rejects this symbol of traditional marriage by drawing “off the perilous symbol” and telling him to “take it back” (Gissing 266). Rhoda claims that she “needed the other proof that [he] loved [her]” (Gissing 267). The other proof is an alternative style of marriage, where both partners have equal agency and one that Everard demonstrates he cannot offer.

Rhoda chooses to reject her suitor Everard’s marriage proposal for various reasons, but most evidently to maintain her vocation, values, and status. Likely, all three of these reasons combine to contribute to Rhoda’s decision as they all relate to her development as an untraditional woman. Critics pick up on these many reasons, making it a popular to discuss the reason and effect behind Rhoda’s rejection of Everard. Although few of these many critics explore Everard’s connection to the subverted Bildungsroman, their views on Rhoda’s rejection help demonstrate the adverse effect of Everard on her development. The critic

Susan Colon addresses the issue of Rhoda’s rejection of marriage in her article “Professionalism and Domesticity in George Gissing’s *The Odd Women*.” Colon offers a constructive argument comparing how Rhoda’s “professional/vocational life is altered by the incursion of romance” and how this incursion contrasts with the novel’s theme of “singleness” (441). She argues that the primary issue in Rhoda’s marriage plot is the contradictory nature between Everard’s “free union” proposal and his upward social mobility due to an “inheritance of more money” (Colon 454). Everard’s inheritance would cause Rhoda to be weaker in the relationship as Everard exceeds Rhoda’s social status. Thus, the equality aspect of Everard’s proposal disappears as he would hold social power over her. Everard becomes an incursion at this point, as his romance plot becomes one of traditional marriage where the male partner has all the power. Unfortunately, Gissing does not offer any suitable alternatives of a romantic partner, and as Rhoda desires intimacy, this leaves her projected growth incomplete. Rhoda cannot develop the intimate relationship she so greatly desires.

Similarly, the critic Jennifer Fuller offers a unique perspective on Rhoda’s marriage rejection in her article “Ordinary Teacher-Woman: The Complicated Figure of the Mother/Teacher in Late Victorian Fiction.” Fuller’s perspective relates to Rhoda’s subverted Bildungsroman by touching on how ideas of motherhood and femininity impact her development. Fuller argues that Rhoda’s role as a teacher is paradoxically related to her capacity for motherhood by “suggesting that the possibility of women” to be “a mother and professional educator, is contradictory to their very nature” (62). Gissing “express[es] radical beliefs” through Rhoda but “challenges the idea of unmarried women as the answer to women’s educational problems” by having Rhoda reject Everard to save herself an “inevitable end as mother” instead of an independent woman (Fuller 64). Yet, she inevitably finds herself in the role of mother when she takes “Monica’s orphaned baby” (Fuller 65). Rhoda seems to gain a form of emancipation from rejecting Everard. In her rejection, Rhoda dismisses the role of motherhood and can keep her independence and occupation, subverting her Bildungsroman as she moves upwards towards an independent identity. Rhoda eventually ends up in

the role of mother with Monica's orphaned baby. Rhoda's position of forced motherhood could be a commentary on her Bildungsroman. Gissing could be suggesting that rejecting motherhood and love is not the ideal path but is the only path for Rhoda to maintain agency.

Although they do not mention the Bildungsroman, both critics touch on the inhibitory factor of Everard on Rhoda's development. Despite not being able to fully develop after rejecting Everard, Everard's traditional views on marriage posed a clear threat to Rhoda's independence. Like Maggie with Stephen and Philip, Everard was never a desirable marriage option for Rhoda, demonstrating how neither heroine's society can provide a suitable relationship partner. Everard's inability to maintain a free union stance on marriage and his attempts to lock Rhoda into a conventional marriage, one that goes against her values, demonstrates his blatant disregard for Rhoda's autonomy. Rhoda still loves Everard but recognizes that he "spoilt [her] life" by "com[ing] and interfere[ing]" with her vocation and happiness (Gissing 267). His interference is prevalent as Rhoda changes aspects of her appearance and manner after Everard enters her life. After only a few meetings, Rhoda starts to appear more feminine. She starts to excuse herself to dress into "her ordinary evening dress[es]" and makes sure "her hair" is "becomingly arranged" when Everard visits (Gissing 101). As evening dresses and elaborate hairstyles are both conventionally feminine in English society, Rhoda attempts to change aspects of her nature for Everard. This change goes against her unconventional identity, representing how Everard inhibits her development. Everard encourages Rhoda to take the traditional British form of a female Bildungsroman. In doing so, Rhoda would grow down to society by conforming to conventional feminine styles and values. Thus, Rhoda's rejection of Everard is also a rejection of Britain's traditional development style.

In rejecting Everard, Rhoda gains a closer step towards development by not conforming to conventional standards. However, Gissing does not offer Rhoda an alternative marriage, the free and unbinding style of relationship that she desires. The undesirable relationship that is her alternative inhibits Rhoda's development because choosing this relationship would trap her in a growing down

model. Although Rhoda made a forward step in rejecting Everard, she cannot achieve satisfaction as she cannot acquire the love she desires. There is something truly awful about having to give up intimacy for agency and vocation. Perhaps, this is why Gissing leaves Rhoda's subverted Bildungsroman incomplete at the end. By leaving her subverted Bildungsroman incomplete, Gissing does not accept the traditional marriage model for Rhoda but also shows how society has no alternative for her. This incompleteness could also be why Gissing chooses Rhoda to take care of Monica's baby. As Fuller mentions in her article, Rhoda rejects motherhood by giving up Everard. However, taking in Monica's baby could be a way for Rhoda to be both a mother and have a job. Gissing's ambiguous ending leans towards the idea that love and vocation are possible for women, but it does not show how to achieve this desire. Gissing outlines the importance of changing marriage values. He implies that making this change will help women like Rhoda achieve happiness through having love and vocation.

Although they exist in different periods of the 19th-century, both novels share a central issue around women's incomplete development. They do not offer a way for the unconventional woman to develop an identity beyond the traditional marriage plot and find happiness. Therefore, an uncomfortable idea that a woman must reject love to have an unconventional identity is present. In Maggie's subverted Bildungsroman, her unfeminine qualities set her apart and make her an outlier. These qualities force Maggie to search for identity in various places, including unfeminine books, intellectual individuals, other societal outliers, religious texts, and relationships. Nonetheless, Maggie cannot identify with most of these areas. Maggie does not stop searching for an identity beyond a traditional one. Unfortunately, Maggie meets a premature death in the flood before discovering a sense of identity and love. She becomes the image of a witch drowned by the society she first tried to identify with at the novel's start.

Rhoda's story starts at a different point in her development, but she still faces the same developmental issue as Maggie. Unlike Maggie's, Rhoda's society accepts her unconventionality and enables her to have some independence and a vocation. However, like Maggie, Rhoda is unable to

develop into having both love and a stable occupation. As a result, her identity suffers as she cannot be unconventional and have the intimacy she desires. Like Philip and Stephen, Everard is not a good choice for Rhoda as he would inhibit her upward development. However, there is no positive alternative for Everard. This lack of alternative suggests that for women to have an agency, they must also reject love or intimacy. Comparatively to Maggie, Rhoda's subverted Bildungsroman also prematurely ends as she is thrust into a loving position of motherhood to an orphaned child but cannot be herself and a mother. Rhoda, thus, does not achieve happiness.

Thus, neither Maggie nor Rhoda's development is complete as they have not found a synthesis between their unconventional traits, position in society, and capacity for love and happiness. Arguably, the solution to their incomplete identities hides in their failed attempts to subvert the Bildungsroman. To complete their identity development, Maggie and Rhoda try to alter the traditional marriage plot. However, their patriarchal societies provide no suitable partners, demonstrating how societal values prevent the completion of their subverted Bildungsroman. The contrast between the two women's societies and their development establishes the impact of societal values on women's growth. Rhoda's society is more accepting of her unconventional traits, allowing her to find a vocation, a step towards wholeness. Accordingly, her subversion of the Bildungsroman has progressed beyond what Maggie can achieve. Maggie is stuck at an earlier stage of development and cannot find a vocation due to her society's restrictions on unconventional women. Rhoda, on the other hand, has progressed further in the working world than Maggie. She can support herself. Therefore, the breaking down of traditional rules like those around scholarship appears to help women advance. Yet, both women do not achieve the ability to keep their feelings of love, which they both desire. The inability for Maggie and Rhoda to maintain their identity and intimacy pushes the idea that a societal change beyond accepting unconventional qualities is necessary for these women to develop. Arguably, it is a relationship based on equality, like a free union style of marriage, that will lift both women into having love and identity. Maggie and Rhoda desire a relationship where both partners have

equal agency but cannot subvert their traditional societies into providing one. The result is their inability to maintain their identities and happiness in life.

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Maya Schwartz’s work, “No Damn Chatter Ever”: Transcendental Interruption in Erin Moure’s *Furious*,” addresses poet Erin Moure’s 1988 Governor General’s Award-Winning collection of poetry. Moure is known for her poetic difficulty, philosophical and theoretical complexity, and linguistic density, and the awarding of *Furious* marked a significant moment in her career. Schwartz speaks to the ways in which Moure’s collection deconstructs and critiques Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. Using queer theory, affect theory, and a close reading and explication of Kant, Schwartz suggests that *Furious* transcends the limitations of Kant’s hypothesis. She then takes this analysis further by contextualizing Moure’s collection in a longer trajectory of queer poetics in Canada that are situated in specifically prairie spaces. Schwartz then reads Moure alongside the work of Billy-Ray Belcourt to track queer solidarities across temporal and spatial sites. Using the emergent strategies of pleasure activism piloted by adrienne marie brown, Schwartz examines how queer poetics develop strategies of community building and pleasure while simultaneously critiquing the ways in which toxic masculinity, resource extraction, and settler colonialism threaten marginalized subjects.

– Erin Wunker

## “No Damn Chatter Ever”

Transcendental Interruption in Erin Moure’s *Furious*

Maya Schwartz

Erin Moure’s poetry collection, *Furious*, critiques Immanuel Kant’s notion of transcendental idealism, while simultaneously upholding a transcendentalism of her own through her exploration of feminized and queer minds and bodies. Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* serves as the groundwork on which Moure executes her poetic

philosophy in *Furious*. The title *Furious* is itself a response and critique of so-called “pure reason” unaffected by emotion, experience, or external structures. She engages with two major Kantian concepts from the *Critique*: this notion of “pure reason” and the transcendental ideal. According to Kant, human beings derive meaning from



experience through thought. In this thought process, Kant draws universal distinctions between *a priori* and empirical cognitions. Empirical cognitions determine what we know through our experiences and encounters with the world. *A priori* knowledge is “absolutely [independent] of all experience” (Kant 137), and is also referred to as “pure reason.” Pure reason provides the forms into which all our thinking about experience necessarily fits. Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* deals with the distinction between what we feel and sense through experience, and our cognitive processes of understanding these experiences. Moure’s project parses out what this distinction means for women and minoritized subjects in contradiction with Kant’s use of “we” as a universalizing pronoun.

As Paul Guyer and Allen Wood write in the Introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, our intellectual modes of understanding “characterize how things necessarily *appear* to us, but not how they actually are in themselves” (Guyer and Wood 36). The human mind gives the world its structure based on these prior forms,<sup>1</sup> but we are unable to know where this *a priori* knowledge comes from – some feminist and other intersectional scholars question, and even argue, its existence. Paradoxically, Kant also argues that we are unable to know things as they are prior to how we understand them to be. The forms of pure reason that allow for our perceived understanding of the world, but deny our ability to know it as it actually is, are referred to by Kant as “transcendental ideals” (8). Kant claims, therefore, that every human being is able to know the world, but only through the universal categories that dictate our subjectivity. Moure critiques both Kant’s universalism and idealism in her poetry. She presents the transcendental ideal through immediate and bodied images, and by promoting a feeling of familiarity that also defies signification. However, she questions assumptions that “our” knowledge structures, specifically in patriarchal society and in the university, insist on the separation of physical experience from knowledge and reason. Moure’s infuriated disruption of meaning through deductive reasoning leads to an experience of transcendence in her work. This denunciation of reason by first upholding and then

dismantling a transcendent reading of her poetry is at the heart of Moure’s engagement with Kant.

Moure’s critique of Kant comes primarily through her translation of his philosophy into her queer prairie poetics. Refusing to “talk a philosophical language” (Moure 81), Moure instead opts to displace academic and philosophical language within a vocabulary that recognizes her identity as queer and accounts for her rural upbringing. Invoking Kant, she writes, “as if: pure writing is a notion beyond the pen / she said, & held her head to keep the wind in” (70). Moure transposes Kantian terminology of purity (something that exists beyond human comprehension and subjectivity) onto the act of writing, as if to suggest that true writing is somehow beyond the physical act of writing itself. The “as if” disproves this notion. Coupling this rejection of Kantian language with the image of a woman holding “her head to keep the wind in” suggests that the strength and force of this denunciation is held within the feminine body. Through vivid associations to the self and nature, the body carries the possibility of eruption against efforts to contain it. Moure’s awareness of the referentiality of language is evident. Take, for example, the following: “It’s the way people use language makes me furious” (82). Moure demonstrates her investment in the philosophy of language and intentional language use. I understand furiousness as an emotive response to matters of my own concern, things that I want to see change or understood differently. Moure’s engagement with Kant in the language of the “colloquial & common culture” (82) enables an articulation of what she deems at issue in Kantian philosophical language – the assumption that knowledge is something independent of her individual lived experience. As I will go on to demonstrate, Moure sets up a transcendental experience in her poetry and illuminates the barriers in language that deny the relationship between her mind and her body. In so doing, Moure creates an alternative. She presents an attempt at thinking through the body.

In my analysis of Moure’s poetics through and beyond the philosophy she critiques, I illustrate how Kant’s transcendental ideal is established in part one of the collection, “Pure Reason” through

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<sup>1</sup> See “Immanuel Kant,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

Moure's use of questioning, inability to articulate, and amalgamation of images. Drawing on work from other scholars, I will also highlight that Moure employs this transcendence hand in hand with representations of the physical body, and elucidate how this approach functions as both a critique and an interruption. As I move to part two of the collection, "The Acts," I will suggest that Moure, through her own processes of thinking through her work, identifies a breakdown in part one. These poems can be interpreted as illustrations of the inability to reconcile the mind-body relationship because of the patriarchal use of language. By connecting Moure's transcendental failing in "Pure Reason" to the evocation of a stutter in "The Acts", I will underscore Moure's act of locating systemic oppression in the physical body. I will also suggest that systemic oppression can be contrasted by the kind of sublime enjoyment that Moure allows for in her attempts at reconciling the mind/body relationship. This contrast will be set up to ask if Moure's joy, if viewed as such, can be applied to political activism. I look to adrienne marie brown's *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good* to think about the body as a site of pleasure that can encourage and enable positive political action. Another writer who explores the intersection between the body and contemporary political issues is Billy-Ray Belcourt. His memoir *A History of My Brief Body* works through a poetical lens to actively entangle the lines of queerness, Indigeniety, academia, poetic form, and social justice. I hope to bring Belcourt and Moure into conversation as two marginalized figures from rural Alberta to probe at what can be cultivated from situating joy and pleasure in physical places of oppression.

### **Transcendence in "Pure Reason"**

In *Furious*, Erin Moure demonstrates the impossibility of separating lived experience from the way she writes and thinks about those experiences. The poems Moure presents in part one, "Pure Reason," are so exciting because they encapsulate the pleasure of her experience in her own body. The images in "Pure Reason" are drawn from distinct memories of Moure's childhood growing up in Alberta, "squirrel- / hunting in the Rocky Mountains under the smell of spruce /forest" (12). These lines resonate with a familiarity that compels readers towards the

particularities of their own individual upbringings while also rooting them in Moure's. This exposes the reciprocity of the text. She continues, "I said I never would forget / & haven't" (12). More hints at the ways in which these memories become lost in processes of separation through time and language. I will go on to allude to how this separation comes about. In "Pure Reason," however, Moure allows us to dwell in the joyous exploration of the physical through her poetics. She writes in "Pure Reason: Femininity" that "Deathful *thinking* comes from deathful *minds*" (20). Moure urges her readers to attempt ways of thinking about these experiences, and articulating them, without their destruction. This is where I will begin to engage with Kant, in order to explore the possibility and necessity of alternative forms of critique.

We can look at "Pure Reason," as I believe Moure wants us to, as a representation of the transcendental ideal – a place where our experiences dissociate from our ability to think about them. The poems in the first subsection, also entitled "Pure Reason," are characterized by questions. For example, the poem "Whose" begins "In whose garden I am sleeping / In whose garden I am sleeping perfectly" (11). Although both lines begin with a question, they end in a statement. This gives the impression that the question itself is the answer. The adverb "perfectly" hints at Kant's idealism, and Moure herself suggests this idealism by referencing an innate understanding of the perfection of this sleep even without understanding the specificities of where she is sleeping. By posing the question itself as an answer, Moure seems to suggest that this *a priori* understanding is enough. However, this acceptance is challenged in the second subsection, "Visible Affection. In the poem "Rose," Moure writes, "The wind between the towers is nothing but the wind, nothing but the." (33) The period should be noted to fully demonstrate how the thought is left unfinished. This hints at something that Moure cannot fully explain in words. The firmness of her conclusion, plus the repetition of the words "nothing but the", lulls her reader in the peacefulness of accepting this half-formed structure, inherited from the earlier poems. However, the sentence "The wind between the towers is nothing but the wind" also proposes that there is, in fact, no preconceived idea beyond what

is written on the page – the wind is just the wind. In the final subsection, “Furious,” Moure takes on Kant not just by demonstrating the processes of transcendence related to the mind in language, but by fully embodying the sublime itself in her writing. She does this by making connections beyond the words on the page. In the poem “Culinary,” she writes, “Would people eat poetry if I could write it fast enough” (55). This gives poetry the possibility of being something larger than words; eating poetry renders a poem nourishing for the body in a material way. In this case, Moure articulates the sublime through her poeticization of everyday physical experiences. Shirley McDonald identifies something similar in “Finding Common Ground: Purposeful Disarticulation in the Poetry of Erin Mouré.”<sup>2</sup> McDonald writes, “Disarticulation within Mouré’s work is marked by its fragmentation into non-sense, into juxtapositional phrases without logical connections” (McDonald 112).

The employment of this fragmentation is perhaps seen most clearly in the final poem of part one, “Gorgeous.” The poem ends “In the line, too, motion. / I love you. The book is ended. / The blood gorges gorges gorges the bed” (Moure 77). Each line seems unrelated to the last, a connection formed by Moure outside of logic. However, the final line when spoken sounds like the title of the poem, and so vaguely relates back to something familiar and known. This familiarity is also articulated in the line “I love you”, as well as her reference to a physical book. However, these reasonable and recognizable statements are contrasted by her repetition of the word “gorges” and its distant connections to blood and “the bed”. The exact meaning of these images all in association with each other, as well as the repetition calling back to the title, demonstrates a playfulness in Moure’s use of language that does not undermine the seriousness or severity of her work. McDonald writes, “Such is the enigmatic nature [...] of the allusions to the sublime that register in her poems” (110). The transcendental nature of Moure’s poetics is most apparent throughout “Pure Reason” in references that reach beyond the scope of her poems, drawing connections that are both immediately incomprehensible and deeply felt.

Moure’s transcendentalism is grounded throughout “Pure Reason” by her unceasing references to the physical body. In “Whose,” the sublimity previously ascribed to her questioning is balanced by the line “my knees pulled up & feet splayed outward” (Moure 11). This bodied imagery grounds her abstract questions. Through her representations of the body Moure presents something that can be understood through feeling. Similarly, in “Goodbye to Beef,” Moure recounts a scene in which her brother shoots a squirrel for the dog to play with. After explaining the scene in straightforward language for three lines, Moure writes, “It is always in our damn heads” (12). Moure first presents an everyday occurrence, rooted in physicality and nature. She then removes this established credibility by referencing an anonymous “it” in conjunction with a phrase used to mean that “it” is made up and does not exist as clearly as it was portrayed in the scene. In “Finding Common Ground,” Shirley McDonald also identifies the discontinuity that physical and bodily representations present in *Furious*. McDonald writes, “The task of naming things *as they are* often provides the impetus of her poetry; however, her task to articulate the material of her existence proves to be formidable given the limits of language” (McDonald 113). This describes both Moure’s motivation for using bodied imagery and the conflict that arises with these images, necessitating her push beyond the physical and into the realm of the transcendent. McDonald also demonstrates this conflict in her assessment of Moure herself. McDonald writes, “Who is she when she is not the poet, when she is at home in her pajamas, playing with the cat?” (116) McDonald suggests an image of Moure as the poet that seems unknowable. However, McDonald goes on to write that Moure, despite dealing with philosophical concepts in her poetry, is “as grounded a subject as her readers and plagued, as we are, by the normal and temporary infliction of the mind, those caused by the body’s chemical or hormonal shifts, and those by the various struggles of existence itself” (116). McDonald identifies Moure also as a physical body, whose anxieties and motivations are knowable and natural. Therefore a contradiction is also imposed on the writer, which

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<sup>2</sup> Moure often changes the spelling of her name in publication. I take the spelling she assigns to *Furious*, however McDonald adopts the spelling “Erin Mouré”.

is furthered by the theories presented by Moure in part two.

### Interpretation through the body

In part two of *Furious*, “The Acts,” Moure lays the groundwork for interpreting the poems in part one, holding a theoretical experience together with a poetic one. By naming this section “The Acts,” Moure calls her readers’ attention to action – specifically the acts of thinking, theorizing, and writing poetry. Moure attributes the transcendent aspects of her poetry, as well as the conflict between the transcendent and the physical, to oppressive patriarchal systems. She writes, “my eyes and my whole body could see that the words and bodies of women were not listened to or affirmed” (Moure 87). This grounds Moure’s writing in a system that does not recognize the physical world as she experiences it. McDonald writes, “The site of contestation for Mouré is the female body and, in particular, a female lesbian body” (McDonald 119). Moure’s use of bodied imagery to contrast the sublime demonstrates the failure of this “transcendent language” – its incommunicability and the questions that ensue. McDonald continues, “Poetic articulation brings the limits of language to consciousness, which then becomes the impetus for Mouré’s innovative use of language as she pushes that language past borders into the realm of the lesbian poet’s imagination” (119). The sublime in Moure’s poetry is not only an identification of the limits of language but a reappropriation of language’s patriarchal use. This can be seen in “The Acts” when Moure writes, “Can I, in writing the next line, refuse what haunts me on the surface of the page, with its easy affirmation. *Be lyric. In my image. In my image. Forty lifetimes in the desert with the mouth pushed shut...*” (Moure 86). Here Moure shows her own attempts to write lyric poetry without conforming to patriarchal values. She even rewrites these patriarchal tropes by positioning herself as the god-figure. This act of challenging preconceived notions of language is addressed not just to gender inequality, but to all structures that support universalizing claims to language – specifically institutions built on Kantian ideals. Moure writes, “I want to write things like *Unfurled & Dressy* that can’t be torn apart by anybody, anywhere, or in the university. I want the overall sound to be one of making sense, but I don’t want

the inside of the poem to make sense of anything” (88). Moure’s creation of the sublime in her poetry by refusing to make sense is a direct attempt to disrupt the institutions perpetuating patriarchal ideals. In “Inhabitation: Erin Moure: ‘all of which is invented has just been invented now,’” Joel Katelnikoff assumes Moure’s challenge and uses her work to defy the norms of academic writing. Katelnikoff’s work is part of “an ongoing series that implements techniques conventionally associated with plagiarism and copyright violation in order to develop collaborative models of critical writing” (Katelnikoff). He combines words and phrases from across Moure’s body of work so that they cannot be individually traced. Katelnikoff writes, “To translate we have one drink. Again there is the pull of the alcohol. A paragraph is pulled out of the veins. Fiction allows us to inhabit the spilling” (Katelnikoff). Katelnikoff uses an amalgamation of Moure’s poetics to articulate ideas from her writing that provide the structure of his own argument. His work shores up Moure’s imperative that experimenting with language is a challenge to institutions and other oppressors that govern its use.

Moure assigns a physical trait to the constraints these structures impose on language through her references to a stutter. She writes, “the patriarchal structure (way-of-naming) of language, masculine language, is maintained by the noun/verb force [...] To put the weight of the utterance on the preposition [...] changes this. Creates, what sounds like, a stutter” (Moure 91). The stutter is both a product of and an interruption to the oppressive systems of language. She writes that the stutter “*replicated surfaces imperfectly*” (94). This characterizes the stutter as an imperfect physical condition that defies transcendence. The stutter appears in “The Acts” when Moure writes, “Not act, but act act act” (91), and in the poem “The Blind”: “Is is is us” (36). The stutter underscores the impossibility of certain structures and systems, and therefore suggests a breaking down of the whole. In the epigraph to *Furious*, Moure quotes from Kathy Acker’s *Great Expectations*. Acker writes, “Culture has been chattering and chattering but to no purpose” (Moure). Moure then takes up this chatter in her own poem “Four Propositions for Climate”: “touching / the sky with our mouths & no damn chatter ever” (39). This stutter could be



interrupted as an interruption to the “chatter” of patriarchal oppression – or they could be understood as one and the same. The chatter continually signifies the constraint of structures of oppression, and in so doing articulates the weak areas where there remains a possibility of escape. Moure writes, “My friend, voice, hand a stutter at the edge of. What is. Real trees with birds in the branches, wet tamarack, the birds’ feathers glossed up & beaks singing” (95). Here, the stutter is represented as a precipice, leading to the reality of things as they are – trees and birds and wet tamarack. Moure writes, “People who are making sense are just making me laugh, is all” (88). This points to the futility of structures of logic and language, and suggests that these structures carry within them indications of their weakness and therefore the seeds of their own destruction. These structures break down through Moure’s laughter, a bodied response that undermines any allusion to reason. McDonald’s solution to understanding Moure’s work “is to abandon the quest for meaning, fulfill ourselves in joyous readings of her poems, and await the next experience of passion or the sublime” (McDonald 121). This attributes the transcendence of Moure’s poetry to the defiance of meaning, which for McDonald contains inarticulatable joy. Katelnikoff’s paper, however, is less hopeful. He concludes, “The writer splinters thru the floor” (Katelnikoff). This is also reflective of Moure’s ending in *Furious*: “You will get out of the ending by falling fully-clothed into the sea” (Moure 97). Frustration, anger, and fury come hand in hand with living and working under oppressive systems. Splintering “thru the floor” seems a more painful experience than falling into the sea; however, both articulate the possibility of escape. The act of falling can be read as an alternate ending to the unreciprocated relationship between mind and body, the stutter that follows, and the experience of closing the book when there has not been provided an adequate answer to the question: where do we go from here?

### **Poetry and pleasure (activism)**

Examining Moure’s poetry alongside adrienne marie brown’s theories of pleasure in *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*, I suggest a way of interpreting Moure’s poetics as a ground for political change through her representations of the

body. I want to introduce brown to showcase Moure’s bodied poetics as representations of pleasure that do not disappear at the end of *Furious*, but allow for a continuing reexamination of how language is altered through systems of oppression. I also argue that connecting Moure with brown emphasizes the reader’s ability to rewrite language as a challenge to forces of oppression. In *Pleasure Activism*, brown defines pleasure as “a feeling of happy satisfaction and enjoyment” (brown 13). The pleasure she discusses is not purely erotic pleasure, although it can be grounded in the body as well. brown often refers to own experiences of identity building to conceptualize and expand notions and experiences of pleasure. brown is Black, queer, feminist political organizer, who’s work is rooted in the speculative futurism of Octavia Butler. She explores the possibilities of pleasure as central to making activism integral to everyone’s lives. In the introduction to *Pleasure Activism*, brown charts possible lives for herself, describing how she could have become a nun, or a “Black Moulin Rouge singer” (7), but that she is “a hermit nudist at heart” (7). This demonstrates how brown’s awareness and openness to exploring the things that make her feel good, aligned with her mind and body, become both contradictory and reconciliatory practices. brown also has an awareness for language, its ability to name things, change, and communicate her pleasure. She frequently employs what Moure describes as “common language”. In her glossary, brown writes: “*Fat* is a word I am reclaiming for myself, especially when connected to sexy, #sexyfat. I am thick, I am big, but most of what gives me this outstanding shape and feel is actual fat” (16). brown’s employment of language is in line with Moure’s work in *Furious*. brown, in her own theories, expands this demonstration of pleasure into the realm of activism to incite positive change. She defines activism as “efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, or environmental reform or stasis with the desire to make improvements in society” (13). Activism is hinged on efforts off the page that can lead to positive change. brown engages readers in thinking about how these efforts can be reactions to experiences of pleasure. Pleasure activism works in two ways. The first, brown suggests, “is the work we do to reclaim our whole, happy, and satisfiable selves

from the impacts, delusions, and limitations of oppression and/or supremacy” (13). I understand this as activism that comes from a moving away from forces of oppression, the reclaiming of pleasure that has previously been denied. The second aspect is that “pleasure activism is us learning to make justice and liberation the most pleasurable experiences we can have on this planet” (13). Here brown demonstrates how her theory is self-sustaining – pleasure activism is not only an embrace of pleasure that then leads to activism, but also a practice of activism that is itself pleasurable. I want to suggest that Moure’s poetry also functions circularly. In the two parts of her collection, Moure shows how experiences of pleasure incite change in language, and also how that possibility for change and the experience of working towards it is pleasurable.

As I have already suggested, the first section of *Furious*, “Pure Reason,” presents bodied images that gradually work towards uncovering the systems of oppression that complicate, confuse, and sometimes make Moure’s experiences unbearable or unable to be articulated. I want to incorporate brown’s theory to relate these initial bodied images to experiences of pleasure, which I think is already quite evident in Moure’s poetry. She writes, “My arms are oranges, soft juice bitter sweet & that beautiful colour. / Orange is indescribable apart from that sweetness” (Moure 66). This metaphor, by connecting Moure’s experience of her own body to the bitter sweetness of the fruit, as well as her attempts to communicate this experience even though she knows it is indescribable, gives her reader the feeling of pleasure. I think it is also important to examine the way Moure conveys sexual pleasure in her poetry, especially as it relates to queer pleasure. The possibility of this representation is also transcendental – but in Moure’s revision of the term, transcendent in the ways this possibility can be known and actualized. She writes in the poem “Betty,” “I want to speak sexually of one thing – not male love / but physical knowing: the distance / between the breastbone & the palm” (75). Here Moure subverts the ways pleasure is typically conveyed in patriarchal society. Instead, she explicitly states what pleasure is to her: it is felt through a familiarity and understanding related to

parts of the body that are not normally sexualized. Later in the same poem, she goes on, “your head wet, streaming, smelling faintly of milk or oranges” (75). The reappearance of the oranges calls back to that sweetness ten page earlier, inciting her readers to remember that experience of pleasure and creating a familiarity that is knowable and achievable while also ever changing and adaptive.

Following the exploration of pleasure in part one, I see part two of the collection, “The Acts,” as a call to action. This is perhaps most obvious in the title, which makes a connection to the word “action,” and which lays out Moure’s theory for social change which she herself enacts throughout the collection. Moure states her theory on the use of language when she writes, “What I am trying to do in my work these days is two things: 1) break down the logical connections/structure of ‘meaning’ (referentiality), and 2) break down the noun/verb opposition wherein the present so-called ‘power’ of the language resides” (89). Here are two distinct and decipherable methods that Moure employs to challenge the systems of oppression that she has experienced, and that she has also previously identified in her work. The fact that she presents this theory alongside the poetry in which it is executed demonstrates adrienne marie brown’s articulations of the reciprocity of activism outlined earlier. In the introduction to *Furious*, Sonnet L’Abbé writes that behind Moure’s poetics is “a deep faith that language can be used more consciously, more ethically, to take us *somewhere*” (V). L’Abbé’s emphasis on the use of poetry for social change, and Moure’s awareness that this change comes through the use of language, further affirms Moure’s poetry as a pleasurable act of resistance that both incites change and already holds that action within itself.

These accounts of pleasure located in the body essential to both brown and Moure’s work are stark contrasts to Kant’s theories of the body. Kant’s goal in *The Critique of Pure Reason* is to critique reason using reason itself, to provide a basis for science, morality, and religion.<sup>3</sup> His theorization denies any involvement of the body that does not contribute to cognition as a form of understanding. Moure critiques Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* most forwardly in some of the first poems of the collection – “Pure Reason: Science”

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<sup>3</sup> See *Immanuel Kant*, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

and “Pure Reason: Femininity.” In both these poems she challenges theoretical deductions. In “Pure Reason: Science,” she writes, “*The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog* is a comparison we reject, / they say. Leading to the obvious: / Maple *sugar* comes from maple *trees*” (17). The italicized line is the shortest sentence using all the letters of the English alphabet, used to demonstrate typing skills. It was also the first message sent on the Moscow-Washington hotline. In the last line, Moure’s reference to maple trees seems to address the intrinsic logic of nature over the human-fabricated logic of science and “reason”, represented by “*The quick brown fox*”. Moure further articulates this thought in her poem “Palm Sunday” when she writes, “(Impossible) to theorize about the real” (27). Here is Moure’s basic critique of Kant: philosophy is unable to incorporate real lived experience. Brackets work around the word “impossible” to demonstrate that although often overlooked, it is intrinsic to the project of theorizing about something is that the thing itself can never be fully understood or realized. In earlier lines of the same poem, Moure writes, “The locks changed & the windows impregnable / [...] What are we saying” (27). Understood in conjunction with the lived reality of locking doors and installing impenetrable windows while not understanding exactly why, the impossibility of theorizing about the real voices the fact that there exist in the world certain experiences that cannot be “reasoned” out.

### Theorizing poetry

How does Moure herself attempt to communicate a theory involving the real? I think it is through the possibilities that poetry provides as a form. We can use Billy-Ray Belcourt’s theory of poetry, from his memoir *A History of My Brief Body* to theorize how poetry is able to incorporate negative experiences of grief, trauma, oppression, and supremacy while also articulating the joy and pleasure necessary for instigating change. Belcourt writes, “Why poetry? It allows for a romance of the negative that doesn’t foreclose the possibility of a non-cruel kind of optimism” (Belcourt 95). According to Belcourt, poetry is able to hold negative experiences while refusing to deny possibility, joy, and pleasure. Belcourt uses a mix of a common language and theoretical language to further articulate his goal: “My thesis statement: Joy is at once minimalist and

momentous facet of NDN life that widens the spaces living thinned by structures of unfreedom” (111). Where in Moure’s work, Kantian theory could not make room for her queer grammars because they exist outside the realm of his work and thinking, Belcourt’s queer Indigenous joy exists outside the boundaries of white supremacy and settler colonial violence, while he himself lives within these structures. Through his use of “NDN” and “unfreedom”, Belcourt balances both his own language and the language of the colonial state to incite social change. He sees this change as stemming from the same place as brown – pleasure, or “joy”, in Belcourt’s terms. Belcourt also references a kind of community built out of oppression. This is different from the universalizing single experience conveyed in Kant, while still allowing for, and in fact necessitating, the identification of commonality. Belcourt writes, “we’ve congregated here under the presumption of mutual care and in the interest of a type of writing that punctures the solitude of a singular existence radically open us up to joy” (154). The inclusion of the negative, while emphasizing joy and commonality under mutual oppression, all contribute to poetry as a potential site for action. This is established when Belcourt writes, “poetry made room for me to grieve” (155), in which he theorizes poetry as a ground for working through the negative. Moure’s poetic use of theory can be informed by Belcourt to demonstrate a non-universalizing community and present joy as a disruption of oppression.

Belcourt’s “romance of the negative” appears in Moure’s poetics alongside her explorations of joy and pleasure. In “The Producers,” Moure writes, “Before she died, she thought about the producers / of x-rays, / & how we once believed we could see thru anything, / we humans” (56). Moure presents the “romance of the negative” through this kind of wistful looking back on the naïveté of human ingenuity – a belief in our own powers of deduction that call back to Kant. Moure is aware of the presence of death despite, or even because of, this ego. The destruction of this ideal, however, is not without a kind of romance. She forms a solidarity in experience with her use of the pronoun “we”, and its repetition and connection with the word “human”, as this is a human experience. She also continues her use of colloquialisms such as “thru”, which may resonate with some of her readers. The

varied employment of this language contributes to Moure's formation of a community through the "romance of the negative", a disruption of the suffering caused by persistent systems of oppression. In "The Acts," Moure tries to show us what this looks like: "The edges were written by someone else. Each note on the page was a refusal, of the end of the line, a refusal of 'the title', & a refusal of the 'middle' of the poem. You will write again & give up your claim to the surface" (97). I interpret these lines as describing the ways in which systems of oppression control structures and uses of language, through the creation of an external form. However, these lines also mark her poetic project as a "refusal" of exteriority throughout her work. The pronoun "you" draws us back to the individual, and ultimately articulates how writing poetry denies meaning in order to deny these structures, or perhaps just the claim that external structures have to particularized meaning.

Moure's attempt at theory once again critiques Kant's universalizing claims to knowledge. Although her poetics defy meaning, the images she portrays resonate. She writes, "The kitchen light is on in your own kitchen. The fish has come from very far away & brings with it the smell of ocean & a small door" (97). This prioritizes the individual through her use of "you" and emphasis on "your own". The details she includes about the fish, the smell of ocean, as well as features of physical space like kitchen and the small door all work to illustrate her project in a way that the theory is not able to adequately describe. This is where the pleasure of her poetry is, in her own space as it is to her.

### **Situating oppression**

In *Furious*, Moure uses abundant references to specific sites and place names. I am most interested in her references to places in Alberta, which reappear throughout the collection and become complicated by mixed representations of pleasure and oppression. In "Pure Reason: Having," Moure writes, "I am in the car of my father with a mug of sweet coffee / outside Red Deer Alberta" (Moure 14). These lines associate the sweetness of the coffee and of memory to her awareness of the proximity to Red Deer. However, the poem goes on: "wearing the coat I've had twelve years / & not liking the coffee, either" (14). These lines contribute a negative air, and we begin

to feel potential hostility in the car: "To be on the road. This early. / Wherever we are going. / Wherever my parents drive" (14). The abruptness of these statements and her youthful lack of control in the situation all work to confuse Moure's familiarity with place and her feelings of discomfort there.

Further into the collection we get more tangible accounts of oppression in these locations. In the poem "Fifteen Years," Moure writes, "The green space beside my parents' house in summer / where we lay down on our stomachs to keep cool" (21). This sets up a site of fond memory for Moure, but then she goes on: "My uncle's shirt-tail beneath his suit jacket, dancing" (21), a detail which signals an unsettled response. In the poem on the next page, "Thirteen Years," she connects this image of the shirt tail dancing with "*The friend of the family touching my new chest*" (22). This now overpowers the previous image of this space beside her house with her experience of being molested by a friend of her uncle. She writes, "I am wondering how we live at all / unable to replace these images" (21). This is a question that Moure evidently grapples with throughout *Furious* – how to reconcile the identity building of location with experiences of oppression there. The poem "Miss Chatelaine" provides an alternative to these images of oppression, or perhaps a move beyond them.

Throughout this poem, Moure uses references the prairie: "I am sitting in the brightness with the women / I went to high school with in Calgary / fifteen years later we are all feminist" (50). Here is this image of women who have come out of these places of oppression and are able to be together. They are participating in a kind of return: "We are in a baggage car on VIA Rail [...] the baggage door is open / to the smell of dark prairie" (50). This situates them back on the prairie. However, this optimism of revisitation comes through a kind of cosmopolitanism, the fact that they are only passing through this place, which allows Moure to say, "Finally I can love you" (51). This is a memory that allows the possibility of escape. However, in the remainder of the collection there still lies the oppression of rural spaces, imposed on women who are unable to physically escape or leave behind these sites and their experiences there. Moure writes, "Dreaming over & over of / women's madness, my mother's



madness, the madness of / the neighbour woman shut up in High River” (69). This associates the “madness of women” with the specificity of small town Alberta. This image appears again at the end of the collection: “No wonder she went away. No wonder the cars were obliterated by snow. Remember, Marianne? Both of us in the Fort McLeod police station, midnight, asking when they’d open the road” (93). Both these quotes suggest that the isolation of rural life can be the cause of oppression, as well as insulate it differently than other locations.<sup>4</sup> As well, madness has been a means of structurally and physically oppressing women for millennia. “Mad women” are seen to exist outside the bounds of all reason. For Moure, however, that “madness” exists all around her – it is situated and, despite the insulation of the snow, can therefore be recognized and valued outside of what is “reasonable.”

Billy-Ray Belcourt similarly sites his experiences of oppression in *A History of My Brief Body*. The book starts with a letter to his nôhkom, which he signs off “Bill, Edmonton, AB” (Belcourt 6). This situates the rest of his writing, his experiences both of pleasure and oppression, in Alberta. It is also where he is writing from in the present – he has not left the province as Moure has. In his book, Belcourt includes a scene that begins “In the west end of Edmonton, my boyfriend and I are holding hands as I drive to the movie theatre” (71). This description of place down to the neighbourhood locates his experience of being followed by “a white heterosexual couple in a rusted pickup truck” (71). Part of the reason why this experience haunts Belcourt is potentially its placement in a neighbourhood that is familiar to him, a place that is supposed to represent belonging. After describing this scene, he identifies “the cruelty of denying someone the solidity of everyday life” (71). This solidity is meant to come hand in hand with living in a place that is knowable to you. By naming the neighbourhood and the city, I think Belcourt reclaims a bit of that solidity, by demonstrating that he is not the unwelcome figure there. However, he also recognizes the challenges of knowing yourself through a place where you have experienced oppression: “The biopower of

each and every ‘faggot’ hurled at me at the grocery store, at the university, in northern Alberta, courses through my veins, making my body feel too much like a body, a feeling I’ve wanted to evade my entire life” (72). Belcourt draws attention to specific locations where he has experienced homophobia and oppression, but he associates it with detachment in the same way Moure does, perhaps demonstrating that this kind of trauma limits the desire or ability to be physically present in a place. He gives, however, a piece of consolation: “NDN youth, listen: to be lost isn’t to be unhinged from the possibility of a good life” (140). This being lost necessarily comes out of experiences of oppression in places that should represent belonging. Hand in hand with the project that both he and Moure undertake to site oppression in specific locations is the difficulty of those sites for those who still live there and continue to experience oppression because of where they may be. Belcourt gives a piece of reassurance that it is okay not to feel at home in there, while he also actively rewrites the narratives of those locations.

In a 1996 interview with Janice Williamson that took place in Edmonton, Moure provides insight into her theory of naming place and experiences of oppression and belonging. Moure says, “The structures of society obviously don’t represent me and don’t allow me to present myself except with enormous difficulties. I like to turn this around and consider it to be a gift – I’m situated like a little rip in the veil where the light comes through” (Williamson 118). This alludes to how Moure’s poetics function through naming place and situating oppression, that there is still a pleasure in those places communicated to the reader. Opening this isolation up, as she says, lets light come through. She goes on to say,

As a person, you need reflections or refractions of yourself around you because you don’t end where your skin is. It’s very difficult to live in a place where the things that come back to you all the time are negative. It breeds a lot of fear among people. The only remedy to that is to be out and say *I’m a lesbian*.

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<sup>4</sup> Deeper analysis of this point goes beyond the scope of this paper, but further research could be conducted on the topic of rural experiences of oppression.

To say this is who I am is to show that things don't make sense. (120)

These lines help me understand how feelings of oppression take shape in a place. As well, they signify to me that what makes Moure's poetry so powerful is her ability to demonstrate refractions of ourselves and in associating these refractions with specific places, allows us to see ourselves reflected there. This also alludes to part of the reason why, perhaps, her poetry does not make perfect sense – it is her splicing of experiences of pleasure that do not fit with the sites in which they are placed, because those sites have so often contributed to her oppression. I think it is also important to note that this interview itself is referenced as taking place in Edmonton. Williamson questions Moure about how she feels returning to Alberta and her memories there:

E: What we remember forms part of who we are and how we situate ourselves. How those things work together has an effect on what we can be in the future and where we're willing to move towards [...]

J: So what's it like to fly back to the past in Alberta?

E: Oh it's fun.

J: You're a much more approachable interview subject now than you were in 1989 when I had to interview your cat and your begonia in Montreal! [laughs]. (123)

I think the ambiguity of Moure's "Oh it's fun" embodies the opposing forces of pleasure and oppression that she experiences in this province. However, we also get Williamson's commentary that Moure is more approachable, and the note of laughter at the end works to demonstrate the pleasure that I think both women take part in through the locality of the interview. Finally, I want to suggest that this locating situates pleasure in sites that are also strongly associated with oppression. This is the kind of radical rewriting that Belcourt engages with in his memoir and Moure articulates in her poetry.

## Conclusion

In my mind, Moure's consideration of her own body and how her relationship to pleasure has been informed by the physical spaces of her childhood and adult life, a consideration that evokes connections with adrienne marie brown and Billy-Ray Belcourt, has possibilities far beyond the realm of Kant. However, *Furious* is ultimately a critique of the Kantian notions of "pure reason" and the "transcendental ideal." Moure articulates her critique of these concepts through her denial of universalizing systems of reason and knowledge. She communicates her own theory on language by inviting her readers into her individualized experiences of pleasure and oppression in her home province. To understand how this disruption works, and what it looks like in other forms, adrienne marie brown and Billy-Ray Belcourt provide opportunities for further reading on the relationship between social change and the physical body. Moure herself, however, demonstrates that we are not only able to find pleasure in her reading her work, but that it is a regenerative act of self-expression under systems of oppression. Moure's interruption of language structures in her poetics through the representation of pleasure and familiarity cultivates her own transcendence.

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More than two decades ago, Elaine Scarry published a book called *On Beauty and Being Just* (1999), in which she set out to redeem beauty as an aesthetic category and an embodied experience. Beauty doesn't necessarily distract us from taking care of the world, she argued; it can sharpen our minds and open our hearts to injustice. For a long time, scholars in the humanities ignored or refuted Scarry's argument, but in recent years ground-breaking writers from Saidiya Hartman to Jennifer C. Nash have written about beauty as a technique of both individual survival and collective transformation. Alex Affonso's Honours thesis, "On Beauty and Communism: The Bilateral Relationship Between Communist Ideas and Our Attention to Beauty," continues this innovative work. Anchoring his thinking in Scarry's seminal book as well as the writings of Karl Marx, Affonso argues that capitalism promotes "privilege for the few and poverty for the many," and therefore destroys our capacity to experience beauty in ourselves or each other. From the brutalizing efficiency of an Amazon warehouse to the divisive hiring practices at a Value Village in PEI, from addictive social media platforms to the economic utilitarianism of the entertainment industries, Affonso examines how the profit motive is antithetical to the "generous attention" that beauty enables. And as Affonso argues, recent experiments in Germany and South Africa with Basic Income Grants (or Universal Basic Income) reveal the relationship between generous attention and individual and collective human flourishing. Affonso concludes this rigorous and ambitious thesis by writing, "Beauty reminds us that fairness is a quality that can and should be shared by all, from individuals to whole communities."

– Alice Brittan

## On Beauty and Communism

### The Bilateral Relationship Between Communist Ideas and Our Attention to Beauty

Alex Affonso

#### Introduction

In the second half of the twentieth century, two topics were often excluded from public discourses in the Western world: beauty and communism. The former was considered damaging and distracting, while the latter was seen as anti-democratic and dangerous. This view on beauty changed when Elaine Scarry, in her book *On Beauty and Being Just* (1999), put forward the argument at the turn of the century that beauty leads to justice. Since then, many writers have taken up and built upon this claim, such as Gabrielle Starr, James W. Torke, Saidiya Hartman, Jennifer C. Nash, and

many others. What these writers seem to agree on is that notions of beauty play an important role in our social and political relations. For Scarry, beautiful things assist in increasing our attention to what is fair and just in society, which in turn draws our attention to what is unfair and unjust, to what needs to change. Being more attentive to beauty, therefore, raises our awareness of social, political, and economic injustices, which are inherent to modern capitalism. The capitalist system generates inequalities undetermined by merit, most evidently in personal wealth but also in individual

attention. Under capitalism, some receive the attention of millions while others receive none, and some have hours each day to give attention to beauty while others have none. This disparity is partly due to the exploitation of workers for the sake of profit, and partly due to the monetization and manipulation of attention by capitalists. Also, by giving beautiful things an exchange value, capitalism prevents the disinterested appreciation of beauty and renders certain forms of beauty the privilege of the few. Under communism, not only would people enjoy more freedom to appreciate what they regard as beautiful, but also labour itself would become a source of pleasure and joy. The giving and receiving of attention would be divorced from private wealth, and beauty would be distributed equally and fairly across society. In short, beauty and communism have a mutual relationship; being more attentive to beauty gives rise to communist ideas and principles, while a society built upon the true principles of communism as envisioned by Marx would allow for a greater attention to beauty.

But what is beauty? Scarry relates it to justice, but what is justice? I argue that the relationship she draws between beauty and justice is inherently connected to communism, but what is communism? It is opposed to capitalism, but what is capitalism? These are complex concepts with countless definitions, so the following explanations are meant to simplify them for the purposes of this essay. *Beauty* in this context is closely related to *pleasure* and *attention*. Scarry argues that a beautiful thing “immediately catches attention” (Scarry 29) and is “pleasure-producing” (117), while Jean-Luc Nancy claims it “pleases” and “attracts” (Nancy 103). When we experience something beautiful, our attention is drawn to it and we feel pleasure; similarly, we make something or ourselves beautiful to attract the attention of others and please them. As humans, we enjoy giving and receiving generous attention. However, because of capitalism, this exchange is often unjust. This brings us to *justice*, which is often accepted to mean *getting what you deserve*. Since what one deserves is a subjective judgement, a better definition is needed. The Cambridge Dictionary defines it as “fairness in the way people

are dealt with,”<sup>5</sup> which echoes Scarry’s description of “justice as ‘fairness’” (Scarry 93). To define *fairness*, she uses John Rawls’s definition of “fairness as a ‘symmetry of everyone’s relations to each other’” (93), and, according to her, this is linked with the fairness of beauty (92-3). I will discuss this in more detail in the “Beauty and Justice” section. For now, it suffices to know that *justice* is connected with *symmetry*.

Under capitalism, our social, economic, and political relations are asymmetrical. To understand why, first we must understand capitalism as an economic system in which individuals can own private property and are unrestrained in their pursuit of profit (“Capitalism”). In contrast, communism or socialism (used interchangeably in this essay), as Marx envisioned it, is a “political and economic doctrine that aims to replace private property and a profit-based economy with public ownership and communal control” (Dagger). Marx saw socialism as the next step in the development of human society, similar to capitalism in the age of feudalism. He recognized the positive changes created by capitalism (Marx 4-5), but believed that, like feudalism, it stopped being a “progressive social system” and so “must be overthrown and replaced by its opposite, socialism, if human culture is to survive” (Sewell “Hegel and Marx”). Communism is a response to the injustices and contradictions of capitalism. For the purposes of this essay, these two systems will be treated as opposites; in simple terms, capitalism focuses on individual acquisition while communism focuses on communal distribution.

### **Beauty and Capitalism**

This focus on individual profit is why capitalism is often associated with wealth and income inequality. A telling example is how the top 1% of the world owns close to 50% of its wealth while the bottom 50% own a bit over 1% (“Global Inequality”). Such gross imbalance suggests that, in terms of material gain at least, capitalism creates the conditions in which a small percentage of the world can own more than their fair share, promoting privilege for the few and poverty for the many. Some may argue that many billionaires, such as Oprah Winfrey and Michael Jordan, started with

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<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/justice>.

nothing and worked their way up (Cain), and so earned their wealth. They may have deserved their wealth at first, but after they reach a certain point, money generates more money. In Oprah's case, after around twenty years of success as a talk-show host she founded a few companies, such as Oxygen Media and OWN (Bloomenthal). Similarly, Michael Jordan "became a millionaire through his labour, but he became a billionaire by owning capital" ("Billionaires"). Regardless of how they grew their wealth, these self-made billionaires eventually become capitalists. That means they own all the equipment, material, and land required for labour and any profit resulting from it, while workers own nothing and simply receive wages. This model applies to all three sectors of the economy—manufacturing, service, and entertainment—and to blue- and white-collar workers alike. In a system where those who do everything (workers) own nothing while those who do nothing (capitalists) own everything, injustice is inherent. Contemporary examples include textile factories in underdeveloped countries, fast food chains, and Amazon warehouses.

When we compare the founder and former CEO of Amazon, Jeff Bezos, with the workers of his company, the social and economic inequalities between the two become apparent. Bezos had the means to spend "around \$5.5 billion" to launch himself into space in a private rocket and have his "best day ever," while the same amount of money could have been used to save "37.5 million people from starving"—amongst other, equally pressing concerns (McCarthy). After his space flight, Bezos thanked every Amazon worker and customer, claiming that "they paid for all of this" (Chang). Meanwhile, in Amazon's New York City warehouse, where employees have to meet unrealistic targets under unsafe conditions and the threat of being fired, "600 workers . . . signed and delivered a petition . . . to improve working conditions," but there was "no real change" (Sainato). No attention was paid to the workers, to the 600 individuals asking for humane conditions, the ones who "helped Amazon achieve its best ever Christmas" in 2020—which simply added a few billions to Bezos's immense fortune (Sainato). Rina Cummings, for instance, an Amazon employee with "impaired vision," was often told to work in departments in which "she was unable to do the work," and was once asked by a manager: "are you

sure you can't see?" (Sainato). That question would have been better posed to the manager, or perhaps to Bezos himself.

Capitalists are often blind to the dehumanization and alienation of workers under their own roof. Their attention is turned to productivity as opposed to working conditions. They exploit people to maximize profit. As Marx states in *Capital*:

Within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productiveness of labor are brought about at the cost of the individual laborer; all means for the development of production transform themselves into means of domination over, and exploitation of, the producers; they mutilate the laborer into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, destroy every remnant of charm in his work and turn it into a hated toil. (qtd. Fromm 67)

Workers are not only deprived of generous attention by those above them, but are also rendered incapable of giving their work and their fellow workers the attention they deserve. Amazon employees, for instance, have unrealistic hourly rates of packages they have to handle, and are written up—and eventually fired—if they fail to meet their targets. Rina Cummings was expected to "inspect and scan . . . 1,800 Amazon packages an hour" while Raymond Velez, another worker at the same location, "was required to pack at a rate of 700 items per hour" (Sainato). In their rush to meet these quotas, workers are unable to direct their attention to anything except the clock and the next task. They become alienated from their work, their peers, and even themselves. What Marx said in *The Communist Manifesto* about how "[t]he work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and, consequently, all charm for the workman" (Marx 11) is still applicable today. Workers push themselves to their limits to be as productive as possible and so keep their jobs, removing any joy or pleasure from the work. The problem with the capitalist mode of production, then, according to Chris Ramussen, "was not that it produced scarcity or was inefficient, but that it dehumanized human society by eliminat[ing] the aesthetic experience"



(Rasmussen 2). As a result, "All activities and relationships in such an inhuman system became tainted, vulgar and, most importantly, ugly" (4). This means that for around a third of their day (sometimes more), workers are deprived of beauty and the giving and receiving of generous attention.

This deprivation in the workplace is present worldwide, including Atlantic Canada, and including businesses that are believed to be less profit-driven and more concerned with giving back to the community. One example is the Value Village located in Charlottetown, PEI, where I had my first job. In a place where we received all sorts of donations—including figurines, paintings, clothes, and so on—and where each worker had a different personality, there was no lack of beauty around; what we lacked was time and energy to direct our attention to it. Similar to Amazon employees, workers have to meet unrealistic quotas. Since we were often understaffed—as new employees meant more expenditure and less profit, and calling in sick became a common strategy to avoid another dehumanizing day—we struggled to keep up with obligations. All the while supervisors kept a watchful eye on us, but their attention was focused on our productivity as opposed to our well-being. They collected data and reported it back to their respective managers, who reported it to the store manager, who reported it to the district manager, and so on, until it arrived at the top of the ladder. This chain of command means that the person responsible for making decisions, such as determining quotas, is completely alienated from the workers and the workplace and pays no attention to them. As a consequence, every decision they make is focused on profit as opposed to people, and when there is a complaint, they are not the ones who hear it. This hierarchy in the workplace inevitably leads to workers and managers alike feeling alienated from their work and each other. They become mere parts of a machine that is geared towards generating as much profit as possible. This is a major issue because, according to Marxism, "alienation in the process of work . . . is inseparably connected with alienation from oneself, from one's fellow man and from nature" (Fromm 68)—and, one might add, from beauty.

Another element of capitalism that alienates humans from true beauty is the focus on the exchange value of things. Every object has a use

value, which is related to "fundamental human needs," and an exchange value, which is "oriented to the pursuit of profit" (Foster 2). The latter is determined by the object's tradeability with other commodities, which is measured by a monetary value. And this value, this price, often overshadows aesthetic pleasure. As Rasmussen argues, "Capitalism gives to all works (art included) monetary value, and all observers become interested consumers, debasing art appreciation and killing the human desire (and need) to experience the beautiful" (Rasmussen 1). Erich Fromm makes a similar point, claiming that the economic conditions of capitalism "produce as a chief incentive the desire for money and property" (Fromm 24). There are several examples of this in both history and contemporary life.

When capitalism influences art, for instance, we end up with products focused on their marketing potential in order to draw consumers and ensure profit, such as Hollywood blockbusters. When capitalism is taken to an extreme, we end up with the slave trade, where humans are treated as private property so their owners can increase production and income at low costs. What these two have in common is a failure on the part of capitalists to give generous attention to something or someone without considering how their potential for profit can further their own self-interests. Rasmussen argues that "acquisitive feelings destroyed disinterest and aesthetic pleasure" (Rasmussen 4), and that this hinders our appreciation of beauty because, as "Kant argued[,] . . . in order to appreciate beauty, the subject must approach the work with a spirit of disinterestedness" (5). Under capitalism, our attention is often focused on an object's exchange value, not its beauty.

A quick look at our popular culture proves how money often receives more attention than beauty. Andrew Garfield, for example, when talking about his experience as Spider Man, said that "the focus is less on the soul of [the movie] and more on ensuring [they] make as much money as possible," and he found that "heartbreaking in all matters of the culture," claiming that "[m]oney is the thing that has corrupted all of us" (Gilbey). This corruption caused by money is also evident in the dispute between Andrzej Sapkowski, the author of *The Witcher* book series, and CD Projekt Red, who developed the video games based on

these novels. Sapkowski, believing the project would wield little profit, sold the full rights to his novels to CD Projekt Red; however, once the games proved a major success, he sued the company and demanded sixteen million dollars in royalties (Hall). Instead of being satisfied by his creation and the vast attention it received, he was instead resentful for not receiving a share of the immense profit made by the video game series. However, one can sympathize with an author who depends on his work to sustain himself and lead a comfortable life. This is also an example of the unequal distribution of wealth made legal by the laws of capitalism. The treatment of art as private property with the potential for profit is what prevents the disinterested appreciation of beauty. Whether it is in the production process (Garfield's example) or after the product is published (Sapkowski's example), capitalism often promotes the primacy of profit over beauty. The attention drawn by a beautiful thing is quickly turned to its exchange value, turning art into commodity.

Another consequence of this transformation of beautiful things into commodities is the privatization of beauty, which renders the appreciation of certain beautiful things the privilege of a select few. One of the main dangers of beauty under capitalism, according to Gabrielle Starr, is that "without due care, it seems to lead to private, unconsidered consumption" (Starr 365). To offer some examples, G. Fernandez made a list of "the 100 most valuable paintings still in private hands," including works by Vincent van Gogh and Leonardo da Vinci, all of which are inaccessible to the public (Fernandez). Some privately owned artworks are displayed in private museums, but a large portion are kept in locked vaults, where they receive little to no attention. An example would be the Isleworth Mona Lisa,<sup>6</sup> which is owned by "an anonymous consortium, and spends most of its time in their Swiss bank vault" (Cosslett). Apart from visual art, we can see the privatization of beauty manifested throughout our current society, such as in beautiful but unaffordable housing and in Jeff Bezos's short trip in his private rocket. The beautiful view Bezos had from his New Shepard, for instance, was not shared by his workers—who

he admitted helped pay for his trip. In creating economic inequality, capitalism inherently leads to attention inequality.

Social media is the prime example of this inequality in the giving and receiving of attention. To give a few examples from the wealthiest people in the world, Jeff Bezos currently has 3.2 million followers on Twitter,<sup>7</sup> Elon Musk has 64.5 million,<sup>8</sup> and Bill Gates has 56.1 million.<sup>9</sup> That out of the top ten richest people in the world, *nine* are white men,<sup>10</sup> only brings out the bias behind the distribution of wealth in society—and, in turn, of attention. Their millions of followers are "the many who always pay attention, but to whom little attention is paid" (van Krieken 6). In contrast, those on top are the few who rarely pay attention, but to whom much attention is given. It is important to note that this connection between wealth and attention is not a perfect equation, as in, a certain amount of money denotes a certain number of followers. However, the connection is apparent, which is why billionaires became celebrities ("Billionaires"). In a capitalist system, attention is inextricable from wealth: wealth draws attention, and attention creates wealth. Kylie Jenner, for instance, "figured out a way to monetize her Instagram followers and her family's fame" ("Billionaires"), building a beauty brand and becoming "the youngest self-made billionaire of all time" in 2019 (Forbes). Other examples include actors, streamers, models, and so on, all of whom capitalize on the attention they receive. The consequence of perceiving "attention as a source of value" (Turner 333) is that the creation and distribution of beauty will often be motivated by selfish interests. As a result, according to Ben Turner, "the solicitation of our attention" is often directed "towards activities that produce value in themselves . . . and activities that produce data from our attentiveness" (Turner 331-2).

In Silicon Valley, tech companies (e.g., Meta) use this data to compete for our attention so they can sell it to advertisers for profit (*Social Dilemma*). They record how much attention we give to each post to "build models that predict our actions," helping them "figure out what to show" us so they can make "as much money as possible from

<sup>6</sup> The Isleworth Mona Lisa was made by Leonardo da Vinci. It depicts the same subject as the other Mona Lisa but with a "younger appearance" (Sooke).

<sup>7</sup> <https://twitter.com/JeffBezos>.

<sup>8</sup> <https://twitter.com/elonmusk>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://twitter.com/BillGates>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/billionaires/>.

advertising” (*Social Dilemma*). In other words, they manipulate our attention for profit; as a result, our attention is diverted from other human beings. Tim Kendall, for instance, who was “the director of monetization at Facebook for five years”—meaning his job was to “figure out how to get as much of [a] person’s attention” as possible so Facebook could profit from it—said he “couldn’t get off [his] phone once [he] got home, despite having two young kids who needed [his] love and attention” (*Social Dilemma*). And he is not alone. Attention is a scarce resource (van Krieken 5), so when private companies use persuasive methods to draw our attention to further their own self-interests, it is taken away from something or someone who deserves it more. As long as the giving and receiving of attention remains unequal and connected to private wealth, a large portion of the human population will continue to live in material and spiritual poverty, pleasure will remain a privilege, and beauty will never be truly just.

### **Beauty and Justice**

This brings us to Scarry’s *On Beauty and Being Just*, whose main point is that “beauty assists us in our attention to justice” (Scarry 86)<sup>11</sup>. She writes that “beautiful things give rise to the notion of distribution” and “fairness,” but fairness “not just in the sense of loveliness of aspect but in the sense of ‘a symmetry of everyone’s relation to one another’” (95). As mentioned before, this quality of symmetry is shared by both beauty and justice. According to Scarry, “symmetry remains key, particularly in accounts of distributive justice” (97), because it reminds us of equality. However, she says that “the equality of beauty, its pressure toward distribution, resides not just in its interior feature of symmetry but in its generously being present, widely present, to almost all people at almost all times” (108). She uses the sky as an example, a beautiful thing that is symmetrical, fair, and equally distributed across the world. It is available to everyone regardless of their ethnicity, gender, sexuality, social class, and so on. We all live under the same sky. Although capitalism makes certain kinds of beauty unavailable to the public, everyone is able to gaze at the sky and contemplate its features of symmetry and equality. Scarry also writes that this “pressure that beauty exerts toward the distributional” (80) is a result of

how “one’s attention is *involuntarily* given to the beautiful person or thing; then, this quality of heightened attention is *voluntarily* extended out to other persons or things” (81). This concept may seem unrealistic, and indeed, under capitalism, it can be. As long as capitalists are motivated by profit to manipulate our attention, it will remain difficult for us to voluntarily extend our attention to anything which does not actively compete for it—but not impossible. Taking these two arguments together, Scarry argues that the sky—or any widely available beauty—involuntarily draws our attention and reminds us of fairness and justice; then, our attention is voluntarily extended to society, reminding us of its inequalities and injustices.

Once we become aware of these ugly aspects in society, our attention may be turned toward a way to fix them. While some people may be too exhausted by their dehumanizing jobs and the constant solicitation of their attention to direct it toward social injustice, others may be so transfixed by beauty that they seek a system that shares its qualities of fairness and justice; in other words, a beautiful society. As Torke says, “Justice is informed by beauty, and is itself beautiful” (Torke 329). He argues that this mutual relationship can be applied to law, as it “supplies the ligature of just social arrangements and so partakes in the beauty of justice” (331). Laws are our way as a society of deciding what is just, what everyone should follow, and what deserves to be punished. In that sense, “a law may be beautiful singularly so far as it shows distributive symmetry, balance, and equality, and is proportionate, due, fitting, and fair” (331). Under capitalism, laws fail to be beautiful as they privilege capitalists over workers, the rich over the poor. For example, in the US an “individual’s labour income is taxed higher than their capital income” (“Billionaires”), which means that those who spend hours of their day actively working to make a living pay more taxes than those who sit and watch their fortune grow through the work of others. For law to be beautiful and just, therefore, we need a system that does not privilege ownership over labour. We need a system that treats everyone equally and fairly.

In other words, we need a beautiful system. We need a system that adheres to what Starr refers to as “Whiggish common sense” (Starr 363).

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<sup>11</sup> Originally a subheading.

Referencing Anthony Ashley Cooper, Starr writes that “[c]ommon sense signifies a ‘sense of public weal, and of the common interest; love of the community or society, natural affection, humanity, obligingness, or that sort of civility which rises from a just sense of the common rights of mankind, and the natural equality there is among those of the same species’” (qtd. Starr 363). Under capitalism, this common sense is forgotten. Capitalists worry about their own self-interests and love capital above their community, while workers are dehumanized and deprived of attention and affection. Owners and labourers have different rights and are treated unequally. This common sense, which shares some of beauty’s characteristics, is opposed to the realities of capitalism. In other words, we can relate beauty to common sense and justice, but neither can be related to capitalism. Starr argues that “thinking the aesthetic all but requires its immediate translation into something else, whether it is ethics, ideology, or politics” (366). When we translate the aesthetic into society, to our political, social, and economic relations, it becomes clear that our current system is not beautiful. Regardless of what we relate beauty to, it is often associated with symmetry, equality, justice, love, attention, nature, and community.

### **Beauty and Communism**

It is only reasonable then that beauty should be brought into relation with the political, social, and economic system that seeks to create a sense of symmetry in the community, that strives for justice and equality for all, and that focuses on people, nature, and love. According to Erich Fromm,

the aim of socialism is man. It is to create a form of production and an organization of society in which man can overcome alienation from his product, from his work, from his fellow man, from himself and from nature; in which he can return to himself and grasp the world with his own powers, thus becoming one with the world. Socialism for Marx was, as Paul Tillich put it, “a resistance movement against the destruction of love in social reality.” (Fromm 74)

Communism—similar to justice, ethics, law, and common sense—has a mutual relationship with beauty. A heightened attention to beauty gives rise to the notions of equality and distribution mentioned by Scarry, and these are easily associated with Marx’s vision of a system that favours “public ownership and communal control” (Dagger). This quality of heightened attention also reminds us “that the sufferer exists” and is “exactly like us” (Weil 64) and that we should “privilege[] pursuit over attainment” (Starr 367), two concepts that are inherent to socialism and antithetical to capitalism, the system that promotes the attainment of individual profit at the expense of others.

A communist system, on the other hand, would prioritize people as opposed to profit. As Erich Fromm mentions, “Marx’s whole criticism of capitalism is exactly that it has made interest in money and material gain the main motive in man, and his concept of socialism is precisely that of a society in which this material interest would cease to be the dominant one” (Fromm 25). Marx’s main goal, according to Fromm, “is the recognition and realization of man’s true needs”—that is, our need for love, attention, justice, and beauty—“which will be possible only when . . . capital ceases to create and exploit the false needs of man” (78)—that is, our need for wealth and property. Today, social media is a major source of this creation and exploitation of “false needs,” as they present us with advertisements for products their algorithms determined would be of interest to us while providing a quick link to purchase that product. They create this need for property in us so they can profit from it, thus fulfilling their need for wealth. As a consequence, our attention (and theirs) is taken away from our true needs, which Marx described as that which we “truly love” and that makes us feel “fulfilled, satisfied, complete” (78). The pleasure derived from buying what private companies like Meta and Amazon decided we would like is superficial, while spending time with a loved one, giving and receiving generous attention, produces a more profound pleasure. In creative writing terms, this distinction is represented by a character’s *wants* and *needs*; the *want* is something the character falsely believes will lead to happiness, while the *need* is what will make them achieve true satisfaction. Making us aware of this distinction is another way that

beauty—in this case, storytelling—can lead to communist ideas and principles. Under a socialist system, as the desire for profit and property ceases to be a major motivation behind social relations, our wants and needs would be interchangeable. We would be free to pursue our true needs and direct our attention toward beauty—be it a work of art, nature, or one another.

The major flaw with this argument is that socialism in history has often meant a lack of freedom and beauty for its citizens. The prime example is the Soviet Union, where artists and intellectuals were targeted and silenced by “[t]he rigid censorship which shut out all but carefully selected authors and ideas, and the prohibition or discouragement of many non-political forms of art” (Hardy 2). This was the result of a “new orthodoxy” that was “organised by Stalin and his practically-minded collaborators,” and which was “directed principally against the emergence of any ideas likely to disturb and so divert attention from the economic tasks ahead” (3). It is crucial to note, however, that Stalin corrupted the socialism which Marx envisioned and for which Lenin and Trotsky fought. As Alan Woods points out, “Soviet Russia in the time of Lenin and Trotsky was the most democratic regime in history” (Woods “The Russian Revolution”). Workers had finally achieved freedom and communal control; artists and intellectuals were free to pursue their passions for the benefit of the community. For a brief period, a truly socialist society flourished. Then, as Hardy and Berlin point out, “The new orthodoxy, which became finally established after Trotsky's fall in 1928, put a firm end to the period of incubation during which the best Soviet poets, novelists and dramatists, and, indeed, composers and film producers too, produced their most original and memorable works” (Hardy 3). The fault lies with Stalin and his supporters, who turned this socially democratic nation into a dictatorship. Woods argues that, “Under Stalin, the worker's state suffered a process of bureaucratic degeneration which ended in the establishment of a monstrous totalitarian regime” (Woods “The Russian Revolution”). True socialism, then, is “opposed to Stalinism . . . for [its] authoritarianism as much as [its] neglect of humanist values” (Fromm 84). Therefore, the most popular example of communism in history is not a true embodiment of Marx's vision of a better society, and is not a

continuation of Lenin and Trotsky's democratic state.

Other examples of socialist societies in history also fall short of Marx's views. China, for instance, was criticized for removing a sense of individuality from its citizens and promoting uniformity. Men and women dressed alike, “clothing made of expensive fabric was discouraged,” and “[c]osmetics and jewelry disappeared from view” (“Dress”). As Jiayang Fan writes of China under communism, “uniformity was absolute and the entire populace wore two colors—black and navy” (Fan); something as ordinary as “a tube of lipstick was an untold luxury” (Fan). However, this lack of individual expression (amongst other issues) in Communist China was also a result of Stalin's influence. Huy-yu Li and Li Rui, “Mao's former secretary in the late 1950's” (Li), mention how Mao revered Stalin's *Short Course of the History of the All-Russian Communist Party*, and how “Stalin's ideas provided Mao with handy short cuts for learning communist ideology and utilizing some of its concepts” (Li). This is relevant to our discussion of uniformity because the “greatest single influence on dress in Communist China . . . was Communist Party head and supreme leader Mao Tse-tung” (“Dress”). What this proves is that the enemy of beauty is not socialism as Marx envisioned it, but those who falsely claimed to follow his ideas to facilitate their totalitarian and fascist ideologies.

Once we acknowledge that communism in the past failed to live up to Marx's vision, a new question arises: how would a socialist society function according to Marx? A common critique of communism is that it is an impractical ideal, that it works on paper but not in real life. This belief is a consequence of the mindset developed by those living in a capitalist society, but it is not necessarily accurate. Teater argues that the “beauty of communism” lies in the principle that “society should function to serve its people in a way that best aligns each individual's purpose with the goals and aspirations of the collective” (Teater). In a communist society, individuals with similar interests would work in harmony without being corrupted by considerations of profit. There would be no capitalist telling them what to do, no one exploiting their labour for their own self-interest. On par with Trotsky's vision, workplaces would be “run not from the point of view of profit, but from

the point of view of the social welfare democratically conceived” (qtd. in Lyon). Workers would take control in a democratic way and build a classless society and an economy based on common ownership. People would then be free to follow their passions and work with that which pleases them. This new system would lead to “the condition of human freedom and creativity” (Fromm 77), thus allowing a greater appreciation of beauty in and outside the workplace. As Woods puts it,

Once the productive forces are freed from the straitjacket of capitalism, the potential exists to produce a great number of geniuses: artists, writers, composers, philosophers, scientists and architects. Art, science and culture would flower as never before. This rich, beautiful, and wonderfully diverse world would at last become a place fit for human beings to live in. (Woods “From necessity to freedom”)

Under communism, our attention would shift from exchange to use value, from false to true needs, from monetary quantities to aesthetic qualities. Beauty would reign over profit.

Another positive result of this change in priorities would be the shift from competition to collaboration. According to Marx, “the essential elements of socialism” are that “man produces in an associated, not competitive way” and that “he produces rationally and in an unalienated way” (Fromm 75-6). Capitalism tends to promote competition amongst not only capitalists but also workers. The latter are often pushed to their limits so that the former can make more profit than their competitors. Amazon employees, as we have seen, are exploited so Jeff Bezos can increase his private wealth, which he then uses to, for example, provide “the vast majority of the funding for Blue Origin” (Foust) so his company can compete with SpaceX and Virgin Galactic (Kariuki). Under communism, we would work side by side in our exploration of space, shifting the focus from *who gets there first* to *getting there together*. Instead of a race we would have a collective effort. Also, considering the many problems our planet is currently facing, we would democratically decide whether space exploration should be a priority at

the moment. As mentioned before, the resources and labour spent on these projects could be directed toward more pressing concerns.

The other competition created by capitalism is amongst workers, who compete with each other to either keep their jobs—such as when downsizing occurs—so they can sustain themselves, or to rise in the company so they can earn a higher salary. At Value Village, for instance, my brother competed with another worker (who was his friend) for a supervisor position, and when he won she immediately left the company and stopped talking to him. This competition created by the social structure of capitalism ended a friendship—a true human need. As long as many workers require a raise to earn a living wage, competition amongst them will be inevitable. Under communism, this chain of command and superiority, which produces the need of climbing the corporate ladder to earn a higher salary, would shatter. People would be equal and work in collaboration instead of competition. Decisions would be made democratically by the workers who are directly affected by them instead of by the capitalist who knows their consequences indirectly through reports delivered by others, and whose attention is turned to profit as opposed to the humanity of those working for them.

As a result, these collective decisions would be directed at improving working conditions and reducing working hours, giving people more time and energy to turn their attention toward beauty. Technological advancements would no longer be threatening to workers but would allow for more freedom. From self-service checkouts to self-driving cars, certain technologies would replace unwanted labour. According to Woods, under capitalism “technology threatens to displace millions of workers,” while “[i]n a socialist planned economy, the same technology would be used to reduce the working day” (Woods “From necessity to freedom”). Working hours determine an individual’s livelihood in a capitalist society, but if everyone’s basic needs were met regardless of their labour, unemployment would no longer be a looming threat and major social and economic issue. People might voluntarily work to fulfill society’s needs once society fulfills their personal needs. If the “productive powers of science and technology [were] harnessed for the satisfaction of human needs, not the profits of a few,” we would



be able to gradually reduce working hours, eventually reaching “a ten hour week or even less” (Woods “From necessity to freedom”). Once humans spend less time with labour, they will have more time to appreciate beauty. Woods claims that, under communism, “men and women would be freed from the drudgery of labour” and so would be “free to lift their eyes to the heavens and contemplate the stars” (Woods “From necessity to freedom”). They would be free to appreciate the beautiful sky and be more attentive to its qualities of fairness and symmetry.

It is important to stress, however, that this freedom does not mean a complete abolition of labour, only a reduction in working hours. Although free time enables the appreciation of beauty, so does labour—if it is not dehumanizing. Referencing Marx, Bakshi states that “a person’s ‘individuality’ finds expression in what he produces. This is why he not only enjoys doing labour but also regards the product of his labour as a source of happiness” (Bakshi 87). The Basic Income Grant (BIG) tested in Germany and South Africa helps support this claim. In Germany, people were randomly selected to receive this grant, then were interviewed in order to assess the impact of this campaign on their lives. As is to be expected from those receiving free money, “almost all of the people interviewed said the monthly payments just made them feel better” (McGrane). The surprising part was that “few people quit their jobs” (McGrane). Some participants used the money to improve their education or jobs, while others took advantage of it to enjoy more free time. For instance, one recipient felt secure enough to “quit her off-the-books job waitressing for an exploitative boss and got another job at a better restaurant,” while another appreciated the “freedom to sit tight” and “enjoy . . . time together” with her “4-year-old daughter” (McGrane). The former used the BIG to find a less dehumanizing job while the latter used it to spend more time with a loved one—both were able to appreciate more beauty. Mr. Bohmeyer, the “founder of the ‘My Basic Income’ website,” believes that “a basic income could offer solutions for a whole range of social ills, like emotional burnout” (McGrane). His thesis, according to McGrane, is that “what people need to thrive in a rapidly changing world is not more money, but more security” (McGrane). Once people are free from worrying about their basic

needs being met, they have more time to appreciate beauty however they choose. Also, adding to Mr. Bohmeyer’s thesis, what people need to be happy and satisfied is not more money but more attention.

This basic human need and the lack of it is one of the reasons why this grant was less successful in South Africa. James Ferguson draws a connection between “social membership” and “recognition” (Ferguson 235), which can be further connected with the relationship between beauty and attention. What recipients of the BIG in South Africa lacked that those in Germany had was simply attention. German recipients were later asked about how the grant affected their lives, and some were even interviewed by Mr. Bohmeyer himself, making them feel as though they were “all equally worthy of existing” (McGrane). In South Africa, where “the BIG might be accessed by any citizen at any automatic cash dispenser” (Ferguson 234), this recognition “is stripped free of the person-to-person social relationships” (236) that Germany’s campaign offers. Attention is replaced by “the frighteningly ‘thin’ recognition of the iris scan” (236). The consequence is that people feel alienated from society and other humans, they feel undervalued and unappreciated. In South Africa, these impersonal bank machines gave people money so they could survive, while in Germany the grant was given by someone who wanted to “help other people find more balance and equanimity in their lives” (McGrane), as he had because of a similar basic income.

This difference in the purpose of the grant and how it affected the lives of recipients also demonstrates how labour is another basic human need. In South Africa, recipients were unemployed and needed the money to sustain themselves, which made them feel stigmatized and alienated from society. As Ferguson points out, “while social payments address quite directly (if minimally) the *material* needs of impoverished citizens, they offer far less by way of dealing with their social and moral needs” (Ferguson 235). Here the BIG becomes a campaign for survival, “a way of preventing the worst, in material terms, but without the granting of any sort of meaningful personhood or social belonging” (235). The sense of “social membership” has long been connected with the “capacity for wage labour,” especially for men, and so the BIG “may seem inappropriate” for

those who are “able-bodied” and “in the prime of life” (235). As Ferguson argues, “a mere grant . . . cannot provide the sort of full social position that comes with employment” (235). This desire for labour amongst South African recipients, as well as the continuation of labour amongst German recipients, is evidence of how people would voluntarily subject themselves to work even if they were not compelled to do so in order to meet basic needs. The need for money corrupts the relationship between humans and their work, making the appreciation of beauty either secondary or completely absent. This would be different under socialism, which aims

to create conditions in which labour becomes a source of joy and fulfilment instead of being regarded as drudgery. In this society, everybody will be able to produce what they like to produce, to own what they produce and to share it with others. Work becomes a source of joy and fulfilment, says Marx, when we are not forced to do what we are not interested in doing. (Bakshi 87)

If wages were no longer the main incentive behind labour, humans would be free to follow their passions. If the desire for profit was no longer a major motivation behind workplace decisions, humans would cease to exploit other humans. And if working conditions were no longer dehumanizing, workers would enjoy their work. Labour would become a source of beauty.

### **Conclusion**

Under communism, humans would be free to appreciate the beauty this world has to offer throughout their day, whether at work or at home. Not only would they spend less time at work and would have more freedom to do as they please, but also work itself would become a source of pleasure. The attention we give to products and services would be focused on their beauty as opposed to their exchange value. Workers would have a more intimate relationship not only amongst themselves but also with their work, being able to give both the attention they deserve. There would be creativity, passion, and satisfaction

involved in labour. We would collaborate to fulfil the needs of society and advance it for the benefit of all, and decisions would be made democratically by those who are affected by them and understand their consequences. If private property is abolished and profit ceases to be a major incentive behind social relations, we would no longer be exploited and have our attention manipulated for the self-interest of others. Beauty would no longer be the privilege of the few, and attention would no longer be connected to private wealth. Once we achieve this communism as envisioned by Marx, most individuals will be more attentive to beauty. It will become intrinsic to their everyday lives. They will no longer be alienated from their work, their community, their environment, and their own lives. Privilege and poverty will slowly melt away, resulting in a fair and just society. This is how communism leads to beauty.

At the same time, being more attentive to beauty and its qualities of distribution, fairness, symmetry, and equality would assist in creating the need for a society that possesses these values. This is how beauty leads to communism. According to Starr, “the sense of beauty . . . is a mediating force, doing work that reconciles individual with community” (Starr 364). Beauty, in other words, can be used as a tool for social, economic, and political reform. It appeals to our senses in a way that social structures cannot, drawing our attention and calling us beyond our self-absorption, thus prompting “a distribution of attention outward toward others and, ultimately . . . toward ethical fairness.”<sup>12</sup> Beauty reminds us that fairness is a quality that can and should be shared by all, from individuals to whole communities, both in the sense of “loveliness of countenance and in referring to the ethical requirement for ‘being fair’ . . . and ‘fair distribution’” (Scarry 91). Capitalism is antithetical to “fair distribution”; communism strives for it. In capitalism, laws protect ownership; in communism, laws protect human relations. Capitalism prioritizes private property and profit; communism prioritizes people and pleasure. Communism, as Marx envisioned it, is both beautiful and just.

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<sup>12</sup> From the overview of Scarry’s [On Beauty and Being Just](#) by Princeton University Press.

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Arthur Miller and Samuel Beckett were among the first playwrights to incorporate sound technologies into their theatrical productions. For example, Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* featured a magnetic wire recorder—most likely manufactured by Webster-Chicago, which was the leading producer of wire recorders in the U.S. in the late 1940s. While magnetic wire was cheap and durable, its sound quality was inferior to that of magnetic tape, which dominated the market by the late 1950s and was featured prominently in Samuel Beckett's play *Krapp's Last Tape*. Liam Kennedy-Finnerty's essay "Technical Remembering in *Death of a Salesman* and *Krapp's Last Tape*" notes that these plays both feature aging protagonists who are preoccupied with the past, and they both use sound technologies to dramatize the tension between remembering, which is subjective, deliberate, and revisable, and recording, which is objective, automatic, and fixed. While critics often disagree as to whether the recording in Beckett's play serves to endow the past with or deprive it of a sense of living presence, Liam's fascinating comparison reveals a persistent concern in mid-20th century theatre with the rise of sonic archives that no longer require the conscious mediation or narrativization of memory. When viewed from this perspective, the plays represent a "before-and-after depiction of memory being overtaken by the recording device," and they thus offer a bleak vision of the fate of the human subject under the technological conditions of modernity.

– Anthony Enns

## Technical Remembering in *Death of a Salesman* and *Krapp's Last Tape*

Liam Kennedy-Finnerty

Arthur Miller's 1949 tragedy *Death of a Salesman* centers around the mental, personal, and professional deterioration of Willy Loman. Miller frames Willy's downfall as a failure of the American Dream in a refutation of the ideal American meritocracy. A salesman by trade, Willy makes his living as a type of performer within the world of the story. In a pivotal scene, Willy encounters a wire recorder, which his boss Howard notes is rapidly becoming a common household appliance. Howard then plays some home recordings to show off his new technology, marking the first instance when pre-recorded sound is heard within the diegesis of the play. The relevance of tape recorders in theatre is a subject perhaps most written about in regards to Samuel Beckett's experimental 1958 one-act play *Krapp's Last Tape*, which follows a single character on the stage listening to recordings of his younger self. The play offers a critical point of comparison to this *Death of a Salesman* scene by centering its story entirely around the recorder and the process of recording the human voice. Looking at research on *Krapp's Last Tape* and critical interpretations of Beckett's use of technology, I will argue that the tape recorder in *Death of a Salesman* also offers a

technological depth to the modern tragedy in Miller's play.

When Miller introduces recorded speech into a play that subtextually characterizes his protagonist as a performer, he complicates the relationship between the performer onstage, his live speech, and the new possibility of recorded speech. Research on Beckett's work examines the conflict between the live performer and the recorded performer in greater depth. In "... I wouldn't want them back': Issues of Process and Technology in a Recent Production of *Krapp's Last Tape*," Andrew Head writes, "the inclusion of recorded speech as a significant and meaningful protagonist in this confessional drama adds a technological dimension that carries with it a number of aesthetic implications..." (48). One such aesthetic implication in both Beckett's and Miller's work is that the nature of presenting memory in theatre is explicitly challenged by the introduction of a medium that can preserve the remembered past on a physical level. In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy, as a performer, lies to himself and others about the past and how it differs from the present. In *Krapp's Last Tape*, the titular character also remembers his past, which is different from what he wishes it to be. The two works both explore the

nature of memory as performance versus memory as a determinate fossil, and how the stage performer loses their narrative power over their audience in regards to representations of the past when recorded sound is introduced diegetically into a play.

In this paper, I will utilize academic research on *Krapp's Last Tape* to reveal how the tape recorder scene in *Death of a Salesman* articulates Miller's own theory of tragedy of the common man at a metatextual level. The device creates tragedy by removing its protagonist from the hierarchical order of performance technique as the American meritocracy he is familiar with. Specifically, the tape recorder upsets the organic temporal restraints of live performance by introducing the possibility of solidified memory within an inherently ephemeral medium, therefore removing the performer's ability to manipulate the audience through performed representations of the past. This loss of control contributes directly to the tragic suffering the hero endures.

To begin, it is important to establish the definition of modern tragedy specifically in regards to how Miller himself defines it. Arthur Miller outlines his theory of modern tragedy in his famous 1949 piece, "Tragedy and the Common Man," in which he explores the possibility that the structure of the Ancient Greek tragedies can remain relevant to the modern condition. As opposed to the emphasis on nobility Aristotle insists upon, the common person can function as a tragic protagonist, still that tragic feeling Aristotle describes as "fear and pity" (20). Miller writes that "[the] flaw, or crack in the character, is really nothing--and need be nothing, but his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status" (1). Miller enables a kind of secular tragedy that allows for a regular, or even low-status person to embody the role of the tragic protagonist. A character such as Willy Loman then (a "low man" even by name) does not need to be of noble status for *Death of a Salesman* to function as a modern tragedy. The component of his characterization that makes him tragic is Miller's portrayal of his struggle against a universe seemingly bent on rendering him irrelevant. Miller reflects on modern tragedy further in an interview conducted by Robert A. Martin, "Arthur Miller and the Meaning of Tragedy." Miller notes that "if we're going to talk about tragedy at all, it seems to

me that we've got to find some equivalent to that superhuman schema that had its names in the past, whatever they were" (35). If tragedy is to continue into the modern age, if it is to remain tragic as well as timely, then there must be a replacement value for the supernatural stakes of the ancient Greek tragedies. There must be some alternative cosmic order suited to a secular form of tragedy to replace the Godly order that informed Aristotle's dramatic theory.

One such replacement value then may lie within the order of the tragic form itself, specifically in regards to the relationship the audience has to the performer playing a tragic protagonist. An important dimension to Miller's drama is the way the audience understands Willy Loman not only as a character in *Death of a Salesman*, but as an actor on a stage. In "Song of the Unsung Antihero: How Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* Flatters Us," Jonathan Witt makes the case that the audience's awareness of the stage informs their understanding of Willy as both a tragic hero and as an irrelevant figure in his own world. Witt points out that "viewed from the outside, as a character in a play, Willy Loman is not an extra. He is the leading man, the protagonist, the tragic hero, a character who looms large in the audience's imagination" (213). There is a paradox between the conflict surrounding Willy's waning relevance as a salesman and his burgeoning presence in the spectator's mind directly as a result of viewing him onstage, seeing the world through his eyes, allowing him to manipulate us through the medium of live performance to a tragic end.

This paradox Witt points towards exists as a result of an awareness of "Willy the actor" in a metatextual sense. The audience's awareness of the stage contributes to their understanding of Willy as the tragic hero. Spectators are directly implicated in the action of the play by the fact that their presence is a contribution to the medium of live theatre. This sense of self-awareness in the audience, specifically in regards to their relationship with the tragic figure onstage, may offer that replacement value to the cosmic void left by the departure of the Gods, prophecies, and emphasis on nobility in the Ancient Greek tragedies. In short: the relationship between the stage performer and his audience in Beckett and Miller posits a new, self-referential order that affects the tragic protagonist but that he is powerless and not entirely conscious of.



By point of comparison, Beckett also makes regular use of the audience as a presence in his dramatic works. The technique notably appears in *Waiting for Godot*, in which the existence of an audience is acknowledged to dramatic effect. Estragon walks towards the lip of the stage, gazes at the audience, and declares “not a soul in sight” (74). Nathaniel Davis explores this scene in “‘Not a soul in sight!’: Beckett’s Fourth Wall,” noting that “[with] this passage, Beckett arrives at a new function of the fourth wall: instead of breaking down the illusionary ontological barrier between the stage and the audience, he subverts the form of this illusion in order to create a nightmarish vision of lived experience onstage” (98). Beckett takes a more overtly experimental approach than Miller to the way in which the audience’s self-consciousness informs the drama onstage by positioning the spectators as an omniscient observer of a tragic character; they are known to themselves, by themselves, but not known in any direct sense by the characters onstage. The dramatic irony of the line “not a soul in sight” (74) creates an audience that knows that their presence affects or informs the drama of the story in some way. As for Witt’s argument for Willy’s identity as being informed by the audience, Davis’ analysis points to a similarity between the two writers: they are both interested in creating an audience who understand that they have a role to play as much as the actors do for the living organism of a live performance to exist. Though the audience-performer relationship differs in the two plays--Beckett’s play relies far more on a conspicuous lack of liveness-- both writers focus on the fact that this relationship exists, and that it necessarily informs the content of the story.

Miller and Beckett complicate the potential within this awareness through the incapability of intervention for the audience, which then leads to an increased awareness of the dramatic determinism of the script being performed in front of them. Both playwrights notify the audience of their role, but create further conflict when the tragic conclusion inevitably occurs, and in part, directly as a result of that role existing. Spectators are rendered immersed audience members and dramaturgists at the same time, both in service of emotional resonance with the tragic subject. Like the paradox of Willy as noble and lowly, famous and irrelevant, the audience can experience a similar paradox: they hold immense power over

the characters by virtue of their presence, but are powerless to the tragic or absurd ends to which the characters onstage will arrive.

The audience’s distance from Willy allows Miller to present Willy’s account of his own past as unreliable by virtue of the subjectivity of his memory. In the first act, Miller stages a memory play in which Willy recalls his younger life, presenting a fabricated, ideal past as truth. Notably, he is alone onstage, thereby only communicating this memory to himself, and, by default, the audience. He imagines his sons as young children, depicting an idyllic relationship free of conflict. However, the aforementioned empathetic distance the audience has from Willy that Witt examines encourages a distrustful reading of Willy’s memories. In an introduction to the play, Christopher Bigsby points out that “[Willy] adjusts his memories, or ‘daydreams,’ as Miller has called them, to serve present needs. These are not flashbacks, accurate accounts of past time, but constructions” (XVII). The past as a construction of Willy’s imagination, in keeping with Witt’s analysis of the audience’s critical relationship with the character, implies that Willy is both literally and metaphorically staging his past in a subjective, present depiction of what he wishes it was. He stages the past not as it happened, but how he would like to believe it happened. Perhaps more importantly, he stages the past the way he would like an audience to believe it happened. The apparent unreliability of his reenactments stem from what we know about him as a character, both as a delusional man and as a desperate salesman.

This concept of staging is critical to an understanding of Willy as a tragic figure in a metatextual context. Miller draws a parallel between the salesman and the theatre actor by portraying Willy as a performer throughout the play. In his relationships, Willy seeks to get what he wants, or to control his own narrative, by embodying the role of “The Salesman” through a type of performance. In one scene, Willy begins an extended monologue to his boss with “[let] me tell you a story” (60). He then proceeds to tell the story of Dave Singleman’s death, naming the play’s title in the process (60). The story feels genuinely heartfelt, dignified, and personal, made up in direct contrast to the impersonal “cut and dried” business culture Howard represents to Willy (60). However, the context of the scene makes Willy’s

intellectual dishonesty apparent. The stage direction preceding the monologue instructs that the actor should recite the lines “[desperately],” implying that Willy is spinning a web, trying to save his job by appealing to Howard’s emotions.

The fact that Willy manipulates through performance does not necessarily imply that he does not believe what he says. As an actor, Willy understands the motivations behind the role he plays, and in his plea, appears to understand a certain justice to what he says. His craft lies in his ability to switch this sentiment on the moment he needs to. Through his memory plays, as in his desperate appeal to Howard, Willy attempts to depict his past for himself by applying his understanding of live performance to the stage of his imagination, and in turn, the literal stage he is standing on. Later, in the tape recorder scene, Willy contextualizes himself as a part of a historical tradition rooted in that idyllic, imagined, and performed past. He ultimately fails as an actor, the seams of his craft showing through the desperation in his performance. Both the audience in the scene-- that being his boss-- and the audience of the play, witness him fail to evoke the tradition of the American salesman as something to be preserved and elevated.

The tragedy in Miller’s play here derives from the metatextual understanding of who Willy’s audience is, and how much of his “rightful status” (Miller 1) Willy embodies for this audience through his memory-staging. In the memory scenes with his brother Ben, and his sons as young children, Willy manages to at least convince himself of the story his memories tell. However, his grasp on this narrative is clearly slipping, his mental composure breaking more and more often as the play continues. His ability to stage his past through live performances in the present moment is shifting from him, therefore losing him his “rightful” place in the world he imagines for himself. His imagined rightful position is not that which the noble Aristotelian protagonist embodies, positioned alongside the will of the Gods and Greek nobility, but instead a rightful place of someone whose status is determined by a God-like audience who watch him perform, yet do not believe his performances.

In contrast to the live theatre used to represent memory in *Death of a Salesman*, Samuel Beckett externalizes the process of memory preservation through recording technology in

*Krapp’s Last Tape*. In “I Wouldn’t Want Them Back,” Andrew Head provides some historical context for the tape recorder in Beckett’s time, noting, “Beckett first became aware of the existence of magnetic tape as a new audio-technology in a visit to the BBC during the late 1950s. [...] Seen in this context, *Krapp’s Last Tape* can be described as prescient in a number of ways. Written in the 1950s, it meditates on the possibilities of quick, convenient and accessible recording of the human voice” (48-49). For Beckett, the ability to record one’s own voice, to preserve a memory as a household commodity meant reimagining what it means to “remember” in the popular consciousness. In theory, the tape recorder as a household commodity revolutionizes memory by eliminating the temporal constraints that render it untrustworthy. The practical result of this device is that in order to convey a memory of voice to another person, any middle-class person can display a selected memory, contained, unaltered inside a machine. The process of explaining a memory then no longer depends on a human, subjective mediation of the past.

Beckett explores how memory can be fixed in place by representing the past through a tape recorder in *Krapp’s Last Tape*. In the play, Krapp sits next to a tape recorder, which he has used to record himself speaking on his birthdays throughout the years. Contrary to Miller’s protagonist, there is no possibility for embellishment or exaggeration, no subjective interpretation of memory for Krapp. In the context of the play, the tape represents tragic inalterability. While Willy Loman may approach the understanding that his past is unchangeable, and not always flattering, Krapp has no choice but to confront it. In ““Once Wasn’t Enough for You’: Beckett, Technology, and Preservation,” Sarah Keller writes, “[what] better vehicle for an author so manifestly interested in the ambiguities triggered by the simultaneous fixity and fluidity of memory than the theatre, where the irrefutable determination of words on a page meets the variability of a performance?” (231). The conflict between the fixity and fluidity of memory, as well as the contrast between the determination of the written word versus the variability of live performance, are, in a sense, remedied; memory is no longer fluid for Krapp, and the variability of his performances are gone, as the majority of his

spoken words are automated between each performance.

For the purposes of my argument, the physicality of taped memory implies permanence and an irrefutability insofar as it contrasts with the nature of performed memory. This is not to say that tape is by any means permanent or objective. Tape may be altered and edited, and may deteriorate over time. William Basinski's album series *The Disintegration Loops*, for example, records real-time deterioration of old tapes, looped until they fall apart and the recording is completely lost. Like a memory, tape may be altered, tampered with, and lost to time. In *Krapp's Last Tape*, Krapp himself rewinds, fast-forwards, and otherwise manipulates the reels to suit his own needs. However, Beckett still plays on the physicality of the tapes as a reminder for Krapp that the past cannot be altered in the present because it cannot be re-lived. The act of remembering, then, departs from the process of performance as a result of memory existing within an automating, commodified piece of technology.

This automation of performance for Beckett draws tragedy out of the audience's metatextual engagement with the medium of live tragedy. Specifically, the representation of memory through external technology creates a permanence typically unachievable in live theatre. In "Voices out of Bodies," Katherine Hayles points to the tape recorder as a distancing device: "[Beckett] emphasized that Krapp should remain absolutely motionless during his listening, concentrating his (and consequently the audience's) attention on the machine" (82). By bringing the audience's attention to the tape recorder through this form of staging, Beckett addresses the idea that the medium itself dictates how a character on a stage remembers. When Krapp listens to his younger self, noted in stage direction as "pompous," he is fundamentally unable to change the parts of his past self he is confronting. Whereas performance in a live sense is ephemeral in nature, preserved forms of performance create a concrete timeframe that can be referred back to, almost limitlessly, in the present.

The tragic feeling in *Krapp's Last Tape* lies in the ontological conflict of being the subject onstage whose existence is restricted to the present, with his former self restricted to the spools and boxes in front of him. The tape introduces a technology of memory that pure live

theatre cannot explore: a true fossilization of the past, which a live theatre can interact with as a comparative study of live versus taped performance. When Keller points out that, for Beckett, "technology and theme are inextricable" (231), she illustrates that the presence of the audience, their awareness of the clash in technologies, and the context of Krapp as an aging man suggests that introducing a tape recorder within the diegesis of a live dramatic performance inherently disrupts the nature of memory in drama, opening new possibilities for representing memory outside the subjectivity of mimetic performance. These new possibilities, however, pose a solely tragic potential for both Willy and Krapp by rendering them aware of their own loss of control.

Beckett and Miller both use the tape recorder to upset audience expectations about live performance. The audience's focus on the tape recorder in *Krapp* that Hayles outlines suggests a discrepancy between the expectation of a live performance and what Beckett presents. Hayles writes that "[the] immobility of Krapp as he listens establishes a powerful tension between the aural and the visible, between presence as a technologically mediated voice and presence as embodiment" (82). Krapp's embodied presence constitutes what is among the most basic assumptions about theatre: that the embodiment of a role in the present moment is tantamount to the content of the drama itself. The medium is predicated upon an actor physically embodying a role in the present moment, distinguishing live theatre from recorded mediums entirely. To avoid speculating on some imaginary audience, I will assert that if I were to go to a theatre, I would both want and expect to see actors onstage performing their lines live. If I were to attend a play only to be greeted with a screened recording of last night's performance, I would certainly feel a sense of dissatisfaction at what would feel cheap and inauthentic. Similar to the frustration an audience may feel at the realization that a concert they've attended has been lip-synced to a prerecorded audio track, the presence of a tape recorder jars Beckett's audience by outsourcing the dramatic labour from the present moment.

This idea of dissatisfaction towards recorded technology replacing live performance implies a desire for a unique, irreplicable artistic experience predicated upon the potential for failure in each

moment. This irreplicable ephemerality, then, may be what a live spectator in this context would call “authenticity.” Thus, a tape would be called “inauthentic,” analogous to the “cut-and-dried” world of modern sales Willy bemoans in his scene with Howard (61). When recorded performance exists in theatre, then, it represents an automated, impersonal experience that directly contradicts expectations of authenticity. Beckett, of course, is not oblivious to these expectations, as Hayles points out. The difference between taped memory and performed memory, like the difference between tape and live performance, is that the taped memory cannot be altered by the rememberer. Their narrative power over their own past disappears when the possibility of a material, replayable past appears to us as their audience.

At this point, it is important to address that the tape recorder as a prop play an important role in drawing attention to the difference between diegetic and non-diegetic sound. The prominent physical device on the stage creates an awareness of the recording, whereas a sound played offstage may not carry the same metatextual weight. For example, Miller mentions a flute playing offstage in the opening scene (1), which returns throughout the play as a symbol of Willy remembering his father. Miller does not mention in the stage direction whether or not the sound should be played live, or if it can be recorded ahead of time. Even if a production decides to play the flute as a recording, it wouldn’t necessarily create the same formal conflict that the tape recorder does. Because the sound would be non-diegetic, rather than a physical sound within the storyworld, it would imply that it is a subjective extension of some voice within the play. The sound would be an aspect of the immersive experience of the live performance of memory even if the memory-sound itself is not necessarily performed live.

In both plays, the tape recorder stands as a signifier for the importance of diegetic recorded voice, as opposed to non-diegetic recorded technology incorporated into a piece of drama. When Krapp sits stationary on a stage listening to a piece that is conspicuously recorded outside of the present moment, there is a concrete certainty to the action taking place. The inherent suspense of live theatre in an actor potentially slipping up is gone; even the silences between words are automated, down to the granular level on the tape. As Steven Connor argues out in “Looping the Loop:

Tape-Time in Burroughs and Beckett,” “Beckett plays between silence-- passages in which nothing is said, or no sound is made-- and recorded silence, the one being an absence of sound, the other the presence of silence...” (97). Connor emphasizes the physically-determined nature of the tape sounds, including the silent passages of tape, versus the organic silence of a theatre in which no sound is happening.

An intrinsic part of my argument for *Death of a Salesman* and the concept of Willy as a live performer only applies when the play is indeed staged as a play. To emphasize the importance of the medium to this argument, it is essential to point out that this particular conflict does not exist in adaptations for film or television. In a recorded medium, the conflict between recorded voice and live voice is gone, as the film itself is also a form of recorded art.

So, in the 1985 adaptation of *Death of a Salesman* (dir. Volker Schlöndorff) for example, the tape recorder scene does not portray Willy losing control over the representations of memory within the medium itself because it is no longer contrasting live performance with recorded performance. The realities and common expectations about live theatre itself create the crux of the conflict of memory in Miller’s and Beckett’s plays, and therefore create a layer of conflict exclusive to the plays as live performances.

The ways in which tape recorders upset expectations of theatre contribute directly to both Miller’s and Beckett’s exploration of memory, and the performativity of memory versus the preservation of it. The prop of the tape recorder draws attention to the fact that representing memory onstage in the first place is an inherently dubious undertaking. Showcasing a memory in a play adds another layer of temporal mimesis to the stage by presuming to represent the past in the present. In the article, “Voice and Narration in Postmodern Drama,” Brian Richardson writes of the narrator in Tennessee Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie*, “[he] indicates that what is to follow is a memory play and observes that it is consequently not realistic. Here the diegetic portion ceases and the mimetic begins...” (683). Richardson highlights that because the narrator is representing the past within the present, it is inherently untrustworthy, as memories often are. This is where the theatre falls short when examined without the suspension of disbelief that

may allow an audience to believe in the truth of a flashback or memory: the actors on stage purport to represent something outside the linear progression of a play's unfolding, therefore imitating a nonlinear progression of time in a room where the performance is necessarily determined temporally. When Miller showcases Willy's embellished memory in *Death of a Salesman*, he explores this same conflict by showing that Willy's staged memories may imitate the past, but can never actually embody it.

Krapp, by contrast, has a physical time capsule of his own past. The expectation of memory as an imitation of the past disappears when the possibility of physical memory asserts itself continually onstage. Richardson's examination of the memory-narrator is especially relevant here. Krapp's tape recorder functions essentially as a narrator of the past. Or, more specifically, a narrator located diegetically within the past. However, Beckett consciously creates an impossibility of memory distortion. Krapp cannot alter his memories through performance because they are not a live performance. The memories played have already been performed, and preserved, as a bridge to a solid past that may be observed, but never altered. In "Matters of Memory in *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Not I*," Jeannette Malkin writes, "Memory in a box means memory localized, thrillingly present within a concrete, material form. No longer elusive or diffuse, memory seems self-contained, redeemable, depending for its 'use' on finding the right reel, twisting the right levers, locating the desired section of tape" (26). By outsourcing the process of remembering to the technological source in a medium predicated on the expectation of live performance, Beckett, and to a lesser extent Miller, disrupt the previously outlined expectations about theatre specifically in regards to how a character may experience the process of memory on a stage.

This subversion of onstage remembering without embodiment contributes to the ideas outlined in Miller's examination of modern tragedy. The loss of one's own power over memory represents a loss over one's own narrative. Willy is able to lie to himself, and to the audience, about what the past is in relation to the present. The tape recorder represents the possibility that something permanent is creeping into the narrative he has constructed. This permanence poses a serious

threat to his imagined position in the world. For Willy, the new world is "cut and dried" in the sense that the truth is now cut and dried. He can no longer flatter himself if this medium takes over. The condition Willy faces here is tragic in the context of Miller's theory on tragedy. His "rightful place in the world" (Miller 1) is slipping away from him because of the displacement of the particular and embodied audience, whose presence is needed to bear witness to his impossible attempt to resist an inevitable fate.

The technology within the medium therefore creates the tragic feeling Miller outlines. Steven Connor writes in his analysis of *Krapp's Last Tape*, "[tape] is the medium that most seems to embody the predicament of temporal embodiment-- by linking us to our losses, making it possible to recall what we can no longer remember, keeping us in touch with what nevertheless remains out of reach, making us remain what we no longer are" (101). To extend his analysis to *Death of a Salesman* in the context of the tape recorder scene, the recorder may be seen to represent the possibility that Willy could exist the way Krapp does: reliving the past as it happened, and wishing in futility that he could make it different. Therefore, the "rightful" position as the performer, the salesman of memory that Willy attempts to inhabit, is usurped by a superior remembering technology. Similar to the automation of jobs that take away the position of an employee, Willy is replaced on his own stage by a technology that reveals him to be inherently fraudulent as a memory player. Miller spells out his tragic downfall in this scene at the level of the stage, the audience, and their relationship to a character who no longer controls the medium he once thrived under.

At this point, it is important to address the crucial differences between *Death of a Salesman* and *Krapp's Last Tape*. The primary difference that separates Miller's play from Beckett's in the context of my argument lies in just how much Miller's play adheres to those aforementioned expectations about live theatre. Unlike *Krapp*, the majority of Miller's play centers around the traditional performance implied in theatre, rather than formal experiments with recording technology. Willy's interaction with Howard marks a shift in the way memory may be represented, whereas Beckett's play showcases a technological relationship between performer and their method of performance from the moment the play begins.

So, *Krapp's Last Tape* can be compared to *Salesman* in terms of where its protagonist stands in regards to their memory being automated; it is in a sense a before-and-after depiction of memory being overtaken by the recording device. Miller's protagonist refuses to submit to technological remembering in his interaction with Howard, while Krapp has submitted from the start. Willy's memory still rests on performance, not technology, and he fights for his status as a rememberer. Rather than a struggle for control over the past, Beckett's narrative is about futility and passivity in that it presupposes a material remembering process for its subject. In this sense, Willy is more a tragic protagonist than Krapp because of his willingness to struggle; Willy faces defeat, whereas Krapp begins defeated, thus never becoming the tragic hero who embodies the "inherent unwillingness to remain passive" that Miller describes (1).

However different the characters may be, their similarities, as well as their shared interaction with the same technology, offer a sort of minimal pair that allows us to explore how a certain type of character copes with their memory being embodied through tape. As character types, the two protagonists are quite similar: they are both aging men living in the past to some degree, coping with the fact that their best days are likely behind them. They are also both characterized specifically in regards to how they perform. Specifically, they are characterized based around how they perform memory as a way to revisit or inhabit the past in their respective ways. The similarities between the two works provide a unique opportunity to explore the ways in which tape recorders onstage contribute to, and subvert, the processes of onstage remembering for the two characters.

The specific difference in regards to their relationship to the tape recorders then rests on

whether or not the character accepts the tape as the past or continues to live in denial. As mentioned, Willy still lives in denial over the nature of his own memory. As an audience, we know that he lives in denial. He performs to himself as much as he performs for us. In terms of his relationship to the tape as memory, he asserts his "rightful place" in the world by refusing to accept the tape as a representation of real life. He calls the recorder "lifelike" (61), importantly emphasizing that the tape imitates, but is not, real life. His own authentic truth does not yet leave room for the intruding medium. Beckett's protagonist, written in response to the technology nine years after Miller, experiences the narration of his own story, on his own stage, through the same technological memory.

To conclude, Miller's drama showcases a complex relationship to memory, one of memory as a performance. Miller contextualizes the theatre, alongside memory, as a subjective representation of the past, which is often performed for one's own benefit. When tape appears to the rememberer, like the live performer, their dramatic power in that moment is lessened by how they can reliably conjure the past convincingly—or, rather, by how their audiences, within or beyond the fourth wall of the stage, believe in their reliability. In *Death of a Salesman*, the failure in memory performance that diegetic tape creates contributes a metatextual tragedy to the play in keeping with Miller's own theory of modern tragedy. By looking towards *Krapp's Last Tape* as the conclusive end to this new form of technological remembering, I hope this paper provides a new insight into the tape recorder scene in *Death of a Salesman*, both in how Miller depicts and confronts Willy's role as a performer and, in turn, how Miller uses this scene to expose the technical unreliability of staged memory.

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Keanan Byggdin's capstone honours essay, "A Dream That Held Us All: Two-Eyed Seeing and the Decolonial World-Building of The Marrow Thieves," is a model of how to uphold Indigenous scholarship and decolonizing critical practices as a settler scholar of Indigenous literature. Keanan begins the essay with a positioning statement that locates their relationship to Dimaline's text as a fifth-generation white settler reader who grew up on the original lands and traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, Assiniboine, Cree, Dakota, Dene, Oji-Cree, and Saulteaux, and the homeland of the Métis Nation. Keanan foregrounds Indigenous scholarship in their citational practice, centring the work of elders and knowledge-keepers such as Mi'kmaq elder Albert Marshall, Mi'kmaq poet and scholar Rebecca Thomas, and Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice, to craft an innovative analysis of Cherie Dimaline's post-apocalyptic novel *The Marrow Thieves*. Beginning their critical work with a location of self and an honouring of Indigenous protocol, Keanan enacts the very Etuaptmumk (two-eyed seeing) that they employ in their reading of Dimaline's text. Used primarily in fields such as forestry management, Biology, and Environmental Studies, Etuaptmumk is a non-hierarchical, collaborative approach to knowledge-acquisition based in a belief that Indigenous and settler knowledge-systems can produce deeper insights together than either can on their own in benefit to all living beings. This is the first time I've seen Etuaptmumk used in the context of literary scholarship, and Keanan's use of this predominantly science-based critical practice in their reading of Dimaline's Indigenous storytelling is an exciting new application of elder Albert Marshall's work within the Humanities. Keanan's use of Etuaptmumk offers careful and critical attention to the narrative techniques Dimaline employs for both settler and Indigenous readerships. Keanan demonstrates that Dimaline's storytelling strategies in *The Marrow Thieves* work to disrupt instrumentalizing settler mythologies that have denigrated the earth and its people for mindless profit, while simultaneously upholding a decolonial vision for the future of Turtle Island. Keanan's scholarship is an example of the inclusive, original, and reconciliatory work needed in our current study of contemporary literature. It's been an honour to learn from Keanan and from the Indigenous scholars they foreground in their work throughout this Honours capstone project.

– Heather Jessup

## A “Dream That Held Us All”

### Two-Eyed Seeing and the Decolonial World-Building of *The Marrow Thieves*

Keanan Byggdin

#### Positioning Statement

As Sophie McCall et al. note in their introduction to *Read, Listen, Tell: Indigenous Stories from Turtle Island*, “[c]entring Indigenous scholarship and intellectual traditions . . . means following good protocol and locating oneself, Indigenous or non-Indigenous, in relation to a text (4).” I come to Cherie Dimaline’s *The Marrow Thieves* as a fifth-generation white settler reader who grew up on Treaty 1, Treaty 4, and Treaty 6 Territory, the original lands and traditional territories of Indigenous Peoples including the Anishinaabeg, Assiniboine, Cree, Dakota, Dene, Oji-Cree, and Saulteaux, and the homeland of the Métis Nation. I acknowledge that my upbringing and education within the settler colonial state of Canada means my worldview contains inherently colonial and racist biases that must be continually critiqued and unlearned. In reading and exploring this text, I recognize I am not an expert in Traditional Knowledge or Indigenous Literatures, nor do I share the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples. My scholarship may contain mistakes and misunderstandings, and it is my responsibility to own and rectify any harms such errors may cause. I am immensely grateful to the Indigenous Elders and scholars whose perspectives and knowledge have allowed me to engage in a more thorough and nuanced reading of *The Marrow Thieves* than I would have been able to do on my own. I am also thankful for the opportunity to study in Kijipuktuk and live as a guest here in Mi’kma’ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi’kmaq People.

In *The Marrow Thieves*, Cherie Dimaline anticipates a near-future where colonialism and capitalism have brought about widespread environmental degradation and the breakdown of settler society across Turtle Island (North America). Elders Miig and Minerva shepherd a group of Indigenous youth through this polluted landscape, evading the genocidal white authorities who pursue them. Each night, the Elders gather everyone around the campfire to share tales of “the old-timey” (Dimaline 21) so the youth in their care can grasp their history and the origins of the threats they now face. Like Miig and Minerva, Dimaline understands the power of story to inform, guide, preserve, and protect. This essay examines *The Marrow Thieves* through the lens of Etuaptmuk (Two-Eyed Seeing) and argues that Dimaline’s utilization of Indigenous storytelling techniques serves to both decentre socially and environmentally harmful settler mythologies and articulate a decolonial vision for the future that benefits all of Turtle Island.

In a 2018 interview with TVOntario, Dimaline states that *The Marrow Thieves* is meant to speak

to “Indigenous young people, so that they can see themselves in the future” and also “Canadian kids so they can understand . . . there’s been some very troubled history in Canada . . . [but] that they are absolutely empowered to make changes . . . [so] these horrible things don’t happen again” (“Reclaiming Lost Dreams” 01:27–01:54). And indeed, the book has reached a wide audience since its publication in 2017, topping national bestseller lists and garnering a Governor General’s Literary Award and the CODE Burt Award for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Young Adult Literature, among other honours. In crafting a novel that appeals to these two distinct readerships, Dimaline’s work engages and dialogues with both the conventions of settler literature as well as the Traditional Knowledge and Oral Traditions of Turtle Island’s Indigenous Peoples that go back thousands of years. Dimaline engages these dual worldviews to create literature that not only entertains but also educates and encourages. This approach to storytelling mirrors the structure of Two-Eyed Seeing advanced by Mi’kmaq Elder Albert Marshall.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Chief Charles Labrador of Acadia First Nation and Marshall’s spouse Elder Murdena Marshall of Eskasoni

First Nation have also made important contributions to the conceptualization of Etuaptmuk. My own

While colonial education systems have long sought to dominate and eradicate Indigenous worldviews, Marshall and his educational partners assert that “Indigenous ways of knowing” and “Western ways of knowing” have much to offer one another (Hatcher et al. 146). Indigenous and settler knowledge systems can produce deeper insights together than either can on their own, insights that can benefit all those who inhabit Turtle Island. Crucially, Two-Eyed Seeing requires a non-hierarchical, collaborative approach to succeed (Hatcher et al. 146). It is specifically the “overlapping” effect produced by viewing the world through these dual perspectives simultaneously that allows a clearer, more holistic picture to emerge (Iwama 4-5).

Originally introduced in Unama’ki (Cape Breton) to encourage greater Mi’kmaq student participation in the Integrative Sciences, Marshall recognizes that Two-Eyed Seeing can be applicable to a wide variety of academic disciplines and contexts, and involve Indigenous perspectives that come from beyond Mi’kma’ki (Bartlett et al. 336, 338). Within the context of literary criticism, Two-Eyed Seeing offers the opportunity to greatly enrich an analysis of *The Marrow Thieves* because it encourages the reader to consider how Dimaline’s storytelling style incorporates and interacts with both Traditional Knowledge and Western literature.

It is precisely because of this double narrative vision that Dimaline is able to so effectively expose and excoriate what Jo-Ann Episkenew refers to as Canada’s “national collective myth,” the stories settlers tell themselves in order to rationalize colonialism and provoke patriotic sentimentalism to keep the colonial worldview alive (71). In literature that reinforces this myth, Indigenous Peoples are either treated as antagonists standing in the way of colonial progress, or, more frequently, dismissed as unimportant characters who gradually disappear from the narrative in order to minimize white guilt over the repeated atrocities colonizers have committed against the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island for more than five hundred years (Episkenew 72). Following Marshall’s exhortation to “weave back and forth

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introduction to Two-Eyed Seeing came from Mi’kmaw poet and academic Rebecca Thomas’s 2016 TEDxNSCCWaterfront talk. A recording of her presentation is available to view on [YouTube](#).

between” knowledge systems (Bartlett et al. 335), Dimaline uses the strengths of Traditional Knowledge to challenge both gothic literature and science fiction, two settler-dominated genres whose anti-Indigenous tropes have helped to uphold the national collective myth and by extension the settler colonial state of Canada.

Gothic literature has long been used to articulate a distinctly Canadian cultural identity that nevertheless remains recognizable and palatable to British colonial sensibilities (Sugars 7). In seeking to manufacture a supposedly authentic Canadian ghost for this new gothic setting, settler writers frequently cast “Indigenous figures as inhuman avatars” (Ingwersen 61) haunting the boundaries of settler society.<sup>14</sup> *The Marrow Thieves* troubles this trope, however. In Dimaline’s novel, there is no artificial border separating civilization from wilderness. For example, the reader first encounters Frenchie, Dimaline’s young Metis<sup>15</sup> protagonist, in the remnants of suburban Toronto. Here, Frenchie and his brother Mitch utilize a tree house “like a sniper hole” to observe their surroundings and snack on a scavenged bag of Doritos (Dimaline 2). Later, Frenchie moves into the woods beyond the city and meets Miig, who teaches him how to keep an eye out for danger and hunt game. Frenchie is perfectly capable of surviving in either an urban or a rural setting, and his body—the pain of a rotten tooth, the sensation of waking up cold, the fusion of hair to tree sap—is always present in the story. This boy is no ghost.

Colonial authorities, represented by government agents known as Recruiters, do not respect the supposed frontier between settler society and the wilderness, either. They continue to haunt and hunt Frenchie at every step. In Dimaline’s telling then, the true monster terrorizing the shared terrain of Turtle Island is white supremacy. While Frenchie is able to avoid the Recruiters regardless of his location, it is also true that he benefits greatly from interacting with other Indigenous Peoples outside Toronto. As Daniel Heath Justice notes, Indigenous writers have often used their storytelling to help “rebuild, reassert, reclaim, and reestablish connections and relationships that return us to ourselves, our lands,

<sup>14</sup> For example, see *Wacousta* by John Richardson.

<sup>15</sup> This spelling follows the text of *The Marrow Thieves*.

and our communities” (65). In *The Marrow Thieves*, the wilderness is ultimately a site of transformation for Frenchie, providing a space for him to reconnect with Indigenous Elders and peers as well as learn important Traditional Knowledge that is essential to his survival.

Dimaline’s efforts to trouble and decentre the national collective myth are also apparent in her framing of apocalypse. As Audra Mitchell and Aadita Chaudhury note, mainstream science fiction writers frequently contemplate apocalypse as a one-time event yet to come (310). Apocalypse therefore becomes a titillating terror for settler readers, allowing them to imagine a world where Western civilization has collapsed, while at the same time offering the comforting knowledge that such a world will always be a fictional, or at least a future, concern. In other words, “despite their claims to universality,” such “‘end of the world’ discourses are more specifically concerned about protecting the future of *whiteness*” (Mitchell and Chaudhury 310). Even in the midst of the cataclysmic societal change that settler-produced science fiction envisions, the genre takes great pains to “explicitly center figures of whiteness as their protagonists” who strive to “protect and/or regenerate and even improve Western forms of governance and social order by leveraging resilience, scientific prowess, and technological genius” (Mitchell and Chaudhury 313).<sup>16</sup> This narrative viewpoint echoes Canadian gothic concerns about the need for settlers to protect themselves from the perceived dangers that Indigenous Peoples and the wilderness represent to their exploitative way of life.

In *The Marrow Thieves*, however, white society and its associated technologies do not save the world, but rather destroy it. Settlers’ insatiable demand for Turtle Island’s resources and land leads to a continental water shortage, the pollution of the Great Lakes, massive earthquakes that destroy California, the melting of the polar ice caps, armed conflict between nations, and widespread disease (Dimaline 24-26). In addition, the settlers who survive begin to experience perpetually dreamless sleep that threatens their sanity and leads to increased aggression and self-harm. As Miig puts it, “a man without dreams is just

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<sup>16</sup> For example, see *The Last Canadian* by William C. Heine.

a meaty machine with a broken gauge” (Dimaline 88). This failure to dream finally forces settlers to reckon with their harmful worldview and its immense limitations. They literally cannot imagine a way to save themselves from this catastrophe of their own making because they only know how to dominate, not collaborate with, nature. Indigenous Peoples, meanwhile, are able to continue dreaming precisely because they do not subscribe to artificial, settler-imposed binaries like human/non-human or civilization/wilderness. Instead, they understand that “[w]hen we heal our land, we are healed also” (Dimaline 193).

Unlike white science fiction narratives, there is no singular event that leads to crisis in *The Marrow Thieves*. This apocalypse is cyclical rather than linear in its progression, “an ongoing and relentless process, not unlike settler colonialism, itself” (Justice 168). As a Metis<sup>17</sup> writer, Dimaline uses an ostensibly futurist narrative to call attention to the historical and present injustices, traumas, and genocide Indigenous Peoples have faced in Canada at the hands of white settlers, “displaying the Indigenous concept that all time is closely connected and that actions can transcend time” (Younging 14). Within the story, Miig ensures that the youth in his care understand how the problems they face are just one manifestation of the many horrors colonizers have inflicted on Indigenous Peoples over the centuries. For example, there is a clear invocation of Canada’s residential school system in the sites of torture and murder set up by Recruiters (Dimaline 5). Government forces place captured Indigenous Peoples in these ‘schools’ not for education but extraction, their bodies boiled down into “a thick, viscous liquid” (Dimaline 144). These heinous actions exemplify “the settler presumption that all things Indigenous are ripe for the taking: blood, identity, bodies, land, heritage, spirituality, being, voice” (Justice 138). Dimaline’s Indigenous characters, however, continually resist settler attempts to exploit them in this way. Their bodies are not a commodity, but rather a living expression of Indigenous sovereignty and survival.

Of course, to read *The Marrow Thieves* as merely a reactive text would be a mistake. As Gregory Younging points out in *Elements of*

<sup>17</sup> This spelling follows the preference of Cherie Dimaline.

*Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous Peoples*, it is important to contextualize stories like Dimaline's as "an extension of Traditional Knowledge systems, Indigenous histories, histories of colonization, and contemporary realities" because "Indigenous Literatures are their own canon and *not* a subgroup of CanLit" (15, emphases added). Dimaline's critiques of both Canadian gothic and white science fiction narratives are an example of how *The Marrow Thieves* engages in Two-Eyed Seeing. She does not limit herself to the conventions of either genre but rather reimagines them and relocates them alongside Indigenous modes of storytelling in a way that allows her readers to see beyond settler narrative traditions and the limitations of the national collective myth. This is an exchange, rather than a consolidation or subsumption, of knowledge (Iwama 5).

For Grace Dillon, *The Marrow Thieves* would fit into the broader context of Indigenous futurisms: narratives that expand the boundaries of traditional science fiction in a manner similar to Afrofuturisms (2). In such narratives, "the fantastic is an extension of the *possible*, not the *impossible*" (Justice 149, emphases added). Rather than relying on some magical technology to fix societal problems, Indigenous futurisms posit that Traditional Knowledge already provides humanity the tools it needs to save itself. Miig's storytelling practice embodies this approach. He knows it is important to instruct Frenchie and the other Indigenous youth not just in hunting practices, but also their history, because holding onto this knowledge is "the only way to make the kinds of changes . . . necessary to really survive" (Dimaline 25). Dimaline does not wish to help her readers imagine a future where settlers' current lifestyle of reckless consumption can continue. Instead, like Frenchie, she calls us to reckon with our past and take concrete actions in the present to prevent further harm to both our species and our planet.

Two-Eyed Seeing is an ideal lens to read *The Marrow Thieves* and other Indigenous futurisms through because this is a genre that foregrounds "the science of indigeneity in a discourse that invites discerning readers to realize that Indigenous science is . . . integral to a refined twenty-first-century sensibility" (Dillon 3). In Dimaline's world, a Western worldview alone will never be able to tackle the climate crisis and other

societal issues. Settlers must learn to recognize the strengths of Indigenous perspectives if they wish to address the gaps in their own knowledge.

Colonialism, however, represents a substantial barrier to Two-Eyed Seeing. The vast majority of settler characters in *The Marrow Thieves* have no interest in collaborating and sharing knowledge with Indigenous Peoples because their colonial upbringing has taught them to devalue and discard all other perspectives aside from their own. Decolonization, which works to dismantle the hegemonic authority of colonialism, is therefore key to creating the conditions necessary for Two-Eyed Seeing to flourish. The path to decolonization in *The Marrow Thieves* involves the adoption of four fundamental principles across Turtle Island: affirming Indigenous identities through kinship; helping the earth with "expansive personhood" (Justice 87); honouring and valuing Indigenous Elders, youth, and Two-Spirit people; and building alliances of mutual care to ensure no one is left behind.

As in present Canadian society, settlers and Indigenous characters in *The Marrow Thieves* have very different ways of conceptualizing Indigenous identity. For colonizers, Indigeneity is an elastic concept, both expandable and contractable depending on whether they wish to view Indigenous bodies as either beneficial or a threat to colonial resource gathering (Justice 8-9). Thus, in Dimaline's novel, when government scientists discover that dreams are physically stored in the bone marrow of Indigenous Peoples, what begins as a polite request for volunteers with "Indigenous bloodlines and good general health" to provide samples of their DNA quickly devolves into a predatory system where officials bribe settlers to racially profile their neighbours and government forces snatch Indigenous Peoples right off the street (Dimaline 89). In a subtle and somewhat humorous nod to race shifting, Frenchie's survival companion Wab declares that clueless settlers attempting to identify the "Indians" in their midst could even mistake "a Swedish girl" with "a braid in her hair" as an Indigenous woman (Dimaline 81).

This obsession with marrow echoes both colonial governments' attempts to limit Indigeneity using blood quantum and settler scientists' efforts to catalogue Indigenous DNA under the assumption that interracial relationships will lead to Indigenous Peoples becoming

genetically, if not literally, extinct (Pravinchandra 137). Dimaline, however, forcefully rejects the false framing of Indigenous identity offered by this dubious legislation and scientific racism. Instead, she envisions a world that affirms Indigeneity through kinship, a multifaceted concept that Justice notes can encompass “extra- or even non-biological cultural and community relationships, chosen connections and commitments, as well as political, spiritual, and ceremonial processes that bring people into deep and meaningful affiliation” (75). As Justice further explains, this is an important and salient point for Dimaline to make, considering “that kinship was *specifically* targeted by colonial authorities in their efforts to destroy Indigenous communities,” resulting in harmful internalizations of settler messaging about who is, and who is not, Indigenous (58).<sup>18</sup> To insist on kinship as the key to understanding Indigeneity, then, is a decidedly decolonial act. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues, “[c]olonized peoples have been compelled to define what it means to be human because there is a deep understanding of what it has meant to be considered not fully human, to be *savage*” (28). Miig does not ask the children that stumble into his camp to produce an Indian status or Métis citizenship card or take a DNA test to prove their Indigeneity. Instead, he claims the Indigenous youth in his care as “my family” (Dimaline 16). Significantly, this community of Indigenous survivors comes to include both Rose, who is Afro-Indigenous, as well as the “pale, green-eyed” Isaac (Dimaline 101). Kinship draws the circle of belonging wide, welcoming members whom settler legal and genetic authorities would seek to exclude.

At the same time, kinship also requires “a process of continual acknowledgement and enactment” (Justice 42). In other words, the act of claiming is inseparable from the act of being claimed. Consider the characters of Lincoln and Travis, two Indigenous men who serve as bounty hunters for the government. While Miig is wary of Lincoln and Travis from the moment they meet, he allows his family to camp with them against his better judgement. The men’s appearance and ability to speak in Cree lull Miig’s children into a false sense of security. They have forgotten their

Elder’s earlier warning that “[n]ot every Indian is an Indian” (Dimaline 55). Lincoln and Travis do not remain part of the camp for long. Both are killed later that night when attempting to kidnap young RiRi, who also tragically passes away. The two men fail in their attempt to claim and be claimed as kin because they do not acknowledge that kinship comes with responsibilities of care to one’s fellow relations (Justice 86).

It is worth noting that while Frenchie kills Travis (and expresses remorse for doing so), he is earlier unable to kill a moose while out hunting for his family. Coming face to face with the animal, Frenchie seems to recognize him as kin. “His eyes were huge, dark globes that reflected back their surroundings,” Frenchie says, “I was sure I could see myself in there” (Dimaline 49). As Justice asserts, Indigenous practices of kinship have long been “inextricably realized in a context of expansive personhood . . . where our human family members are not our only relatives to whom we owe attentive obligation” (87). Here, Dimaline calls attention to the importance of following Traditional Knowledge and extending empathy, value, and agency to the natural world. Frenchie ultimately concludes that killing the moose would result in a wasteful death and so lowers his gun. The boy recognizes that he “owe[s] reciprocal and respectful obligation” to the animal, and that makes it difficult to engage in unsustainable and selfish acts against nature (Justice 89). While this is no doubt a difficult decision to make on an empty stomach, Frenchie returns to camp to find his family preparing a dinner of wild turkey. Beyond the poisoned confines of settler society, it appears the land and waters still have much to offer those who are willing to navigate their environment with care and compassion.

Most settlers in *The Marrow Thieves* do not acknowledge the importance of expansive personhood, however. Instead, the vestigial colonial authority figures that remain—religious leaders, scientists, the police—do what their ancestors have always done: treat Indigenous Peoples not “as humans” but “commodities” (Dimaline 203). Although it is undoubtedly the relentless resource extraction demanded by colonization that has brought humanity to the

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<sup>18</sup> To be clear, the devaluing of kinship and the policing of Indigenous identity is ongoing within Canada’s judicial and legislative systems. As Bob Joseph notes,

“[t]he Indian Act remains in effect today, with basically the same framework it had in 1876” (10).



brink of extinction in *The Marrow Thieves*, settlers resolutely refuse to accept any blame for the horrors their worldview has wrought. They would rather consume the bone marrow of Indigenous Peoples as just another exploitable resource to ease their dreamless sleep, even if that means mutilating and destroying Indigenous bodies in the process (Ingwersen 64). As readers, we are never told whether marrow extraction actually succeeds in curing the growing madness of the settler population. The point is entirely that the work of the Recruiters is desperate, indefensible, and doomed to fail. The authorities do not realize, or refuse to acknowledge, that “[o]ur humanity isn’t what we *are*, but rather what we *enact*” (Justice 70). As *The Marrow Thieves* repeatedly underlines, we must expand rather than contract our definition of personhood if humanity is to continue its existence beyond the twenty-first century.

Here, then, is one of the most compelling examples from Dimaline’s world of how necessary Two-Eyed Seeing is for the inhabitants of Turtle Island. The text makes clear that a settler worldview is fundamentally incompatible with the notion of expansive personhood, and that any attempts to solve our present climate crisis through additional acts of exploitation will ultimately fail. Those of us who are settlers must therefore be willing to envision the future through the added lens of Traditional Knowledge if we hope to fully understand the failures of colonialism and make the societal changes that are desperately needed to ensure our species’ survival.

Indigenous Elders, youth, and Two-Spirit people all do their part in *The Marrow Thieves* to hold onto kinship, expansive personhood, and other equally important Traditional Knowledge. Consider the character of Minerva. As an Elder, she is not able to carry the most or travel the fastest. But the politics of productivity that form a core part of the settler colonial worldview do not define Minerva’s value to her Indigenous kin. Thus, when Frenchie expresses sympathy for Rose, who is “stuck” with Minerva while he learns hunting skills from Miig, she rebukes him by pointing out that “Minerva has the language” and is worth listening to (Dimaline 38).

In analyzing Minerva’s character, Gesa Mackenthun describes her as an “elderly, apparently senile woman” who “[u]nexpectedly” manages to prevent the Recruiters from extracting

her marrow by “humming and singing” (15). While Minerva’s decision to refuse supposedly “[s]ensible words – English words” (Dimaline 172) during her imprisonment might be mistaken for a sign of senility, it actually represents an intentional and determined act of decolonization on her part. This is because “language . . . is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture” (Ngũgĩ 13). Colonizers have long attempted to suppress Indigenous languages across their empires in order to eradicate the alternative cultural values these languages hold. By singing in Anishinaabemowin, however, Minerva demonstrates that the colonial worldview is not universal. Her rejection of English is not unexpected then, but rather the culmination of her life-long efforts to resist settler attempts to silence her. Minerva’s ties to Traditional Knowledge imbue her with a tangible power her captors cannot counteract. By relying on “her blood memory, her teachings, her ancestors” (Dimaline 173), the Elder reveals the hollow authority of the colonizer.

The power of the Traditional Knowledge Minerva carries is not for her alone. When Frenchie and others grow sick from the cold, Minerva “boil[s] cedar branches and pine needles into medicine” and feeds it to her younger kin with tender care (Dimaline 93). Her concern for the next generation’s wellbeing is so great that the Elder is willing to do whatever it takes to keep them safe. Just before she is captured, the group spends a night in a barn. While the others make themselves a bed in the hayloft, Minerva gently but firmly indicates she plans to sleep on the hard ground. Though the Elder’s decision initially baffles Frenchie, her foresight becomes apparent later that night during a raid by the Recruiters. Assuming Minerva is sleeping alone, they take only her. The Elder deliberately sacrifices herself to save the others, leaving only some jingles she has fashioned out of canned food lids. Even in her absence, the Traditional Knowledge Minerva has gifted her younger Indigenous kin keeps on giving. Responding to Slopper’s confusion about holding onto noisemaking objects in an apocalyptic colonial landscape where Indigenous silence appears paramount to survival, Chi-Boy says “[s]ometimes you risk everything for a life worth living, even if you’re not the one that’ll be alive to live it” (Dimaline 152). Minerva demonstrates that Traditional Knowledge ought to be freely shared

with Indigenous kin, rather than hoarded or exploited.

This framing of Elders and youth working in tandem to keep Traditional Knowledge alive is important. As Frenchie observes after his family loses both RiRi and Minerva, while “[w]e were faster without our youngest and oldest,” the group was also “without deep roots, without the acute need to protect and make better” (Dimaline 154). Here, Dimaline demonstrates that intergenerational kinship is an essential component of Indigenous survival. Her choice of Frenchie as her primary narrator, and the marketing of *The Marrow Thieves* as young adult fiction, echo this truth. As a Metis storyteller, Dimaline is very careful to ensure the Traditional Knowledge of her own Elders and kin will be accessible to young Indigenous readers across Turtle Island.

There is a distinct lack of hierarchy in this reciprocal relationship. For example, when Frenchie throws himself in front of a potentially electrified fence in the hopes of sparing Miig, the older man admonishes him, emphasizing that “[n]o one is more important than anyone else” and “[n]o one should be sacrificed for anyone else” (Dimaline 58). As Elders, Miig and Minerva do possess important Traditional Knowledge, but they do so only as stewards who seek to pass these lessons on to the next generation. Thus, even when a government agent kills Minerva, he cannot silence her. Instead, Slopper and the other youth are inspired to “start passing on the teachings right away, while they were still relearning themselves” (Dimaline 214). Slopper’s work takes on a special meaning when considered in light of Wab and Chi-Boy’s pregnancy towards the end of the book. Despite her death, Minerva’s efforts to project Traditional Knowledge into the future undoubtedly succeed because each individual does what they can to carry it forward.

Of course, the Indigenous youth are not alone in their attempts to reclaim their cultures. In Minerva’s absence, other Elders step up to serve as guides for the next generation and help them to continue resisting the Recruiters. It is significant to note that Dimaline deliberately positions two queer men, Miig and his husband Isaac, as two of Minerva’s most prominent successors. Throughout the book, Miig’s Two-Spirit and Indigenous identities are never in conflict. He is always fully

accepted and loved by those who know him. When Frenchie meets Isaac, he sees “[s]omething about his eyes” that “reminded me of Minerva” (Dimaline 223), a similarity later confirmed when Isaac reveals he is able to “dream in Cree” (Dimaline 228). As Indigiqueer men, Miig and Isaac act as inherent symbols of decolonization in the narrative because “heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity are a part of colonial projects” (Driskill 403). Since the existence of Two-Spirit people calls the gendered hierarchies of settler colonialism into question, they therefore have a “central” role to play in “decolonial agendas” (Driskill 409).

The inclusion of Two-Spirit characters in *The Marrow Thieves* is framed as both a positive and necessary part of Indigenous survival. Frenchie would likely have perished in the woods without Miig’s guidance, and his community would have been at a loss to dream their way towards a better future without Isaac. Embracing these two Indigiqueer men is “actually an anti-assimilation stance against” colonialism because it asserts the right of Indigenous Peoples to inhabit sexualities and gender identities that settlers have long deemed deviant and sought to destroy through Christianization (Driskill 415). By challenging this one imposition of external morality, the community is ultimately working towards the dismantling of all colonial cultural frameworks forced upon Indigenous Peoples by settlers.

While recognizing the common forms of oppression that settler colonialism has imposed across Turtle Island, however, Dimaline also understands that her Metis identity does not give her carte blanche to appropriate the stories of other Indigenous cultures. As she mentions in her TVOntario interview:

“It’s absolutely crucial [to know] . . . who has permission to tell what story and what the protocols are . . . Some of the stories are only told at certain times of year, sometimes you have to go through an enormous training to be able to carry certain stories, and other than that . . . there’s just the stories that belong to other families . . . You would never tell somebody else’s story. You would never sing somebody else’s song. And so, for me, I’m very careful . . . [about] what stories I tell and even how I tell them . . .

I spend a lot of time with my adopted Auntie Lee Maracle who is one of the first Indigenous women . . . to be published . . . I carry a lot of her stories. She knows that I tell her stories. I never tell them as my own. I introduce her, her family, where their territory's from, and then tell that story with her permission." ("Reclaiming Lost Dreams" 08:12–09:11)

Thus, when Miig's family encounters an Indigenous encampment near Espanola, Dimaline is careful to name and honour the distinct cultures that make up the community's governing council: Metis, Cree, Anishnaabe, Inuit, Salish, Haudenosaunee, Migmaw, and Ho-Chunk.<sup>19</sup> When sharing their Traditional Knowledge with one another, the members of the camp also take pains not to "mak[e] things up" (Dimaline 214) or forget where these stories have come from.

Although the Espanola encampment remains under constant threat from the Recruiters, this community also comes closest to articulating a truly decolonized world where Two-Eyed Seeing can begin to help heal Turtle Island. An alliance of mutual care develops between the camp's First Nations, Inuit, and Métis residents. Men, women, Two-Spirit folks, the disabled, the young, and the old all come together to help one another survive. There is space here for non-Indigenous allies as well. For example, Father Carole uses his position within the settler government to relay important information to the Espanola encampment, including the whereabouts of Minerva. This allows the Indigenous leaders of the camp to make more informed decisions for their community than they could have done on their own. The crucial difference between Father Carole and the Recruiters is that the priest is willing to be critiqued. He does not react with anger, fear, or violence when Miig, Chi-Boy, and Frenchie assume

he is an enemy agent and nearly kill him. Instead, understanding why his presence would be upsetting to Indigenous Peoples, he remains silent until Frenchie's father can explain the man's connection to the community. The two Guyanese nurses who helped Isaac escape the schools are also willing to question their worldview. The women are described as "real allies" because "[t]hey put their lives on the line" instead of offering "just talk" when they realize what the government is doing to Indigenous Peoples (Dimaline 227). Here, Dimaline invites the non-Indigenous residents of Turtle Island to join Indigenous Peoples in disavowing and dismantling the settler state. Even settlers have a place in Dimaline's decolonial future, so long as they respect Indigenous cultural protocols, root their allyship in action, and listen just as much as they speak.

While it is important for *The Marrow Thieves* to shed light on colonization's many evils, Dimaline does not write only about "apocalypse," but also "what endures beyond it" by "imagin[ing] the living, loving, and connecting that takes place in the ruins of settler colonial excess" (Justice 167). She envisions a world where Traditional Knowledge gives Indigenous Peoples the strength to survive and settlers give up any claims of cultural superiority, recognizing that they must work in partnership with First Nations, Inuit, and the Métis to solve the systemic injustices and climate crisis that colonialism has unleashed on Turtle Island. Here then is "the . . . dream that held us all" (Dimaline 231). Through decolonization and Two-Eyed Seeing, Dimaline crafts a powerful story of Indigenous-settler collaboration. There is much we can accomplish if we work together. As Miig observes, "[w]e are actually both motivated by the same thing: survival" (Dimaline 54). If we believe in Dimaline's dream, however, we can do much more than merely survive. We can thrive.

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<sup>19</sup> These spellings follow page 169 of *The Marrow Thieves*.

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