

# RUTGERS UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL



*of*  
*Comparative Literature*  
*Edition No. 3 Spring 2020*



**THE RUTGERS UNIVERSITY  
UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL OF  
COMPARATIVE LITERATURE**

*Issue 3, Spring 2020*

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

The most enjoyable process of putting together this journal over the past year has been our engagement with the selection of papers contained within this issue. This year, we are proud to publish undergraduate papers ranging from a queer, posthumanist critique of Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* to a critical reading of industrialized factory-farming and food systems vis-à-vis Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Behind every paper are fellow undergraduate students—readers, authors, critics—who have poured hours of passion and labor into their work. Having the opportunity to look at their work and come face to face with new ideas, theories, practices, never fails to be invigorating. It reminds us of why we choose to study Comparative Literature, or rather, why we choose to read and learn at all: to engage with the unfamiliar and seek greater avenues of possibility. We hope that our readers emerge from reading this year's issue with the same sentiments that we felt when reading these papers for the first time.

Many thanks to our senior editors Christina Chen, Hope Dormer, and Alexandra Gupta, as well as our copy editors Malaika Jawed, Grace Kim, Stephanie Man, and Aaron Young for their dedication to the journal despite the challenging situation. We would also like to thank our cover illustrator Phoenix Reign for her impeccable art gracing the front of this year's issue. And finally, our deepest gratitude to our faculty advisors: Professor Andrew Parker of the Department of Comparative Literature and Professor Janet Walker, the Undergraduate Director of the Department of Comparative Literature.

Due to the changes in circumstance brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, we had to delay our publication of this year's issue far later than expected. Nevertheless, we hope that everyone involved with the publication of this issue can thoroughly appreciate the fruits of their labors.

— Pratibha Nyshadham and Maitreyi Rajaram

# THE PHALLUS PALACE: THE GRUNDLE DUNGEON

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Ari Colaprete

"The individual does actually carry on a twofold existence: one to serve his own purposes and the other as a link in a chain, which he serves against his will, or at least involuntarily."

— Freud, *On Narcissism*<sup>1</sup>

"But whoever is wisest among you is also just a conflict and a cross between a plant and ghost"

— Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*<sup>2</sup>

The question of the day is machines, cyborgs, and machine constructions; how these things become, as somehow differentiated from man, yet within man, seeded into *man*; seeded into and among men. For what is a cross between a plant and ghost, it must be that recognition that the body, the body which a Human is supposed to occupy, is nothing more than a shell, nothing more than a part among other parts, moving throughout and around and inside of each other, parts haunted by the very notion of a "soul" which they are presupposed to occupy.

## Bodies that Flatter

The radical cyborg thus imaginarily gratifies various liberatory fantasies which have, in a sense, already been coded in the terms of the dominant because they have been naturalized within the social imaginary itself.<sup>3</sup>

To Silvio, *Ghost in the Shell* is still fairly heterosexualized, as Kusanagi becomes the "womb" for which the phallus of the puppet master "inseminates" to create the new entity and reproduction—reproduction in an entirely heterosexual sense. Silvio posits that, while *Ghost in the Shell* offers an initially confusing and perhaps radical alterity of a potential "post-gender" society<sup>4</sup>, the film actually goes to, in multiple instances, fetishize the woman, show how

<sup>1</sup> Freud, Sigmund. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, p. 78

<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, et al. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: a Book for All and None*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 6

<sup>3</sup> Silvio, Carl. "Refiguring the Radical Cyborg in Mamoru Oshii's 'Ghost in the Shell.'" *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1999: 54–72. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/4240752](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4240752), p. 56

<sup>4</sup> Specifically, the confusion in the scene where Section 6 goes to inspect the Puppet Master in Section 9, and its body is referred to as a "he", even as the shot sits on a damaged but nude female-signified body.

Kusanagi is still gendered female even when it is no longer sensible.

But that is odd, considering how goofy some of these scenes are<sup>5</sup>, shots which hang on her nude body for far too long, especially in a society where anyone, regardless of sex assigned at birth, could take any body; they could even take a body which is not anthropomorphic. The very premise of the film itself would go to undermine its heterosexualizing complexes. Even the ending shows “her” in a body which cannot be gendered male or female—that of a child, an entirely neutral character (though it would’ve been cooler if they stuck her head on a donkey or something) . While it demonstrates that the society is still perfused by heterosexual practices, it also, at the same time, in a double movement shows how unimportant these aspects are through the demonstration, and the oddly necessary acts of *he* and *she*-ing in a place where even a diplomat has cybernetic enhancements<sup>6</sup>; where the bodies that produce gender are almost entirely separated from their natural origins, which are supposed to (in the antagonism of queer politics) construct a necessary binary.

We assume that a post-gender society would be constructed of “individuals”, but is it not this very enlightenment idea, the individual onto itself, upon which gender and the Other is necessitated upon? If one was looking for post-gender *in* gender, then they’d always find some way to relate how it functions in a heterosexualizing system. Heterosexualization itself functions in *pairings* and parts into a “whole”; it requires that word, the endlessly powerful word “love”. A word perhaps more powerful than a wound, perhaps a wound—physical/textual damage—itself is made in its usage (and how many wounds have been made following it); a word bound up in so much history and signification. Love is perhaps the most important component of heterosexuality and the formation of the Self. But if we look at the basis of *Ghost in the Shell* in heterosexuality as just that, a basis, then perhaps we can see how the film eventually *queers* the completeness of the “individual” as a function of a heterosexual economy, and how the posthuman who “comes from nowhere” does,

<sup>5</sup> Wherein Batou turns away from Kusanagi as she undresses on a boat even though he may have witnessed her body being manufactured; when he's probably seen her naked numerous times before

<sup>6</sup> It's in the shot in the first scene. When Kusanagi blows his head off, you can see the cables splaying out of it.

by virtue of its disunitariness, disrupt those very forces which construct it.

When Kusanagi “becomes” a child, this new figure, this *entity* which exists afterwards is no longer an individual itself; the shift, since Kusanagi always had a connection to the network, is one of thought and displacement. Her place in the network is within its *deferment*. Instead of now considering herself *individual*, she considers herself something like a shifting parameter in a network; to even say that she “considers herself” is odd and uncanny somehow—to say she “considers herself” is to say that there is yet a Kusanagi to do the considering; it is to say that the position of Kusanagi is yet satisfied, though that would be an unsatisfactory remark.

The change, the “shift” as it were, must occur only in the shifting of perspective; in the change of one’s way of seeing. But isn’t “perspective” an odd word to use here? When there is a complete lack of a personal notion—a notion of oneself—then the idea of a unitary locus, a single *lens* upon which the light of the world shines through, is shattered. And the light itself, the *material* world which these things are supposed to reflect and filter, is put back, far back, deferred infinitely so as to become totally *Real*. Even the ground itself has become a ground of shifting cables, a scattered surface, so the entire arrangement is fractured into a million pieces as they become further incomprehensible to the eye/I, so Kusanagi’s position is the position of a name; though it is an empty name. A name in signs only, a name which anything could fill, which its filling is only in deferment.

In the final scene of *Ghost in the Shell*<sup>7</sup> after Kusanagi “integrates” with the Puppet Master, we are left with something which is no longer “individual”. None of the characters are ever really sure if they’re still human (after all, it is Kusanagi who questions whether or not there was a “real me” in the first place; whether the entirety of her is already in-network), but they still appear to think of themselves *as* themselves. Therefore, is there any shift for Kusanagi in her position, between the beginning and end of the film? Is there any change at

<sup>7</sup> Actually, the Japanese title is something stupid (*Mobile Armored Riot Police*), although this forum page (<https://anime.stackexchange.com/questions/2823/what-is-the-origin-of-the-title-ghost-in-the-shell/2824> archived: <https://web.archive.org/web/20150925173705/https://anime.stackexchange.com/questions/2823/what-is-the-origin-of-the-title-ghost-in-the-shell/2824>) disputes that, saying the author of the *manga* always wanted the title to be *Ghost in the Shell*.



all?

“The physical disintegration—”one” may feel the ground shifting underneath their feet, as the world falls apart—with the splitting of the atom, the unwinding of even those objects in the constellation of the universe. The unwinding of time, as the relative perception of movements shifts and changes. The unwinding of even perception itself, as the medium of perception is lost; the single unitary locus, the lens, is fractured into so many pieces so the light refracts scattered against a scattered surface. The location of the light is deferred, the surface upon which it shines always pushed back, back into the mists of lost perception, lost ways of thinking, lost ideas; like dreams, the views of historical drama disappear the moment we wake up into our new ways of seeing, in the new light shining back into our eyes; but there are so many eyes, so many different shattered lenses—a stained glass, mosaic, a kaleidoscope—look out into the world and to which the world looks back in, constellational coordinate shifting, object-chains falling into and out of each other.”<sup>8</sup>  
 - Colaprete, “Machina: a Manifesto”

These “ghosts” which haunt the shells are the very attachments to the enlightenment individual; their “ghosts” are in that libidinal energy which *forces* the body to recognize a master, though this master is only the rotting remains of a dead idea. A *libido* is just that, a force not unlike the Schopenhauerian *Will* which was taken by Nietzsche to be one’s single unifying, defining logic towards material creation.<sup>9</sup> But the material and the figuring of the *self* and its ironic body is always a perplexing negotiation between the language of the body and the very force of the signifiers in whose ego-constructing web they are entrapped. “The radical difference between *referent* and *signified* is the site where the materiality of language and that of the world which it seeks to signify are perpetually negotiated.”<sup>10</sup> The Ghost in the Shell,

<sup>8</sup> Colaprete, A. "Machina: a Manifesto." www.earthsin.com. December 11, 2019. Web. December 17, 2019, <<http://www.earthsin.com/2019/12/machina-manifesto.html>>.

<sup>9</sup> “The fragments found in the note-books [for *The Birth of Tragedy*] contain a discussion of the ultimate nature of the universe, which, in true Schopenhauerian fashion, Nietzsche declares to be the will.” (Dolson, Grace Neal. *The Influence of Schopenhauer Upon Friedrich Nietzsche*, p. 243)

<sup>10</sup> Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: on the Discursive Limits of “Sex”*, Routledge, 2011, p. 38

as it were, the cross between the *ghost* and the *plant*, is a performance of this negotiation, its impossible libidinal complex and ever shifting locations of expression. For one to define the *pains* they receive in both word and text is completely indeterminable, where we must organize it somehow for it to be painful, yet the physical energy itself as it spills out the signifying web of the body, the blood of language dripping out as it fails to maintain the ego's object chain.

What is a plant, anyway, but the biological rule of economy, the thing *connected* to its environment? The unconscious object already within the boundaries of a *natural* world; nature being that *flow* of energy which expresses itself out the body of the earth into the body of the earth, whose energy signifies its parts and pieces that grow out from it; the Phallically signified parts of the environmental unconsciousness. The Ghost, the haunting ideal of unitary will.

To me, at least, it seems difficult to create a location for the perspective of Major Kusanagi, given her perplexing position as an agent; given her actual lack of location as an agency. We could say that she *recognizes* herself as having a shifted position, and from there her newfound agency arrives, but her agency is already splintered, her notion of self is already attached to the network. How can a network shape itself in terms of other "individuals", even as it recognizes the fault in these individuals? A network does not need these humans; a network moves. So too does Kusanagi, in the final scene, a body which is no longer entirely located within itself. A body which functions not as the "I" but as its limb, though it is a limb with no central nervous system, a decentralized nervous system.

So, the "body" of Kusanagi as it's transferred into this new object, this new entity which only occupies her name, lacks even entirely a perspective. Bodies are *supposed* to be intersections of discursive practices, performatively constituted in a series of signifying chains, granted a materiality through their textual weavings; but those parameters are always shifting. A continuous performance should be something untenable given a body which can be signified

separately in separate textual locations. A body which is *splintered*, but not in the sense of so many lines crossing *into* each other, but rather so many lines crossing *over* each other. Where the Self is a system of forces and commodities, so the self is so many lines which need to cross over each other under specific parameters; in others, they remain apart. Other “views” might have the “body” be its blood and organs, or something which has no unity at all, though the “viewer”, much like the “Reader” for Barthes, is as those discursive practices; it is the conditions under which these commodities are signified.

### **Earth Angel<sup>11</sup>**

Wherein heterosexuality we find the word *love*, it always connotes a completeness (“You complete me”) and a necessary lacking in the subject. A subject which is supposed to be onto itself, yet, in the Hegelian/Freudian/Lacanian sense, always needing an Other to define itself. “What constitutes through division the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ worlds of the subject is a border and boundary tenuously maintained...”<sup>12</sup> A subject, which is a full body, yet any body is full of *holes* to be penetrated. Holes which are supposed to excrete yet mark the limits of excretion, mark the very limits of a central bodily logic and a stable internal/external binary. “I love you”- it is a partnering, a connection, a completed circuit. The “I” always needs its Other; that is the human sense. But a network, with its movable reference points—its nodes—has no need for “love”. Even Batou, who seemed to still hold those human words in his mind, could never spill them for Kusanagi, because he knew she was altogether separate; though, not completely because Kusanagi still somehow “falls” in love with the Puppet Master. And Silvio here is right, it forms a heterosexual pairing in what should be two completely asexual machines; it references the “tree of life” directly prior to their engagement—though, only to be destroyed. And that is exactly where the queering which was indicated earlier in this essay takes place, because you cannot simply rip apart

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJcGi4-n\\_Yw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJcGi4-n_Yw)

<sup>12</sup> Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, 2006, p. 182

structures without neutralizing your own position<sup>13</sup>. Although this new “network” of shifting libidinal energy arrives from heterosexuality, it is perhaps the “last” heterosexual pairing. The discordance with the structures of society, the binary heterosexuality, should effectively unwind it.

What is normally presented as a “queer” relationship in queer studies and queer theory and queer shit is one in which the characters are still practicing the essentially heterosexual notion of two connecting to become one in a new completeness with each other. The Butch/Femme, Top/Bottom, Dom/Sub binaries all attest to this necessity of double difference, of a two-in-one package; they still participate in heteronormative notions of the discursive limits of the body, a body which contains holes and lackings, and requires a filling in- an incomplete w/whole. A network is not really sexual at all, unsexual in its complete lack of *holes*—a network is made of cables. Which is why *Ghost in the Shell* appears un compelling at first, because it fails to present a *sexual* alternative to heteronormativity; of course, sexuality, sexual reproduction, and the discursive limits of sex are already heteronormative. People want a new way of looking at the same things; although, as stated earlier, these things are not new. Our heteronormative practice is a product of our era, our heteronormative notions of self-identity are due to the continued use of the “I” who utters or speaks and thereby produces an effect of discourse. There is first a discourse which precedes and enables that ‘I’ and forms in language the constraining trajectory of its will. Thus, there is no ‘I’ who stands behind discourse...”<sup>14</sup> The I is not an empty signifier, in this case, it is still *present materially*, even if Kusanagi as an entity has been lost within it. For humans, or those who still call themselves human, are in not so different a position from Kusanagi; humans are already in-network, they simply have to recognize themselves as such. And it is my worry that these bodies which humans are so attached to are exactly what will keep them from imagining a world outside of them.

<sup>13</sup> Shoving yourself and your opinions in a hole they call the Ivory Tower.

<sup>14</sup> Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, p. 171

### Baby Blue<sup>15</sup>

However “radical” this reading is, there is a need to examine another aspect of this ending which I believe is yet unexplored, that of a neutralization. Yes, Kusanagi and the Puppet Master “become” the illimited libidinal energy which is not bounded to enlightenment ideas of individuality, but does this entity exist as a revolutionary/deconstructive force, or is it relegated to the outside to balance the structures of society, kept at bay to maintain what is set in stone?

The progeny of the Kusanagi and the Puppet Master, even in its lack of unitariness, still “itself” must interact among “bodies” in the unitary sense (Batou as the direct and only example), and it is these bodies which draw my critical eye. Because to liberate (a strong word, I know), these bodies from the [eye/I]s which haunt them brings us into a revolutionary fervor; it doesn’t fit the standard of queer practice. It doesn’t allow for anyone to “get it twisted”. A single release of libidinal energy onto the network does not suggest that all consciousness will be integrated materially outside of bodily units, so to immediately assign a radical alterity to the ending of *Ghost in the Shell* would be hasty, though an interesting opening does arise. Consider, the body, the sacred temple of the individual, dismantled, reassembled, as it is in the beginning of the film. Is this not a case of the body losing all sense of itself?

Kusanagi even freely admits that she is owned by section 9; a body which is only unified through its parts is no body at all, it is a body as a commodity. In the beginning of the film, Kusanagi is not already far from being entirely commodified, although she resists it somehow, through some sort of attempt to remain individual. By the end, all that is left is a system of object-relations which used to be called alternatively Kusanagi and the Puppet Master. By the end, “Kusanagi” is nothing more than the head on the body; the head itself is no longer central to the body. The “people” in the film, those who have not yet *altered* themselves, are still onto themselves by

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkA7xQb6uPk>

themselves. But does it take a machine body to make one machine, or are we simply privileging the flesh over the silicone, the synapse over circuit?

To peel off the flesh of a Human would be to end their unitary existence, a liberation by force. The texts they produce would be of dirt and decay, their mouths may fail to speak the same words which they used so dearly before. Mouths are not the only instrument of speech; to *rot* into the earth, into the body of the earth, into the physical/textual space of the dirt, and speak the words of the ground: that is one more speech-act. Machines cannot be maintained by their own right, and humans cannot be maintained without their superstructures and mechanisms.

It would not be incorrect to slot this anthropocentricity/diktyocentricity (*diktyo* is the word for “network” or “trawl” in Greek) which I’ve constructed in the same location as the nature/culture dichotomy, although the cyborg *displaces* rather than replaces the binary. In effect, it confuses nature/culture when you have free libidinal energy which is not *quite* individual and not quite completely integrated either, a quasi-individuality and quasi-natural state. The Posthumanist position can often be one whose *telos* is always within a return to nature; by the same right, Kusanagi’s new “network” identity must, to be “truly radical”, hold some sort of amorphous quality. Kusanagi must become a function of an economy *rather* than a piece in it.

To say, therefore, that Kusanagi remains somehow unattached is to get rid of her *own* body, even as that body is no longer the central point of negotiation in the machine economy. Her body must be something like a puppet with no master—dancing with strings running only across each other. Her body is the S/s (Signifier/signified) but in a *different* way, where the network, the supposed structures which are *represented* by her signified body, are themselves already signified within Kusanagi, so to collapse the distinction at once, or at least have them occupied simultaneously on a physical/textual level. The

negotiation between the text, as something which is grounded in the material, creates a body which is *already* its own signifier. The Network and the Body, which are both functions of discursive practices, both signify each-other in a double movement, instead of the Lacanian *telos*, where the end location is the signified position.<sup>16</sup> The unconscious becomes a *material* unconscious, a material signification within the letter, the letter of the network and its negotiation between a signification and a materialization of a signified.

How to end an essay anyway, how to find that signifying point which marks the final period. A Network has no end, only its frayed edges. I've written what I wished to speak over.

<sup>16</sup> "...these [sexual] relations will turn around a 'to be' and a 'to have', which, by referring to a signifier, the Phallus, have the opposed effect, on the one hand, of giving reality to the subject in this signifier, and, on the other, of derealizing the relation to be signified." (Lacan, Jacques, trans. Alan Sheridan. *Écrits: A Selection*. Tavistock Publications Limited, 1977, p. 289

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## **"I COULD NOT STOP FOR THAT": EMILY DICKINSON'S "CIRCUMFERENCE"**

*Angela Mao*

“Perhaps you laugh at me! Perhaps the whole United States are laughing at me too! I can’t stop for that! *My* business is to love . . . ‘*My* business is to sing” (L177).<sup>1</sup>

“Perhaps you smile at me. I could not stop for that – My Business is Circumference” (L176).

“Love,” “sing,” “Circumference”—these are the definitions Emily Dickinson gives of her “Business” as written in two letters, the first to her friends Mr. and Mrs. J. G. Holland, and the second to Thomas W. Higginson. Of the three, the definition for Higginson is by far the most cryptic, and her word choice with him is significant. When writing to Higginson, whom she once asked to judge whether “my Verse is alive,” when conscientiously presenting herself as a poet, Dickinson chose “Circumference” to encompass her poetry (L260). Her choice gives the word a unique status in her personal lexicon. However, contrary to what her letter might lead us to expect, Dickinson seldom used the words “Circumference” and “poetry” together—among her seventeen poems that include the word “circumference,” the word “poet” appears only once (F930). As one scholar observes, Dickinson “brings ‘circumference’ to bear on subjects as diverse as intense physical suffering,” “the mesmerizing flight of a butterfly,” “and the spectacle of nightfall” (Chu 37). If Dickinson didn’t view circumference strictly in terms of poetics, what did it mean to her, and why use it as a definition of her craft? To begin to understand this, we must look into the ways Dickinson used circumference, to what extent her view was shaped by existing definitions and literary interpretations, such as Webster’s dictionary and Emerson’s essays, and to what extent she made it her own.

Dickinson had multiple definitions for circumference. Seo-Young Jennie Chu addresses one of these in her article “Dickinson and Mathematics,” where she takes Dickinson’s mathematical schooling as a key influence on her poetry. Chu examines the ways her poems employ concepts of “mathematical logic,” such as the circumference

<sup>1</sup> Editor’s note: As noted in the bibliography, the following abbreviations, as used by the author of this paper, are used for parenthetical citations of Emily Dickinson’s work:

F Dickinson, Emily, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, Ed. R. W. Franklin. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999. Citation by poem number.

L Dickinson, Emily, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, Ed. Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958. Citation by letter number. All other citations have been formatted into footnotes.

and ratios of a circle.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, while math and geometry were part of the curriculum at Amherst Academy and Mount Holyoke Female Seminary,<sup>3</sup> the mathematical circle would not have been Dickinson's only point of reference. Many of her poems don't address circumference in strictly mathematical terms. The 1844 edition of Webster's dictionary defines circumference this way:

**CIR-CUM'FER-ENCE**, n. [L. *circumferentia*, from *circum*, round, and *fero*, to carry.]

1. The line that bounds a circle; the exterior line of a circular body; the whole exterior surface of a round body; a periphery. – Newton. Milton.
2. The space included in a circle. – Milton. Dryden.
3. An orb; a circle; any thing circular or orbicular; as in Milton, speaking of a shield, The broad circumference / Hung on his shoulders like the moon.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast to the mathematical meaning, Webster presents definitions of circumference encompassing both the outer edge and inside of the circle. While a dictionary entry can't be said to encompass the whole of her poetry's use of circumference, the spatial imagery Dickinson employs does.

Webster's first entry, for instance, parallels a spatial concept that appears in multiple circumference poems, such as "She staked Her Feathers":

She staked Her Feathers – Gained an Arc –  
 Debated – Rose again –  
 This time – beyond the estimate  
 Of Envy, or of Men –

And now, among Circumference –  
 Her steady Boat be seen –  
 At home – among the Billows – As  
 The Bough where she was born – (F853)

<sup>2</sup> In addition to the circle, Chu also addresses how ratios, angles, asymptotes, and fractions appear in Dickinson's poetry.

<sup>3</sup> Chu, Seo-Young Jennie. "Dickinson and Mathematics." *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2016, p. 35-36

<sup>4</sup> *Emily Dickinson Lexicon*. Brigham Young University, 2007-2019, edl.byu.edu/webster. Accessed 14 May 2019.

Describing a bird's mastering of flight, "now, among Circumference - /Her steady Boat be seen –" evokes the image of a bird in the sky, steadily navigating the wind the way a ship navigates the waves. Flying in the sky, she is both "among Circumference" and "among the Billows," the parallel phrasing linking circumference with air and atmosphere. In this context, "Circumference" defines the sky or atmosphere, the element the bird now moves "among." Similar wording occurs in "A Single Clover Plank," where a bee is blown by the wind:

Twixt Firmament above  
And Firmament below  
The Billows of Circumference  
Were sweeping him away

(F1297)

The bee of "A Single Clover Plank" is also among "Circumference" and "Billows." Here, the "Billows of Circumference" again refers to the wind. In a stanza of double "Firmament[s]," where the small bee is lost in the expanse of the heavens, circumference is linked with atmosphere, with expanse.

Dickinson's use of "Circumference" for atmosphere does not belong to the realm of mathematics, but takes from Webster's first definition. The atmosphere covers the entirety of the earth; it is "the whole exterior surface" of the "round body" of the globe.<sup>5</sup> Recognizing that an inherent quality of atmosphere is its circumference of the earth, Dickinson employs the term as a metonym. Metonymy is not unique to her circumference poetry—it is a staple of Dickinson poetry—but it is notable that, in his third entry for "circumference," Webster himself featured a metonym from Milton's poetry: "as in Milton, speaking of a shield, The broad circumference / Hung on his shoulders like the moon".<sup>6</sup> It is possible that the dictionary's example of metonymy inspired Dickinson to use "circumference" as a metonym in her own poetry. Although it's impossible to say whether the entry influenced her to call her business

<sup>5</sup> *Emily Dickinson Lexicon*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

of poetry “Circumference,” it is still a noteworthy correlation: Dickinson defined her “Business” of poetry as circumference, and Webster included a poetic device as part of his definition for circumference. In any case, Dickinson evidently drew from Webster’s first entry and may have had the third in mind when creating her own circumference metonyms. Making use of Webster’s looser definition of circumference, Dickinson employs circumference as a poetic metonym for atmosphere, the surface of the globe.

In addition to the “exterior” and movement around it, Dickinson’s circumference at times also refers to Webster’s second entry, “The space included in a circle”.<sup>7</sup> This usage often refers to encompassment. When she writes, “In all the circumference of Expression, those guiltless words of Adam and Eve were never surpassed, ‘I was afraid and hid Myself,’” circumference refers to all that has been said, all that is encompassed within “Expression” (L945). In addition to larger concepts, this use of circumference as encompassment applies to the self, as in “Pain expands the Time:”

Pain – expands the Time –  
 Ages coil within  
 The minute Circumference  
 Of a single Brain – (F833)

Similar to “The brain is wider than the sky,” Dickinson plays with space, exploring how the physically “minute” brain can hold or comprehend concepts larger than itself—it can encompass “Ages” (F598, F833). In “Pain expands the Time,” circumference is synonymous with “scope,” and again when describing encompassment Dickinson refers to the inside of circumference. Interestingly, she takes this concept of circumference’s containment and applies it to poetry in “I dwell in Possibility”: “For Occupation – This –/The spreading wide my narrow Hands/ To gather Paradise – ” (F466). This is an implied circumference poem, as Dickinson doesn’t explicitly use the word,

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

instead suggesting circumference with the imagery of encircling hands. The last line, “To gather Paradise –,” leaves readers with the image of what she holds within her hands, and this closing image emphasizes the inside of the circumference, what the circle holds. For Dickinson, the word “circumference” was nuanced. Not limiting herself to the mathematical circle, Dickinson makes use of Webster’s twofold circumference, referring to both outer edge and inner space.<sup>8</sup>

Dickinson takes a dual approach to the figure of the circle, but she also uses a double application of circumference. At the close of a letter to Mrs. Holland, she writes “Give my Heart to each, and my slim Circumference to her who often shared it”—in other words, “Send my love, and give her a hug for me” (L690). In addition to connecting circumference as the “periphery” of the globe, she also related it in a personal manner, to the outside of her “slim” frame (L690).

Circumference is not reserved for large concepts, but also applies to the physical self. Again, in “His mind of man, a secret makes,” she describes someone who “carries a circumference/ In which I have no part . . . Impregnable to inquest,” indicating that circumference can be intensely personal and private, accessible only to one’s self (F1730).

This dual application of circumference, both to the self and to concepts outside the self, echoes Emerson’s “Circles”: “The eye is the first circle; the horizon which it forms is the second; and throughout nature this primary figure is repeated without end” (“Circles”). Indeed, some of her writing on circumference takes inspiration from Emerson<sup>9</sup>, and a consideration of his influence may give insight into how Dickinson connected poetry and circumference. For example, in “Circles” Emerson presents his philosophy that in a “continual effort to raise himself above himself,” an individual’s life is a series of expanding circumferences (“Circles”). In terms of what prompts such expansion of self, he posits “conversation,” calling it “a game of circles” where “each new speaker strikes a new light.” Discussion ultimately falls short, however, for the illumination is only temporary —“To-morrow [the speakers] will have receded from this high-water

<sup>8</sup> In addition to a dual spatial circumference, Dickinson might possibly have also used a dual pronunciation of “circumference” in her poetry. Webster’s 1844 dictionary identifies “circumference” as a four-syllable word with one stress, which easily fits into Dickinson’s iambic poetry. In most of the circumference poems, “circumference” has four syllables with one natural stress and one “song beat” stress. But in the two poems “Time feels so vast that were it not” and “His mind of man, a secret makes,” “circumference” must be contracted to fit the meter (F858, F1730). Both are two-stanza poems with 4a3b3c3b meter and an 8676 syllable count—the third line in each stanza is impoverished, and “circumference” appears in these impoverished lines. The word must also be impoverished, contracted to “circumf’rence,” to fit the meter. Thus, the word “circumference” might have two pronunciations in Dickinson poetry, a longer four-syllable pronunciation and a shorter three-syllable one. If so, when writing circumference poems Dickinson would have been able to expand or contract the word at will.

mark”—their “cloven flame” doesn’t last. The real key, he declares, is literature and poetry: “Therefore we value the poet. All the argument and all the wisdom is not in the encyclopaedia . . . but in the sonnet,” “afford[ing] us a platform whence we may command a view of our present life, a purchase by which we may move it” (“Circles”). And closely echoing this intertwining of light, poetry, and the ever-widening circle is Dickinson’s “The poets light but lamps:”

The Poets light but Lamps –  
 Themselves – go out –  
 The Wicks they stimulate  
 If vital Light

Inhere as do the Suns –  
 Each Age a Lens  
 Disseminating their  
 Circumference – (F930)

This is the one circumference poem that explicitly addresses poetry, and it is intriguing how closely it corresponds to “Circles.” Emerson presents imagery of speakers consecutively striking “new light” that lives and dies like a candle’s flame, but doesn’t continue the metaphor when he moves on to laude poetry as the true route to self-expansion. However, Dickinson does. Instead of striking a series of temporary lights, the “Poets” of her poem light “Lamps” that never go out. Unlike Emerson’s conversationalists, Dickinson’s poets illuminate something that lasts, and like the poets of “The martyr poets did not tell,” the art continues even after the lighters themselves have ended, benefiting later generations (F665). As Dickinson scholar Gary Lee Stonum puts it, “Poems containing a genuinely vital light continue to spread their influence well after the author has died”.<sup>10</sup> While the “Martyr Poets” leave behind “the Art of Peace,” here the enlightenment their art brings is defined as an ever-disseminating “Circumference,” an association that likely didn’t come from

However, though compelling, this idea of dual rhythms isn’t concrete—while the current Merriam-Webster dictionary gives both the four-syllable and three-syllable pronunciations (“Circumference”), Dickinson’s dictionary only gives the one (Emily Dickinson Lexicon). Thus, I am unsure if Dickinson actually used the contraction. If she did, “circumference’s” double rhythm may provide an added reason Dickinson was drawn toward “circumference”—in addition to its dual definition, the varied pronunciation would be another example of the word’s nuance and flexibility.

<sup>9</sup> Even the original context that precedes her definitions of “Business” (“Perhaps you laugh at me! Perhaps the whole United States are laughing at me too! I can’t stop for that!”) reflects the independence Emerson advocated: “What I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people think” (L177, “Self-Reliance”).

<sup>10</sup> Stonum, Gary Lee. *The Dickinson Sublime*. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990, p. 47

Webster's dictionary, but was informed by Emerson. Indeed, Emerson's essay may have inspired Dickinson to apply "Circumference" to her business of poetry. Though not necessarily exemplifying transcendentalism, in "The Poets light but Lamps" Dickinson gives "Circumference" the same weight, the same association with a heightened existence, that Emerson gives to his circles.

Paired together, "The Poets light but Lamps –" and "I dwell in Possibility" represent dual sides of the poetic process. "I dwell in Possibility" focuses on the poet's process of creation—here is where circumference is created, both the outer edge ("spreading wide my narrow Hands") and what is held within ("To gather Paradise") (F466). The creation of circumference is Dickinson's poetic bliss, her "Paradise." When this is finished, "The Poets light but Lamps" describes the corresponding half to this process: reading, not creating, poetry. Stonum suggests that the "Lamps" the poets light actually symbolize their readers: "The verb suggests that the things primarily lit and stimulated by poets are their readers . . . If the wicks or readers stimulated by the poem shine with a vital light, [they] will last or inhere just as suns," for through the dissemination of their "Circumference," they become "agents of light in their own turn".<sup>11</sup> "I dwell in Possibility" describes the formation of circumference, but here is where circumference expands: Denoting not the poet's process of creation but the reader's process of illumination, "The Poets light but Lamps –" is the second half to "I dwell in Possibility." Dickinson imagines, like Emerson, that poetry broadens readers' lives, and her poem's "Disseminating . . . Circumference" fittingly echoes Emerson's philosophy of ever-widening existence which "rushes on all sides outwards to new and larger circles" (F930, "Circles"). Together, these two poems embody the two halves of poetry, the writer and the reader, and Dickinson presents these concepts through the lens of Emerson and circumference. But while she does take from "Circles" when merging poetry and circumference, Dickinson was no Emersonian.

<sup>11</sup> Stonum, *The Dickinson Sublime*, p. 47

Her poetry echoes his writings, but she did not adopt wholesale his idea of the circle, and a key difference between their two circumferences is movement.

Emerson imagined expanding the self as a series of widening concentric circles, and this pattern creates a distinctly linear movement outward. He describes it as a “ladder” we scale “Step by step” (“Circles”). This, however, is not the movement Dickinson associated with her circles:

When Bells stop ringing – Church – begins –  
 The Positive – of Bells –  
 When Cogs – stop – that’s Circumference –  
 The Ultimate – of Wheels – (F601)

Dickinson juxtaposes church bells with the cogs of a machine. When church bells stop, the service begins, but when cogs “– stop –” the machine stops with it. The dashes around “– stop –” give a dramatic pause just preceding the phrase “that’s Circumference,” as if the poem points to the silence—what made it stop?—and then identifies the missing element: it is “Circumference,” “The Ultimate – of Wheels –.” Like Emerson, Dickinson associates Circumference with movement, but her motion is cyclical. It is the circular motion of cogs as they rotate in a machine, it is the spinning of “Wheels” that makes machines function. The “Ultimate” of the wheel, its essence, its defining function, is rotation, and Dickinson labels this motion “Circumference.” Unlike Emerson’s linear movement, Dickinson’s movement of circumference is cyclic.

In fact, cyclic motion is a defining feature in many of her circumference poems. In addition to associating circumference with the atmosphere and the surface of the earth, “She staked her feathers” and “A Single clover plank” include multiple levels of motion, from the “Billows” of the atmosphere encircling the globe to the “bee” blown by circumference’s force and the bird who moves freely within it. In “I should have been too glad, I see” she compares “My little



Circuit” to “This new Circumference,” again connecting circumference with movement (F283). In “Crisis is a Hair” the lines “Or a Circle hesitate/ In Circumference” appear, which define the difference between Circle and Circumference, explicitly designating circumference as encompassing motion (F1067). Even in her letters, Dickinson’s introduction for her definitions of business—“I can’t stop for that”—imply that she is in motion, that circumference is movement. This motion of rotation—unassociated with the movement of Emerson’s circles, not found in Webster’s dictionary—is unique to Dickinson.

Several of these poems contrast circumference with another form of movement: the arc. For instance, “When Bells stop ringing - Church begins” juxtaposes the motion of cogs with the motion of church bells. In her article on Dickinson’s circumference and feminine circuitry, Lissa Holloway-Attaway connects the shape of a bell with circumference by describing its shape as a “burst circle with an open end and a tongue to give it endless musical voice”.<sup>12</sup> However, in terms of motion, the bell does not move in a circumferential way. To ring, the clapper hits the bell’s walls, making multiple arcs back and forth between the bell’s strike points. In addition, while ringing, the entire bell sways back and forth in an arc shape. Thus, the bell’s movement is a dual series of arcs, and the juxtaposition of “When Bells stop ringing Church begins” moves from the pendulum-motion of the arc to the continuous rotation of circumference. This progression from arc to circumference appears in multiple circumference poems. For instance, it is again hinted in “I saw no Way – The Heavens were stitched,” where, similar to “The Soul’s Superior instants,” Dickinson describes a moment of solitary poetic inspiration:

I saw no Way – The Heavens were stitched –  
 I felt the Columns close –  
 The Earth reversed her Hemispheres –  
 I touched the Universe –  
 And back it slid – and I alone –

<sup>12</sup> Holloway-Attaway, Lissa. “The Business of Circumference: Circularity and Dangerous Female Power in the Work of Emily Dickinson.” *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, vol. 5, no. 2, Fall 1996, p. 187

A speck opon a Ball –  
 Went out opon Circumference –  
 Beyond the Dip of Bell – (F633)

Similar to “When Bells stop ringing – Church – begins –,” Dickinson again juxtaposes “Bell” and “Circumference.” The contrast perhaps occurs on multiple levels, for “Dip of Bell” may be an allusion to the “lip” of a bell. The lip of a bell is its rim or edge, its circle (“The Parts of a Bell”). It is the circular edge the clapper hits to make noise. Read this way, the poem contrasts two circumferences, the meager circumference of a bell to the vast “Circumference” of the globe (the speaker is “A speck opon a Ball,” presumably the earth), but by using “Dip,” Dickinson also contrasts movement in the same way she does in “When Bells stop ringing – Church – begins –.” Webster’s dictionary defines “dip” as “Inclination downward; a sloping; a direction below a horizontal line,” and “Dip of Bell” could indicate the shape a bell makes, its sloping arc as it tolls (Emily Dickinson Lexicon). If so, going “Beyond thne Dip of Bell” and “opon Circumference” echoes the movement past arc to circumference from “When Bells stop ringing” (Emily Dickinson Lexicon).<sup>13</sup> “She staked her feathers” also manifests this progression, for in the process of learning flight the bird first “Gained an Arc” before becoming one with the greater “Circumference” of the sky. Apart from connecting circumference to motion, these circumference poems also present the specific movement from arc to full circumference.

This progression, in addition to being a play on the figure of circumference (Webster defines “arc” as “any part of the circumference of a circle”), may take on a philosophical, even spiritual significance (Emily Dickinson Lexicon).<sup>14</sup> The juxtaposition between circumference and religion made by “When Bells stop ringing Church begins” is reminiscent of Dickinson’s treatment of church in poems like “Some keep the Sabbath going to Church,” where she contrasts a traditional, dogmatic Christianity with her own spirituality among

<sup>13</sup> *Emily Dickinson Lexicon*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

nature (F236). Read alongside this poem, the “Circumference” that pairs with church takes on a deeper, spiritual connotation. It calls to mind Dickinson’s letter: “The Bible ends with the Centre, not with the Circumference” (L950). Interestingly, the progression from arc to circumference is not without religious precedent—when discussing the circle imagery of Dickinson’s contemporaries, Gary Lee Stonum quotes Robert Browning’s poem “Abt Vogler”: ““On the earth the broken arcs; in heaven, a perfect round””. Stonum observes that the circle is “of course a traditional symbol of perfection and completeness,” and infers that Dickinson’s use of circumference may “constitute a specifically earthly way of measuring and gaining such ideals”.<sup>15</sup>

“On the earth the broken arcs; in heaven, a perfect round”—Dickinson’s bell imagery seems to reverse this idea. From the way she structures “When Bells stop ringing – Church begins,” the “perfect round” of unbroken circumference does not belong to “Bells” (F601). Instead, her juxtaposition of movement, contrasting the rotation of “Circumference” to the pendulum-swinging of the “ringing” “Bells,” designates the “broken arcs” to the bell. What Browning viewed as earthly and incomplete Dickinson gave to the church, the supposed entryway to heaven. The dismissal of traditional religion is also suggested in “I saw no Way – the Heavens were stitched,” for the circumference she achieves is “Beyond the Dip of Bell,” beyond what the church can give her. However, Browning’s words appear to match perfectly with “She staked her feathers – Gained an Arc.” The arc the bird first gains is on the level of the earth, but the full circumference she achieves is in the sky, in the heavens. Nevertheless, there is a key difference. As Stonum observes, “The bird is able to trade the partial bliss of the arc for the soaring paradise of circumference, and it does so without needing to acknowledge any authority or power outside itself”.<sup>16</sup> Similar to “I saw no Way – the Heavens were stitched,” where to reach circumference the speaker must personally act and “[touch] the Universe,” the bird achieves “paradise” through its own

<sup>15</sup> Stonum, *The Dickinson Sublime*, p. 133

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136

power. It is independent, moving from “broken arc” to “perfect circle” using its own ability without a need for God. And if Dickinson also associated circumference with poetry, then her means of achieving “paradise” was through her verse, her personal craft, her “Business” (L176). While Browning’s idea of progression from arc to circle is a distinctly religious progression from earth to heaven, Dickinson’s is not. Relegating her “broken arcs” to the realm of religion, her circumference, her “paradise,” her sublimity, is achieved through her own powers alone.

As Seo-Young Jennie Chu observes, Dickinson brings “‘circumference’ to bear on [diverse] subjects”,<sup>17</sup> from the atmosphere of the globe to the private self, from poetry to personal spirituality. But Dickinson’s exploration and application of circumference is just as diverse. For her, the word “circumference” is nuanced, open to multiple interpretations. Her multifaceted use of circumference is an example of her “Business” as a writer—it is an example of how Dickinson, as a poet, interacted with the “circumference of Expression” around her, how she informed her poetry through existing definitions and literary writings and built upon the concepts she found there, creating a significance unique to herself and her work (F945, L176). She chose “Circumference” to describe her “Business,” and just a brief foray into her use of this single word reveals the complex schemata of her poetics.

<sup>17</sup> Chu, “Dickinson and Mathematics”, p. 37

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## "KILLIN' FLOOR BLUES": FACTORY FARMING AS AMERICAN GROTESQUE IN TOBE HOOPER'S THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE

Jay Arora

People, if I can ever get up off of this old hard killin' floor /  
Lord, I'll never get down this low no more

— Skip James, "Hard Time Killin' Floor Blues"<sup>1</sup>

"How am I a hog and me both?"

— Flannery O'Connor, "Revelations"<sup>2</sup>

The final moments of Tobe Hooper's 1974 film *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* depict the young Sally Hardesty fleeing for her life from a hitchhiker following her escape from the Sawyer family's cannibalistic dinner ritual.<sup>3</sup> As she runs in terror, her surroundings evoke imagery of the Southern pastoral imagination—the *mise en scène* includes a towering windpump, barbed-wire fences, and an idling pickup truck that collectively pepper the undeveloped farmland. With the hitchhiker in close pursuit, Sally hurtles down a winding dirt path when, instantaneously, that trail transitions to a vast, cement-paved roadway. Just as the girl and her assailant cross from farmland to freeway, the heavy hum of a running engine fills the air, and a large semi-truck bursts into frame. The humming noises of the engine turn to a deafening roar and the honks of the truck drown out Sally's shrill, throat-tearing screams. What follows is a brutal comeuppance: the truck smashes into the crazed hitchhiker, killing him instantly. In this, the film's coda, modernity and the pastoral meet head-on, and the result of this collision is fatal.

*Texas Chainsaw Massacre* presents the story of Sally Hardesty and her companions (consisting of her boyfriend, her invalid brother, and another couple) as they drive through the desert roads of rural Texas on a voyage to visit the burial site of Hardesty's grandfather. After taking a respite in an old family home, the group discovers a nearby farmhouse inhabited by *Leatherface*, a wordless, chainsaw-wielding boogeyman who wears a mask made of human skin. One-by-one, the members of the group are executed in increasingly brutal

<sup>1</sup> James, Skip. "Hard Time Killin' Floor Blues." *Today!*, Vanguard Records, 1966

<sup>2</sup> O'Connor, Flannery. "Revelations," *Complete Stories*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971, p. 506

<sup>3</sup> Hooper, Tobe, Marilyn Burns, Allen Danzinger, and Paul A. Partain. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Vortex, 1974

methods by Leatherface and the rest of the cannibalistic Sawyer family. Ultimately, only Sally remains, fulfilling the requisite ‘final girl’ role of a prototypical slasher film.<sup>4</sup>

While some critics may deride this film for capitulating to one of the horror genre’s more infamous tropes, the status of this film as a piece of populist entertainment is conducive to my argument—the cultural ubiquity of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* places a spotlight on a penchant in the American subconscious for violence, an *appetite* (in all senses of the word) with which the work is explicitly in conversation. Hooper’s film exists as a period-specific entry into a longstanding tradition of the American Grotesque, a literary trend with the overarching goal of “[forcing] both their characters and readers into a confrontation with the inescapable, terrible realities of our American culture.”<sup>5</sup> While the Grotesque, a manner of combining the terrifying with the comic to reveal disturbing new perspectives<sup>6</sup>, predates the establishment of the United States, the American Grotesque is fixated on a national sense of cognitive dissonance between a pragmatic inclination for the material and Romantic proclivity for idealist expansion.

Through *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Hooper plays a definite role in furthering this tradition; the film contains genealogical links to writer Nathaniel Hawthorne, one of the forebearers of the American Grotesque. While referring to his style as ‘the Romance,’ Hawthorne embodied the Grotesque *modus operandi* in his writing by shining a light on “the secret sins and broken promises which lie beneath the surface of an apparently prosperous society like America...[his writings] make us aware that these things exist and need to be acted upon...”<sup>7</sup> Just as Hawthorne’s depictions of misguided puritanism and social ostracization in *The Scarlet Letter* can be read as a reflection on the national ignominy of the Salem Witch Trials, I assert that *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is ultimately a work dealing with the shame of industrialized factory farming that had contemporaneously grown rampant at the time of the film’s release, using hyperviolence and

<sup>4</sup> Trencansky, Sarah. “Final Girls and Terrible Youth: Transgression in 1980s Slasher Horror,” *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, vol. 29, issue 2, 2001

<sup>5</sup> Uruburu, Paula M. *The Gruesome Doorway: An Analysis of the American Grotesque*, Peter Lang, 1987, p. 25

<sup>6</sup> Balkun, Mary McAleer. “The American Grotesque,” *Literature Compass*, vol. 6, issue 4, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Uruburu, *Gruesome Doorway*, p. 49, 53



absurdist imagery to uncover the industrial monstrosities in the American South. While presented as allegories, both examples operate at a level of Grotesque realism—Hawthorne’s novel and Hooper’s film each interact with the abstract, auratic conflicts of the zeitgeist by forcing them to be instead embodied with corporeality and concrete. Concerns of the American spirit could only be exorcised through American bodies and landscapes.

One impressionistic journal entry by Hawthorne in 1844 elucidates the writer’s fascination with the subterranean ills that were otherwise belied by prosperous development within the national experience. As Hawthorne takes note of the Sleepy Hollow woods near his home in Concord, Massachusetts, he presents a scene with implications that will extend to the aforementioned collision in *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* which opened this paper.<sup>8</sup> Hawthorne holds a sentimental yet sensible perspective on this pastoral scene; while he fondly writes of the sounds of birds and squirrels and other fauna, he is not oblivious to the role that humans play in this ecosystem as he takes note of manufactured pathways and the noises of laboring men. This interaction of man and nature does not “break our sabbath; for like a sabbath seems this place, and the more so on account of the cornfield rustling at our feet.”<sup>9</sup> In an analysis of this entry in *The Machine in the Garden*, Americanist scholar Leo Marx writes of this description: “there is no tension either within the self or between the self and its environment... [the sounds] seem to unify society, landscape, and mind.”<sup>10</sup> Suddenly, just as discordantly as the semi-truck that pummels through the Texas farmland in *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Hawthorne’s Edenic vision is disturbed by a thundering freight train: “... the whistle of the locomotive—the long shriek, harsh, above all other harshness...it brings the noise world into the midst of our slumberous peace.”<sup>11</sup> The bubble has been burst.

Marx notes this interruption as indicative of a larger pattern in the American literary imagination, one in which the dream of a pastoral utopia is shattered by the onslaught of industrialization and

<sup>8</sup> Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The American Notebooks*, ed. Randall Stewart. Yale University Press, 1932, p. 103-05

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104

<sup>10</sup> Marx, Leo. *Machine in the Garden*. Oxford University Press, 1964.

<sup>11</sup> Hawthorne, *The American Notebooks*, p. 104

mechanization, resulting in alienation from the meaning and purpose that said spaces initially seemed to provide. Indeed, after the locomotive's shriek has subsided, Hawthorne's stream-of-consciousness seems to reflect an affective change to his previous tranquility as he now must wait for his thoughts to "repose again, after this interruption"<sup>12</sup>. The stark reminder of industrialization fundamentally alters his perception of Sleepy Hollow. And yet, for all of his efforts to mark the delineation between these two worlds post-interruption, Hawthorne appears to reenact that same intrusive quality individually; upon finding an anthill, he "[drops] a few grains of sand into the entrance of one of their dwellings, and thus quite [obliterates] it."<sup>13</sup> This act is presented *sans impetus*, and Hawthorne himself is unwilling (or unable) to provide reasoning or motivation for his actions, even within the confines of his journals. In what will become patently clear in the case of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, the brutality of industrialization appears to engender the subconscious desire to perform comparable acts of violence in those who bear witness to it.

### **Pastoralism and the Southern Diet**

Thus, over 100 years after Hawthorne noted this fundamental shift in his diary, Hooper's film exposes the ramifications of a new form of American mechanization—a meat industry that had become increasingly monopolistic and motorized in the second half of the 20th century. There is a violent divergence between the pastoral state, a space that is simultaneously populated by real farmers and sentimental myths, and the hulking industrial state that has re-structured the very concept of *meat* itself. Once I have established the persisting link between meat consumption and agrarianism in the American South, I will use this paper to expound upon two complementary points: (1) Factory farming engenders a violent conflict between the burgeoning industrial state and the Southern pastoral identity, presenting a crisis

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 104

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 105

that is both material and cultural in nature and (2) *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is uniquely qualified to reveal the nature of this violence due to its adoption of Grotesque thematic tropes, ultimately crafting an allegory for both the rise and implications of factory farming in the American South that blurs the cultural classifications between man, meat, and mechanization.

Ergo, if mechanized factory farming has engendered a clash between the pastoral and the industrial as it relates to some central Southern mythology, what is the original narrative surrounding food production/consumption (both material and metaphorical) that exists in the American South? The complete history of storied Southern cuisine is undeniably multifaceted and far-reaching—in order to present an informed yet abridged representation of the subject, I will focus on the significance of rurality to the story of the American South, an ideology for which the roots can be traced back to Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson, a staunch believer in the moral virtues of agrarianism, once wrote: "No occupation is so delightful to me as the culture of the earth, and no culture comparable to that of the garden... Though an old man, I am but a young gardener."<sup>14</sup> American historian Lauren F. Klein identifies in her work that the Virginian held an analogous position towards the importance of an "American" cuisine as an ameliorating factor for the burgeoning republic, noting "his belief in the act of eating as emblematic of republican ideals... He also developed a serving style 'after the American manner,' in which plates were placed directly on the table and guests served themselves, reflecting the virtuous simplicity of the republican citizenry."<sup>15</sup> Here, the manners of both food production and consumption played a *specific* role in developing a Southern ethos.

Still, this belief in a causal relation between a pastoral diet and the tenets of American democracy belied the reality of the enslaved workforce that was sourcing much of the food that would populate dining tables across the South—much of the rhetoric which lauded the value of agricultural labor gradually was replaced by a sentiment that

<sup>14</sup> Goodman, Emily. "Thomas Jefferson, food pioneer," *Appleseeds*, vol. 8, issue 7, 2006, p. 1

<sup>15</sup> Klein, Lauren F. "Dinner Table Bargains: Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and the Senses of Taste," *Early American Literature*, vol. 49, issue 2, 2014, p. 404

agricultural models were merely a means to a final goal, the development of an American gustatory identity. Klein writes that this alteration was ultimately bolstering to Southern plantation owners as it provided “a means of continuing to extol the virtues of agrarian life while avoiding a personal confrontation with the implications of slavery.”<sup>16</sup> While the machinations of slavery differ considerably from the current factory farming system, a pattern begins to emerge of varying forms of violence existing under the palliative eclipse of pastoral sentimentality.

This philosophy was again evoked in the early-20th century Southern Agrarian movement, which was characterized by a central tenet that spiritual reawakening would come from a revitalized commitment to agrarianism that stood in firm opposition against the increasingly mechanized and industrialized society characterized as one of degeneracy, emasculation, and Godlessness.<sup>17</sup> By creating a heterotopic vision of independent production, the Southern Agrarians sought to return to a nostalgic state of self-reliance and farm work to cultivate food and raw materials. Of course, if the real history of farming in the South was irrevocably intertwined with the legacy of slave labor, then the Southern Agrarians utilized, instead, a mythological narrative—the answer lay in “[circumventing] race by arguing that slavery had no essential connection to agrarian lifestyle and was an environmental response to the conditions of the nineteenth century. As their history deteriorated due to its inability to reconcile this emerging spiritual system with the realities of slavery, it became clear that the imagined space of the South would have to be radically transformed from its plantation roots”.<sup>18</sup> It is, then, no wonder Flannery O’Connor described the South as “Christ-haunted;”<sup>19</sup> the fervor for Christian salvation tied to fecund Southern soil is only matched by an uneasy awareness of the sin soaked in the dirt.

The substitution of slave history with idealized nostalgia as it relates to pastoral food production remains apparent today. Food studies scholar Lily Kelting writes that Southern cookbooks

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 416

<sup>17</sup> Grey, Stephanie Houston. “The Gospel in the Soil: Southern Agrarian Resistance and the Productive Future of Food.” *Southern Communication Journal*, 2014, p. 388

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 395

<sup>19</sup> O’Connor, Flannery. “Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction,” *Mystery and Manners*, Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1971, p. 44

disingenuously perform this narrative through historical erasure, noting that “no other American foodway that so clearly negotiates very real national traumas...through the creative and potentially healing acts of cooking and eating...other American regions do not use food to negotiate the relationship between nostalgia for an idealized past, the realities of a traumatic past, and the desire for a better future through internationally circulated media.”<sup>20</sup> For example, regarding the ubiquity of ham hocks in traditional Southern cuisine, no less inseparable than the recipes is the generational racism that necessitated Black Americans’ consumption of discarded pig feet—a cultural affinity borne from centuries of subjugation to farm labor.<sup>21</sup>

Ultimately, the practices of animal husbandry that were so integral to the production of these culinary staples have transitioned from being defined by their rurality to reaching previously unprecedented levels of mechanization. The transformation of North Carolina’s hog farming industry provides a representative example of this history—dating back to the 18th century, hog husbandry through either subsistence or commodity farming was a substantial part of the local economy, with the economic value of hogs overtaking that of local cotton crops in the South during the antebellum period.<sup>22</sup> In the mid-20th century, self-sufficient, landholding family farms senesced in the wake of industrial hog farming as the state government provided subsidies to meat-packing companies in order to replace lost tobacco funding (which had declined as a result from the rise in reports on the product’s health detriments.)<sup>23</sup> Currently, North Carolina’s hog husbandry has expanded to become a massive industry with over \$2 billion gross income annually; the state has earned the nickname *Porkopolis* as “mega-farms” owned by Tyson and Smithfield take the place of smaller hog farms.<sup>24</sup> However, as the annual scourge of hurricanes batter the Southeast region, these mega-farms become significant sources of oozing animal waste. One 2010 report, commissioned by the National Institute of Environmental Health Science, stated that hurricane water breached 46 waste pits, a majority

<sup>20</sup> Kelting, Lily. “The Entanglement of Food and Nostalgia in Contemporary Southern Food Cookbooks.” *Food, Culture, & Society*, 2016, p. 363

<sup>21</sup> Poe, Edgar N. “The Origins of Soul Food in Black Urban Identity.” *Food in the USA*, 2002, p. 95

<sup>22</sup> Thompson, Michael P. “This Little Piggy Went to Market: The Commercialization of Hog Production in Eastern North Carolina,” *University of California Press*, 2010, p. 571

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 578

<sup>24</sup> Jones, James R. Hog Farming, *NCPedia*, 2006

of which were located in low-income, primarily Black-American communities.<sup>25</sup> More recently, a 2018 public health article found that the waste from hog CAFOs (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations) in North Carolina was being used as an aerosolized fertilizer; this increased the risk of infectious disease in neighboring low-income communities, locales that already contained the highest proportions of uninsured residents.<sup>26</sup> In a 360° revolution, the agrarian pork husbandry that defined the cuisine of slaves in the American South had transmuted into an industrialized machine that perpetuated a modernized form of oppression upon the lives of Black Americans and poor Southerners.

### **Mechanical Interruptions**

What, then, can the role of encroaching mechanization in the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* tell us about this historical trend of technological intrusion upon the Southern agricultural state? In more specific terms, how has the industrialization of meat production in the South contributed to the violent environmental and moral degradation that we see in the film? While the aforementioned semi-truck of modernity that strikes the hitchhiker as he traverses farmland to highway mimics Hawthorne's locomotive in that they both acrimoniously force a collision between the two worlds, this is hardly the first instance of such a coalescence. The effects of industrialization on this landscape are evident from the beginning of the film, during which the gang of young friends are driving through the Texan expanse in a Ford van when they stop to pick up the aforementioned hitchhiker—with drawling speech and a candid exuberance that borders on hillbilly parody, the hitchhiker begins to describe his family's history with the slaughterhouse that looms over the region: “My brother worked there, my father, too...my family's always been in meat!” When Franklin, one of the city folk, inquires about the newly-developed “big air-gun” used to kill cattle, the hitchhiker

<sup>25</sup> Wing, Steve. “The potential impact of flooding on confined animal feeding operations in eastern North Carolina,” *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 2002, p. 387-391

<sup>26</sup> Guidry, Virginia T. et al. “Connecting Environmental Justice and Community Health: Effects of Hog Production in North Carolina,” *North Carolina Medical Journal*, vol. 79, no. 5, 2018, p. 326

angrily retorts in favor of using sledgehammers: “The old way, that was better, they died better that way...with the new way, people put outta jobs!”

Hooper’s film depicts a vision of an American South that is post-apocalyptic in an ecological, infrastructural, and economic sense. The desolate countryside, penetrated by an empty highway and peppered with abandoned factories, is home to individuals whose entire identities have been robbed and replaced by the mechanization of animal husbandry. Not only is the hitchhiker unmistakably living in destitute poverty, but the legacy of his family business has been all but destroyed by industrial changes. While the makeup of this temporal setting is amplified for the sake of the Grotesque, the real-world symmetries are all too apparent; the hold of Tyson Foods on the American meat industry in the late-20th century had grown tighter and tighter as the Arkansas-based meat processing/marketing corporation began to cultivate a monopoly by acquiring various competitors and contracting out the labor of localized farmers, referenced below as *growers*.<sup>27</sup> In 1975, just three years before the release of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, a Texas Agriculture Department Study on the current state of the animal husbandry industry in the wake of these changes concluded that “although the grower makes a substantial capital investment and takes most of the risk, he or she is not sharing in the success of the industry.”<sup>28</sup> During this period, an undue surplus of poultry products by Tyson led to diminished wages and increased lay-offs for contracted growers; Tyson withstood this period of economic pressure at the direct expense of their laborers, maneuvering around taxes by expanding the network of contract farms. This expansion, combined with a continuation of production despite diminishing conditions, led farmers to take on more and more debt to stay in business, effectively creating a semi-feudalistic system wherein they either followed Tyson’s directives or risked being cut off and left to shoulder the financial burden on their own.<sup>29</sup>

In self-preserving press releases, Tyson often responded to

<sup>27</sup> Riffel, Brent E. “The Feathered Kingdom: Tyson Foods and the Transformation of American Land, Labor, and Law, 1930-2005,” University of Arkansas Doctoral Thesis, 2008.

<sup>28</sup> Charles Dale Killian. “The social movement in incipency: a case study of broiler growers in Washington County,” University of Arkansas Master’s Thesis, 1977.

<sup>29</sup> Riffel, “The Feathered Kingdom”

such accusations by using the sentimental language of the American pastoral ideal that Leo Marx identifies. Echoing the rhetoric of the Southern Agrarians, John Tyson (the son of the CEO who had overseen the corporation's rise) once retorted that "growers get the pleasure of being on the farm and living a lifestyle that's fast disappearing in America today."<sup>30</sup> With ever-increasing frequency, this ubiquitous cultural memory of the independent farmer, who represented the American spirit of self-reliance, was hijacked to distort a trend of industrialization that was actually alienating laborers from traditional farm life. These workers had become economically chained to the very farms which had long been viewed as a respite from the constraints of urbanity; the food products of their labor, paradoxically, served as a connection to pastoralist mythologies while being harvested by a highly industrialized monopoly.

In *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, a backdrop of decayed Southern landscape embodies this paradox's auratic ramifications—the first shot after the title sequence is a close-up of an armadillo (so frequently symbolic for the Texan wildlife) lying dead on the highway, upside-down and bloodied after a vehicle presumably ran it over. The subsequent scene depicts the wheelchair-bound Franklin awkwardly rolling out of the vehicle to urinate in the tall grass. When facing the open expanse of nature, his back is turned to the Ford and the highway. Still, while Franklin is visually removed from those facets of modernity, the din of the motor and of cars whizzing by cannot be ignored. Superimposed over all of this is the radio blaring from the van. The broadcaster lists out, with a monotonous and unperturbed affect, various grisly news stories of buildings collapsing in Atlanta, parents chaining up their babies in the attic, and children discovering dead bodies. Grimly reflecting the Southern Agrarians' anxiety towards the emasculation that came with mechanization, the broadcaster notes that one of the bodies discovered was a man whose "genitals had been removed." The scene's staging provides a heightened physical depiction of the breached border between

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 20



mythical agrarianism and encroaching modernity—Marx describes this clash as a “sudden, shocking intruder upon a fantasy of idyllic satisfaction,” one that leaves the individual in flux.<sup>31</sup> As the hitchhiker stands on the shoulder of the highway, he exists in a liminal space between the pastoral landscape and the paved highway, unable to wholly connect to either pole of this American cultural dialectic.

Writing on 20th-century literary depictions of the mounting frequency of said clash, Marx emphasizes “the violence of the contrast between the industrial and the natural landscapes”<sup>32</sup> in *The Education of Henry James*, and, when commenting on Henry James’ reference to a busy railroad’s intrusion upon a once-sylvan town in Connecticut, notes that “there is nothing in the [pastoral] scene capable of resisting the domination of the machine”<sup>33</sup>. Hence, as *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* attempts to allegorize real world issues that bridge the gap between a mechanical reality and a pastoral myth. It does so by using the method of the Southern Grotesque (a regional branch of the American Grotesque tradition) that Flannery O’Connor articulated, wherein violence is the logical conduit between that which is concrete and that which exists in the realm of memory and spirit.<sup>34</sup>

In the confines of the Ford, the negative space between urbanity and its bastardized offspring, the neo-pastoral, can be breached not by an act of verbalization but by an act of violence that uncovers some shared primordial, fleshy bond between the individuals spanning these two worlds. The hitchhiker snatches Franklin’s switchblade. By first cutting his own hand and then Franklin’s arm, he makes their status as blood brothers literal. Later, when the group arrives at the old family country estate, they notice a smear of blood which forms a curvilinear shape on the green exterior of the van. “I wonder if that means something,” Kirk, one of the group members, remarks facetiously. While the rest laugh the prospect off and continue to the house, Franklin continues to stare at the beguiling sign, a sausage link from a nearby barbeque joint hanging loosely from his lips like a pork cigar. Later in the film, we learn that the meat products

<sup>31</sup> Marx, *Machine in the Garden*, p. 29

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 347

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 352

<sup>34</sup> O’Connor, “Some Aspects,” p. 43

coming from this family, such as Franklin's sausage, are derived from human flesh. While this is never outright stated by the characters, the subtle implications of anthropophagy produce a linguistic de-familiarization with the very concept of meat, itself.

### **Factory Farming and the Object**

If, in our cultural sense, *animal* signifies some creature of nature and *meat* signifies some food to be consumed, there is a missing link in the negative space between the two terms; *meat* is intentionally removed from the *animal* from which it is derived, thus resulting in an ambiguity that, when extrapolated, evokes the question of the difference between the meat of a hog or a chicken and that of a human body. The hitchhiker's drawing serves as an emblem for this animal-to-meat transition, with the primordial and universal substance of blood being imprinted upon the van, an object of modernity and industrialization, resulting in a dynamic that prompts discombobulation from Franklin and willful ignorance on the part of the remaining group members. In a literature review on industrial meat production, Alex Blanchette expounds upon this dynamic:

[there is an] "ellipsis" between animal and edible, corpse and carcass, muscle and meat. [*Animal to Edible*] describes isolated and invisible French slaughterhouses not (primarily) as sites for generating capital, but instead as places that manage cultural sentiments about death...industrial meat is "an organic substance obtained by dispersal of the biological."<sup>35</sup>

The significance of the "ellipsis" metaphor to denote such a transmutation from animal subject to meat object is the deliberate *invisibility* of this process; the signifier for this punctuation mark comes from the Latin "*elleipein*," or "to leave out." Excision of the reality of this process can be noted in the de jure agricultural gag rules (colloquially referred to as *ag gags*) that have explicitly criminalized

<sup>35</sup> Blanchette, Alex. "Industrial Meat Production," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 2018, vol. 47, p. 51

the dissemination of videos and information that depict the ongoings inside of a factory farm. In 1990, Kansas passed “The Farm Animal and Field Crop and Research Facilities Protection Act,” which made it illegal to “enter an animal facility to take pictures by photograph, video camera or by any other means” with the intention of “[damaging] the enterprise conducted at an animal facility.”<sup>36</sup> Such ag gag restrictions have been legislatively replicated with only slight variations in Missouri, North Dakota, Montana, and other states.<sup>37</sup>

While such de jure rulings post-date the release of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, the intentional ignorance of factory farming is all too prevalent in the film. The friend group abandons Franklin while he alone deciphers the aforementioned symbol of blood on the Ford. To acknowledge the inherent link between the fruits of industrialization and the violence which propels it is to stare at an abject truth—the natural response is to expel such destabilization. Critical theorist Julia Kristeva notes that with meat consumption comes a tacit acknowledgment of the “death drive” that fuels humanity—to devour meat is to subconsciously accept the “bent towards murder essential to human beings.”<sup>38</sup> In this case, avoiding abjection, or that which would disturb a fundamental sense of self, requires an implied moral line of separation between meat production and meat consumption.

In order to target this precise aversion to violent realities, contemporary activists and documentary filmmakers hoping to expose the cruelty of factory farming often attempt to trigger such feelings of abjection in the viewer, utilizing videos of suffering animals to evoke undeniable horror and disgust. Leaked footage<sup>39</sup> of a Tyson chicken slaughterhouse was obtained in 2015 by the organization PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals)—the viewer is subjected to a sickening series of clips in which countless chickens are shackled by their necks on a swiftly-moving conveyor belt, sentenced to the mechanical gallows. We, too, see the dehumanizing effect of these factories on human laborers; one shot includes a man freely urinating in the corner of the killing floor. A whistleblower, with their voice

<sup>36</sup> Pitt, Jessica. “Ag-Gag Legislation and Public Choice Theory: Maintaining a Diffuse Public by Limiting Information,” *American Journal of Criminal Law*, 2012, vol. 40, issue 1

<sup>37</sup> Wilson, Larissa. “Ag-Gag Laws: A Shift in the Wrong Direction for Animal Welfare on Farms,” *Golden Gate University Law Review*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2014

<sup>38</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Columbia University Press, 1982, p. 96.

<sup>39</sup> PETA, dir. “Tyson’s Dirty Deeds,” *YouTube*, 2015.

distorted for anonymity, provides narration describing how the workers would play games by fitting multiple birds into one shackle or throwing the birds across the room at the conveyor belt. In a discreet audio recording, a worker describes breaking a chicken's back with his hands: "Fucking chickens made me mad. I hurt a [sic] innocent chicken because the other chickens made me mad...I smashed that motherfucker..." His voice seems to modulate back-and-forth from anger to regret to anger again, as though he is trying to convince himself that his actions are justifiable. Reminiscent of the actions of the "guards" in the Stanford Prison Experiment, the unambiguous, unattended power dynamics between human and animal engenders a brutal and cruel disposition in the authority figure.

On the surface, the visceral nature of the cruelty in such footage is enough to nauseate the viewer, but I assert that the real abject horror comes from the subconscious disruption of something much more personal. When we consider the overwhelming scale of the bloodshed in the factory farm, that place where animal flesh and bone turn into consumable meat, we irrevocably come to realize the staggering degree to which pure brutality of our own doing underscores the food consumption that would otherwise epitomize life's quotidian mundanity. In her essay *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva presents a specific scene from her childhood during which her parents offer her a glass of milk that had, unbeknownst to them, already begun to spoil. As Kristeva describes in nauseating detail her revulsion and anxiety at the moment when "the lips touch that skin on the surface of milk,"<sup>40</sup> she identifies the source of these feelings not to be the spoiled milk alone, but rather the refutation of guilt supplied by the mother and father that had offered it to her—the milk's subtext as familial nourishment is disrupted. In rejecting that which is provided by her family, Kristeva fundamentally separates herself from her parents, eschewing that subjectivity and creating her own:

"I" want none of that element, sign of their desire; "I" do not want to listen, "I" do not assimilate it, "I" expel it. But since the

<sup>40</sup> Kristeva, *Horror*, p. 2

food is not an "other" for "me," who am only in their desire, I expel *myself*, I spit *myself out*, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish *myself*. . . it is thus that *they* see that "I" am in the process of becoming an other at the expense of my own death. During that course in which "I" become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit.<sup>41</sup>

Slaughterhouse footage, like the one presented by PETA, operates in a comparable way, as the meat, which once represented a comforting mythology, now is destabilized to also operate as a source of brutality and terror. We are disturbed by this footage not because it is graphic, but because it engenders a cognitive dissonance for which the response is to either remain willfully ignorant or cease to participate in such consumption altogether. It is ironic—this mechanized space is where our primordial inclination towards violence becomes most apparent.

### Revelations

It is with this capacity for violence that *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is concerned. Soon after Sally Hardesty and her group of friends settle into the old family estate, they each subsequently encounter the film's primary antagonist: the wordless, chainsaw-wielding Leatherface. The character's introduction comes as Kirk and Pam, a young couple, are wandering around looking for a swimming hole. Their search is interrupted by a loud and incessant whirring noise coming from a dilapidated plantation-style home. As the pair approaches the structure to investigate, the use of a cinematic wide shot reveals Kirk and Pam to be walking through a field full of bright yellow sunflowers; this dichotomy proves to be another instance of the disturbed rurality outlined in the 1844 Hawthorne journal entry<sup>42</sup>. This foreground of natural bliss is intentionally marred by the reveal of a

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 3

<sup>42</sup> Hawthorne. *The American Notebooks*, p. 103-05

cacophonic, running electrical generator situated outside of the home. To Pam's indignation, Kirk enters the house, calling out to see if anyone is home—suddenly, with the sound of a pig's squeal, a lurching figure emerges from the shadows, striking Kirk across the head with a meat sledgehammer. The young man does not die instantaneously—his body violently convulses until Leatherface again clubs him with the hammer, killing him.

While this violent exchange lasts for not thirty brief seconds, it is Pam's elongated, deeply discomforting encounter with Leatherface that reveals the true nature of the killer. Upon entering the darkened house to find her boyfriend, she falls headfirst into a room, landing on a floor covered in bloody, plucked chicken feathers; looking up in terror at her surroundings, she notices both human and animal bones littered across the space, and a single hen suspended in a cage that hangs from the ceiling. The caged bird's incessant clucks serve to mock the hapless character, hinting towards the fact that each of them exists in an imprisoned, unfamiliar state of captivity. Pam emits a bloodcurdling scream and attempts to flee from the house only to be grabbed and pulled back in by Leatherface, who the viewer can now see clearly as wearing a butcher's apron and mask of material that resembles human skin. Leatherface, continuing his nonverbal, animalistic squealing, impales and hangs Pam on a meat hook as she squirms and kicks at him to no avail.

Here is our first, most explicit instance of humans transforming into livestock for the slaughter, with Leatherface as a figure that has awkwardly transcended the borders separating animal, human, and machine. He effectively embodies both manhood and animality, wearing a mask which presents an artificial (in nature if not in material) visage of a human face while also emitting vocal imitations of the squeals and groans of a feral hog. When Leatherface picks up his weapon of choice (the titular chainsaw) to carve up Kirk, he gleefully wields it with a balletic grace that belies his otherwise awkward and lumbering frame; the rumbling tool serves as an

appendicular extension of himself, affording the killer a mechanistic potency in lieu of human traits. As the camera zooms in on Pam's suspended body, the reverberations of the mechanical weapon grow deafeningly loud, and Hooper subsequently uses a cinematic "L-cut" to transition to a shot of a peacefully whirring windpump while the fading audio of the chainsaw from the previous shot carries over. The implications of these successional images further blur the line between man and machine—much like the aforementioned Tyson workers, here is a case in which men ultimately replicate the violence of the tools they utilize.

The monstrosity of Leatherface stems from his eschewal of classification, a transgression borne from societal consumptive habits that hence must be relegated to the furthest borders of civilization. Conversely, Pam represents the other half of this equation, comfortably ignorant in her consumptive desires until she crosses the threshold into that space of mass production wherein it becomes impossible to see past the violent reality. A metonym for the film's audience, Pam has been forcibly transformed into a captive audience to Kirk's dismemberment, repulsed but unable to look away.

The onus on the viewer to bear witness to this and other moments of nauseating violence in *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* has been a source of considerable controversy, with critics highlighting the prevalence of hyperviolence, specifically against women, in Hooper's film. In one derisive review at the time of the film's release, novelist and critic Mary Mackey remarked of the scene: "Pam has the distinction of dying what is probably one of the most brutal deaths a woman has ever died on the screen... Why are violent films so popular, and why are films that involve violence against women some of the most popular of all?"<sup>43</sup> While it is a worthy task to dispute the gendered inequity in recipients of violence in film, Mackey's critique reductively glosses over the *revelatory* power of violence that the American Grotesque has sought to harness. The heightened nature of this scene and the brutality to which Pam is subjected are not merely a

<sup>43</sup> Mackey, Mary. "The meat hook mama, the nice girl, and Butch Cassidy in drag," *Jump Cut*, no. 14, 1977, p. 12-14

means to create an atmosphere of horror, but a method of exposing the innate sense of empathy to violence against humans and connecting it to more abstract conflicts existing between the pastoral and the mechanized. In utilizing the substantial power of fiction, Hooper has functionally created a version of the Tyson factory footage that was previously rejected on the grounds of legality and has made it mainstream and palatable by comparison.

Flannery O'Connor battled criticism of her writing not so dissimilar from Mackey's, noting:

We hear many complaints about the prevalence of violence in modern fiction, and it is always assumed that this violence is a bad thing and meant to be an end in itself. With the serious writer, violence is never an end in itself. It is the extreme situation that best reveals what we are essentially, and I believe these are times when writers are more interested in what we are essentially than in the tenor of our daily lives. Violence is a force which can be used for good or evil, and among other things taken by it is the kingdom of heaven. But regardless of what can be taken by it, the man in the violent situation reveals those qualities least dispensable in his personality, those qualities which are all he will have to take to eternity with him...<sup>44</sup>

O'Connor understands Grotesque violence as being profoundly imbued with the power to disturb the audience into acknowledging the more tacit horror that exists within the American experience, offering redemption via a trial by fire. The brutality of the crucifixion is one such example that gives credence to the undying power of redemption. In the scene I have laid out, Pam's death is notably bloodless, and the violence stems not solely from shocking visuals but more notably from shocking transgressions and transformations: the dueling noises of blood-curdling screams and pig squeals highlight this moment as one in which the consumer becomes the consumed, as one in which a

<sup>44</sup> O'Connor, Flannery, "On Her Own Work," *Manner and Mystery: Occasional Prose*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969, p. 114



Southern pastoral mythology is irreparably shattered by an innate capacity for destruction harnessed and exacerbated by mechanization. Just as the technological improvements at this Texas slaughterhouse lead to a de-evolution into primordial violence, just as North Carolina's exponential increases in production of factory-farmed pork turns clean water sources into rivers of shit, "everything that rises must converge."<sup>45</sup>

In spite of (or, perhaps, thanks to) accusations of excessive violence by critics, it is worth noting the long-term success of the 1974 film. What began as a single installment with a reported budget of less than \$100,000 has now ballooned into one of the most successful horror franchises of all time with a total worldwide gross, adjusted for inflation, of over \$350,000,000.<sup>46</sup> Leatherface's fleshy mask has leaped from the screen—it is now a mass-manufactured product, with plastic facsimiles donned by innumerable children on Halloween night as the miniature monsters trick-or-treat from door-to-door. Most recently, in 2013, Hooper's original film was re-made in eye-popping 3D to the tune of \$20 million under the title *Texas Chainsaw 3D* (the excision of the word "Massacre" from the title is proof alone of its ersatz nature.) In what is perhaps a fitting piece of meta-textual irony, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* has been co-opted by the same bloated, capitalistic forces of cheap mass-production as the meat industry it first set out to critique.

<sup>45</sup> O'Connor, Flannery. *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965.

<sup>46</sup> Chang, Kirsten. "Business of Fear: The Ten Highest Grossing Horror Movie Franchises," *CNBC*. 2011.

# **OBJECTS OF TRAGEDY: MATERIAL MOMENTS THAT MARK IRREVERSIBILITY**

46

*Kendall Jefferys*

In contrast to the comedy *As You Like It*, in which love serves as a generating premise and, ultimately, the resolution of the play, many of Shakespeare's tragedies center around women's inability to prove their love: Cordelia, described as her father's "best object" in *King Lear*, represents the verbal inexpressibility of love. In *Othello*, Desdemona, too, finds words insufficient to prove love and faithfulness. Notably, the crucial evidence weighed against Desdemona's honesty is held in a mere handkerchief. Theatrical preoccupation with domestic objects such as a woman's handkerchief, clothing, or bed-sheets underscores a pattern in Shakespeare's tragedies: material representations of women's love, life, purity, and honesty – the objects, if you will, of female objectification.

Materials shroud Desdemona's death much as they shroud Desdemona in death. Death is a tragic place to start, but Shakespeare's tragedies are so categorized by their endings, not beginnings. The last scene in which Desdemona and Emilia are both alive, Desdemona instructs Emilia, "If I do die before thee, prithee shroud me / In one of these same sheets."<sup>1</sup> Wedding sheets alluded to be marked by the blood of a virgin bride, Desdemona's anxiety foreshadows a different sort of stain tonight – the stain of murder rather than consummation. Sex and death; Two acts staged in the bedroom, mingled conceptually as well as tactilely in the blood spilled in the final acts of *Othello*.

Upon Iago's wounding of Cassio, Othello sneers, "Forth of my heart those charms, thine eyes, are blotted. / Thy bed, lust-stained, shall with lust's blood be spotted."<sup>2</sup> In Othello's view, the stains of sex and the stains of violence lay equally on the bed. Othello describes the blood spurting from Cassio's wound as "lust's blood," not Cassio's. It is as if Iago's seeded rumors of Cassio sleeping with Desdemona erase Othello's knowledge of Cassio's character. The thought blinds Othello so much that for him, Cassio only embodies the rumor, losing a physical connection to his own wounds.

<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare, William. *Othello*, 4.3.22-23.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.1.36-37.

In his book, *Shakespeare's Noise*, Kenneth Gross explores the potent sway of rumor in the Shakespeare's plays:

Rumors were seen to have, almost by nature, a corrosive, even an accusatory edge. We may relate this to what the sociologist Francoise Reumax sees as the derealizing, deobjectifying power of rumor – an ability to submit real persons and institutions to the logic of the imaginary.<sup>3</sup>

Iago's suggestion of an affair between Cassio and Desdemona subjects both characters to "the logic of the imaginary." That is, the logic of a lie, an untruth that has true implications. After all, the rumor results in Desdemona's murder.

Such "deobjectifying" power of rumor relies on confirmation through objects. Realizing Othello plans to kill her, Desdemona asks, "What's the matter?" Othello responds without pause, "That handkerchief / Which I so loved and gave thee, thou gav'st to Cassio"<sup>4</sup> Notably, the handkerchief in question is strawberry patterned, and this exchange follows the scene of Cassio wounded, lying in a "lust-stained" bed. A scene upon which Emilia – echoing Desdemona – asks, "Alas, what is the matter? What is the matter, husband?"<sup>5</sup> Iago responds, "This is the fruits of whoring".<sup>6</sup> The *fruits* of whoring. Contextually, the pattern of strawberries on the handkerchief alludes to "lust-stained" materials. Serving as both evidence and allusion to her infidelity, the handkerchief paints Desdemona in the language of stain and shame.

As *Othello's* violent scenes are wrapped up with the image of a strawberry patterned handkerchief, renaissance England was wrapped up in a woman's chastity and fidelity. Noted by Mary Beth Rose in her book on love and sexuality in English renaissance drama,

...while celibacy no longer flourished as an idealized mode of behavior after the Reformation, the distrust of sexual desire and the ideals of maidenly virtue –virginity—and wifely chastity continued to preoccupy the Renaissance imagination

<sup>3</sup> Gross, Kenneth. *Shakespeare's Noise*. University of Chicago Press, 2001, p. 51

<sup>4</sup> Shakespeare, *Othello*, 5.2.50-51

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.1.113

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.1.118

of the moral and spiritual life well into the seventeenth century.<sup>7</sup>

The language of *Othello* draws from the language of a society fixated on the “ideals of maidenly virtue.” Such language blurs and bleeds until a woman’s worth boils down to her blood alone: The purity of her blood, the shedding of her blood, and how her blood interacts with the material world surrounding her.

Spotted by more than a pattern suggestive of “lust’s blood,” the strawberry heirloom traces back to a profoundly inset pattern of stained cloth as proof of unseen actions. In his book, *The Stage Life of Props*, Andrew Sofer traces the origins of holy cloths and sacred blood to the “first dramatic cloth on the English stage,” the linteum, a holy grave cloth that served as “ocular proof of Christ’s resurrection”.<sup>8</sup> Returning to the shared exclamations of Emilia and Desdemona teases out Sofer’s point. The women do not ask their husbands what is wrong or what upsets them. They ask what is the matter, a word inherently steeped in substance, the tangible. In asking for the matter of conflict, the women ask for the physical matter, the root of their husband’s violence, which, as discussed, comes down to a piece of cloth. The answer to Emilia’s and Desdemona’s question alludes to a historical trust in objects as proof. Further illuminating the role of cloth as evidence, Sofer describes the holy scene of the linteum:

The cloth is shown to the congregation as the culminating moment of a divine narrative... It is a mnemonic device that reinforces a preexisting contract of revelation: a belief in Christ’s resurrection that is based on faith in the unseen. In a sense, the shroud is not proof at all. Rather, the shroud is the buffer between audience and play that signals the end of the story and the beginning of faith.”<sup>9</sup>

But faith in who, in what? For the congregation, it is faith in Christ’s resurrection. For *Othello*, the material moments of the play

<sup>7</sup> Rose, Mary Beth. “Moral Conceptions of Sexual Love in Elizabethan Comedy.” *The Expense of Spirit*, Cornell University Press, 1988, p. 17

<sup>8</sup> Sofer, Andrew. *The Stage Life of Props*. The University of Michigan Press, 2008, p. 65

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65

mark a faith in Iago, in rumor, over Desdemona's word. Desdemona pleads with Othello, plying him to talk to Cassio before he acts. Othello is dismissive, invoking again and again the handkerchief as undeniable evidence. Iago exploits the handkerchief as a metaphorical blindfold, obscuring Othello's sight and judgment, blinding him to any possibility outside Desdemona's suggested unfaithfulness:

By heaven, I saw my handkerchief in's hand.  
 O perjured woman! Thou dost stone my heart,  
 And makes me call what I intend to do  
 A murder, which I thought sacrifice.  
 I saw the handkerchief.<sup>10</sup>

Interestingly, in the context of cloth's Christian history, Othello thinks of murder as sacrifice. As if killing Desdemona could atone her (or Othello himself?) of her supposed sin. "My handkerchief" reclaims Othello, invoking a reversal of their union, her hand in marriage. After Desdemona dies, Othello proclaims "I have no wife." Though the handkerchief would have been his regardless upon her death, Othello makes it a point to reclaim the handkerchief before murdering Desdemona. In this way, she is dead before the scene begins. Taking the handkerchief as irreversible proof, Othello has already decided he must kill Desdemona, and, "being done, there is no pause."<sup>11</sup>

But let us pause first on the appearance of the word "stone" in the play. "Thou dost stone my heart" Othello tells Desdemona shortly before he murders her, while in the willow song Desdemona sings:

The fresh streams ran by her and murmured her moans,  
 Sing willow, willow, willow,  
 Her salt tears fell from her and softened the stones,<sup>12</sup>

The harrowing willow song evokes grief and disappointment in love. With the force of a river, the woman's tears "softened the stones." We see the fluids of a woman's body moving the immovable, softening the solidity of stone. At the same time, we see Desdemona's

<sup>10</sup> Shakespeare, *Othello*, 5.2.67-71

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.2.90

rumored infidelity to Othello's reputation as solidifying, turning Othello's heart to stone. The dual possibilities of a woman's fluids, her blood and her tears, emphasizes the play's difficulty in separating dark from light, life from death, and passion from violence. Othello claims that Desdemona is "false as water." Like water, Desdemona is subject to her environment and hard to separate from the pollution of outside influences. In the end, no amount of water removes blood stains of lust and violence from the sheets. No amount of tears can remove the stain of rumor from Othello's mind, a tragedy of lost love which is poised to bring tears from the audience as well. Like water over stone, *Othello* is a story that has carved its place in theatre over centuries.

The word "stone" also situates us in the tragic scene of another play: Cordelia's death in *King Lear*. The audience does not directly witness Cordelia's death, rather we witness King Lear's grief and disbelief. Against the "nothing" that launches the drama of *King Lear*, into the nothingness of wind, and with the breath Cordelia no longer has, Lear howls:

Howl, howl, howl, howl! O, you are men of stones:  
Had I your tongue and eyes, I'd use them so  
That heaven's fault should crack. She's gone forever!  
I know when one is dead, and when one lives;  
She's dead as earth. Lend me a looking-glass;  
If that her breath will mist or stain the stone,  
Why, then she lives.<sup>13</sup>

Lear's howl resonates like a throttled willow song, one which rails against the cold "men of stones" that could allow Cordelia's death. But maybe Cordelia is not yet dead. Holding the stone looking glass, Lear grasps a feather of hope. As with Othello, King Lear expresses the need for physical proof of unseen actions. In this case, the unseen action is the hanging of Cordelia. The movement of breath upon stone (or in some versions, a feather) is the material proof of her death.

<sup>13</sup> Shakespeare, William. *King Lear*, 5.3.256-62

Cordelia's hoped-for breath is described as "stain[ing] the stone." The only other appearance of the word "stain" in *King Lear* references tears, on which King Lear takes a hardened view. Despite the pain of "daughters' hearts / Against their father," King Lear refuses to weep: "let not women's weapons, water drops, / stain my man's cheeks!"<sup>14</sup> Tears are "women's weapons" capable, in the willow song, of "softening stone." Tears form a weakness to be resisted, staining a "man's cheeks," but not a woman's. In Lear's description, women stain and men receive the stain. As for Cordelia, no stain of her breath marks any residual of her life upon the stone.

Like Desdemona, who is suffocated by Othello, Cordelia dies a death of lost breath. The striking similarities in their deaths speak to the voices of these women -- they die with them. Or perhaps, these women die because their voices are not heard. Recall the moment of silence that brought us to Cordelia's permanent silence. In the opening acts of the play, King Lear is partitioning his kingdom among his three daughters when he asks which of his daughters loves him most: "Tell me, my daughters... Which of you shall we say doth love us most?"<sup>15</sup> After listening to her sister's lavishly false claims of loving their father above all else, Cordelia delivers the audience a sly aside: "What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent."<sup>16</sup> As Cordelia clues us into, love is a verb, a form of being, not speaking.

But are there truly no words for love? And how is it that objects serve as more commanding proof than language? Kenneth Gross frames Shakespeare's stage as a globe in which "we are faced with words whose force depends exactly on how they are repeated, obscured, interrupted... and misheard by those who hear them."<sup>17</sup> The force of words depends not only on how they are "repeated, obscured, or interrupted," but also on how they are interpreted.

These lines follow Lear's request that Cordelia speak:

Cordelia	Nothing, my lord.
Lear	Nothing?
Cordelia	Nothing.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 2.4.1578-79

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 1.1.46-49

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 1.1.60

<sup>17</sup> Gross, *Shakespeare's Noise*. p. 1

Lear            Nothing will come of nothing, speak again.  
 Cordelia        Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave  
                     My heart into my mouth. I love your majesty  
                     According to my bond; no more nor less.  
 Lear            How, how, Cordelia! Mend your speech a little,  
                     Lest it may mar your fortunes.<sup>18</sup>

Cordelia's "Nothing" upon his inquiry into the extent of her love is interpreted by Lear as a lack of love. Refusing words, Cordelia acknowledges both the power and limits of language. The fallibility of language lies in the vulnerability of the human body and mind to receive and interpret it. The ear "opens a hole in the whole of the world", it opens up to a nothingness that asks to be filled. The vulnerability of the human ear makes it "a place of power and danger."<sup>19</sup> This is evidenced with Othello, who takes Iago's words over Desdemona's. And with King Lear, who doesn't seem to hear Kent's call to rationality:

Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least;  
 Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sounds  
 Reverb no hollowness.<sup>20</sup>

Kent assures Lear that Cordelia is not "empty-hearted," assuming that Lear interprets Cordelia's "nothing" as emptiness, rather than a solid shield that Cordelia holds around her heart, protecting love there. Lear's view of Cordelia as "empty-hearted" reverberates the theme of women lacking solidity. And yet it is the men in both plays that call love into question in the first place based on what they hear. In both *Othello* and *King Lear*, upon hearing the woman's answer to the questions of their love, Othello's and King Lear's "ears are open to poison, and they extract poison where they find none."<sup>21</sup> In both plays, suspicion and unjust punishments breed in body parts of sensory experiences. Body parts that are relatively and substantially more open to external world while providing openings to internal world: ears,

<sup>18</sup> Shakespeare, Op. Cit., 1.1.86-93

<sup>19</sup> Gross, *Shakespeare's Noise*, p. 35

<sup>20</sup> Shakespeare, Op. Cit., 1.1.152-154

<sup>21</sup> Gross, Op.Cit., p. 35



eyes, mouth, nose, genitalia – body parts that are, because of this, also places of vulnerability.

It is the fallibility of Lear's senses that sets his suffering in motion, Phillip McGuire, in his book on Shakespeare's "open silences," examines "Lear's habit of imposing on the world around him his vision of what is and what will be." Lear is unable to see beyond the insecurities of his mind. "During the play's opening scene, that habit prompted Lear to disown the very daughter whose death he will not now accept."<sup>22</sup> After his banishment, Kent urges Lear to "see better," and perhaps Kent could have also said "hear better" (it would have rhymed, in any case). Regardless, Lear disowns his daughter and banishes Kent. Lear neither hears nor sees the situation clearly, which perhaps reveals why objects play such a large role as final evidence – objects are physical, easier to accept than ideas or words.

In the end, Cordelia is relatively accepting of her father's actions. Indeed, it is rather remarkable that neither Desdemona nor Cordelia blame the men who take it upon themselves to decide their fates. Both Cordelia's echoing "no cause, no cause" for grudge against her father, and Desdemona's insistence to Emilia that she, not Othello, is responsible for her death portrays not just acceptance and forgiveness but also a refusal to blame. A refusal, I would argue, that stems from love. Cordelia's father and Desdemona's husband lack faith in each woman's love, yet Cordelia and Desdemona still love. Unwavering, they love. The raw power, the striking tragedy, of these women lies in their power to love, to rise above rumor and slander. A stain alters; it is viewed as impure, an unsightly mark marring a surface. From a restructured perspective, a stain is resilient, resistant, often permanent. A stain marks moments of irreversibility in objects of durability; it signals moments of divinity. The objects representative of Cordelia and Desdemona's tragic ends are the receivers of, in Lear's words, "women's weapons:" blood, breath, and tears. The two objects of tragedy in *Othello* and *King Lear*, stone and cloth, are also the very two objects associated with Christ's resurrection. In this way, the

<sup>22</sup> McGuire, Phillip C. *Speechless Dialect: Shakespeare's Open Silences*. University of California Press, 1985, p. 97

unwavering love and forgiveness of Cordelia and Desdemona commands a reverence. Imagine stained glass windows displaying the plays' scenes in vibrant colors, for these women are the color, the life, and the blood in two of Shakespeare's great tragedies.

## **"DANGEROUS DEVIATIONS": QUEER VAMPIRISM AND AESTHETIC OTHERINGS IN STOKER'S DRACULA**

*Jessica Lovett*

*"You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her.  
And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing."  
— H el ene Cixous, "Laugh of the Medusa"<sup>1</sup>*

Medusa, according to Greek mythology, is able to turn her onlookers into stone—which, upon first reading, seems to deflect agency onto the onlooker, as they are essentially the one who is *doing* the looking. However, the real monstrosity of Medusa comes from her at once seductive and repulsive aesthetic—as the story goes, she is beautiful and impossible to look away from, but at the same time, her face is surrounded by snakes, inciting fear within the seduction, but even further, a penetrative power (the power to bite). It is in this impossible dualism that the onlooker is struck—stone, frozen, immobilized. The female vampires in Stoker's *Dracula* do very much the same thing. They seduce, with their overtly-sexualized, *voluptuous* mouths—but peeking through this beautiful and enticing orifice are a pair of sharp white teeth: their power to bite, penetrate, and extract fluid. In essence, they castrate their male victims by removing 1) their own penetrative power and 2) their mobility and therefore agency and autonomy. This two-fold loss could be summarized as the inability to procreate—by losing both their phallus and their actual physical agency, the men are literally and figuratively trapped in time; in the moment, they are frozen in fear. But they are also unable to procreate, and pass *themselves* on throughout time, throughout history. Seeing that immobilization and a subsequent loss of reproductive power is, at least in terms of these two female monsters, a direct result of an aesthetic deformity or defamiliarization. It can be followed that vampires are both *othered* and *empowered* as a result of that aesthetic deformity. I will argue that such mutations, dysfunctions, and other diversions from familiar aestheticized gender presentations at once oppress and empower the vampires in *Dracula*, and that this very oppress-empower dichotomy is at the heart of their queerness.

<sup>1</sup> Cixous, H el ene. "The Laugh of the Medusa", *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2017, p. 947

It is first necessary to define what I mean by aesthetics, and to do so I borrow heavily from Tobin Siebers' "Aesthetics of Human Disqualification." According to Siebers, aesthetics is "the way that some bodies make other bodies feel," bodies being defined as "the physical manifestation of itself or as the particular appearance of a given physical manifestation".<sup>2</sup> It is particularly within aesthetics that "the sensation of otherness is felt at its most powerful, strange, and frightening".<sup>3</sup> With each description of the vampires by the human characters, the horror comes from the abnormality and unfamiliarity of their bodies—the lack of any clear gender binary or boundary. Take Harker's very first description of Dracula upon entering the castle:

"His face was a strong—a very strong—aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils; with lofty domed forehead, and hair growing scantily round the temples, but profusely elsewhere. His eyebrows were very massive...with bushy hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion...the chin was broad and strong, and the cheeks firm though thin...[his hands] were rather coarse—broad, with squat fingers. Strange to say, there were hairs in the centre of the palm. The nails were long and fine, and cut to a sharp point."<sup>4</sup>

Everything about the Count's aesthetic presentation betrays the gender binary by exhibiting both the masculine and the feminine at once. Almost directly side by side does Harker contrast the Count's dual aesthetic: he at once lacks hair around the temples, a typically masculine hairstyle, but grows it "profusely elsewhere;" its profuseness indicating a feminine abundance of "bushy," "curly," hair. His chin is the properly broad and strong chin associated with manliness, but immediately his cheeks are thin—which gauntness is more often associated as a feminine-like feature. Perhaps the clearest evidence of the Count's queer aesthetic is in the description of his hands—they are masculine in that they are coarse, broad, squat. But again we see the womanly hair, which Harker himself remarks as

<sup>2</sup> Siebers, Tobin. "Aesthetics of Human Disqualification", *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2017, p. 1488

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1488

<sup>4</sup> Stoker, Bram. *Dracula: Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism*, ed. John Paul Riquelme. Bedford/St. Martins, 2016, p. 44

“strange to say,” and the long, sharp nails, evidently effeminate. Just after giving this description, these hands—these amalgamations of both sides of the binary, these objects of blurred boundaries—graze Harker’s, and he can “not repress a shudder” nor “a horrible feeling of nausea”.<sup>5</sup> The power is in aesthetics—in the way the Count’s *body* makes Harker’s feel. And it is more specifically the queerness of that body which incites a physical and psychic reaction.

This incitation of feeling, from one body to another, is moreover “involuntary...a form of unconscious communication between bodies, a contagious possession of one body by another”.<sup>6</sup> This involuntary, unconscious *possession* lends aesthetics an enormity of power. It may be directly compared to the involuntary possession of victims under the hypnotic and seductive sway of vampires. While describing, in detail, their “high aquiline noses,” “great dark piercing eyes,” and “brilliant white teeth, that shone like pearls against the ruby of their voluptuous lips,” Harker is totally subject to the three vampiric sisters and their aesthetic power.<sup>7</sup> He makes no attempt to move, to run, to question or consider (at the moment) who, or how, they are. Rather, his sole occupation is in regarding their unfamiliar and uncanny bodies, in a dream-like trance. The three vampires, then, *possess* his consciousness, and render him completely defenseless against their aesthetic power. Count Dracula’s distinct aesthetic presentation, as well, provokes involuntary admiration. Mina, immediately upon seeing his figure appear beside her bed, “knew him at once from the descriptions of the others,” detailing his “waxen face; the high aquiline nose...the parted red lips, with the sharp white teeth showing between; and the red eyes...” She also knew him from “the red scar on his forehead where Jonathan had struck him,” quite a literal aesthetic disfiguration.<sup>8</sup> In any case, Mina is, like Jonathan, “paralysed” by the Count’s remarkable and unfamiliar features. This aesthetic unfamiliarity of the vampire body affords them a keen sense of power; to overtake the autonomy of their onlookers and victims, to immobilize them and seduce them.

<sup>5</sup> Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 44

<sup>6</sup> Sieber, "Aesthetics of Human Disqualification", p. 1488

<sup>7</sup> Stoker, *Op. Cit.*, p. 63

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 289

The vampire's aesthetic power however, as the site of their monstrosity, also evokes their own oppression and violence. Siebers holds that "[oppression] is justified most often by the attribution of natural inferiority—what some call 'in-built' or 'biological' inferiority" and that this occupation with biological inferiority "always comes back to the appearance of the body and the way the body makes other bodies feel".<sup>9</sup> The power of aesthetic othering, then, is to indicate and symbolize a deeper inferiority or incompetency. The queerness of the vampire's aesthetic malformation signals their *biological inferiority*, according to the humans in the text, because it means that they fail to operate and function properly within the sex/gender system. Gayle Rubin defines this system as "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied".<sup>10</sup> Within every human activity, says Rubin, the sexes are divided "into two mutually exclusive categories...[exacerbating] the biological differences between the sexes and thereby [*creating*] gender".<sup>11</sup> By failing to exist neatly within the categories so thoroughly ingrained in society, production, and economy—vampires are seen as mutants and deformities; insofar as they perform their sexual functions *improperly*. John Allen Stevenson notes that "traditional sexual roles are terribly confused" by vampires, and I agree—but rather than simply reverse or invert the roles, vampires creating something of an aesthetic mobility, wherein their bodies deny and redefine any semblance of gender categorization at all.<sup>12</sup> In the vampiric sex scene between Mina and Dracula, the mobility of sexual signs makes Seward's "hair rise like bristles on the back of [his] neck, and [his] heart [seem] to stand still". What he sees is the Count, his "left hand [holding] both Mrs. Harker's hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension; his right hand [gripping] her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom...a thin [stream of blood trickling] down the man's bare breast which was shown by his torn-open dress."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Siebers, "Aesthetics of Human Disqualification", p. 1489

<sup>10</sup> Rubin, Gayle. "The Traffic in Women", *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2017, p. 902

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 912

<sup>12</sup> Stevenson, John Allen. "A Vampire in the Mirror: The Sexuality of Dracula." *PMLA*, vol. 103, no. 2, 1988, pp. 139–149. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/462430](http://www.jstor.org/stable/462430), p. 146

<sup>13</sup> Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 285

Charles Prescott & Grace Giorgio consider this scene and its description “a manifestation of the unfixing of gender boundaries,” as it depicts “not penetration of the neck as we expect, but rather Mina sucking on the breast of the Count, creating further gender confusion”.<sup>14</sup> The scene performs a refiguration of male and female anatomy as well as sexual agency—the Count employs at once a typically male-associated dominance, with both of his hands gripping Mina, and a feminine passivity as Mina is the one suckling at his breast. The result is a renegotiation between their roles: male/female, active/passive, dominant/submissive. Their “sex,” then, distorts a regularly familiar kinship system, as defined by Rubin, as “an exchange of women between men” wherein women “are the most precious gifts”.<sup>15</sup> There certainly is an *exchange* taking place, except that it is more or less equal between Mina and Dracula: Mina later explains that the Count “pulled open his shirt, and with his long sharp nails opened a vein in his breast” for Mina to drink from *only after* “[placing] his reeking lips upon [*her*] throat” (emphasis added).<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the agentive roles are neither simply voided nor inverted, but they are mobile, changing, and interactional—and specifically so due to Dracula’s masculine and feminine qualities. Whereas typical kinship systems “transform males and females into ‘men’ and ‘women,’ each an incomplete half which can only find wholeness when united with the other,” vampiric “kinship” blends those distinctions.<sup>17</sup> That kinship is queered—and that it is queered through bodily transformations—is what makes the encounter so monstrous, so horrific, so shameful; and it is what so explicitly angers the men in the text.

The humans in the novel, and notably the straight, cisgender male humans, are driven to extreme violence and anger due to the improper and warped sexuality of the vampires—Lucy being arguably the most oppressed and fiercely villainized. Upon her transformation, Seward remarks how her “mouth opened, and the pale gums, drawn back, made the teeth look longer and sharper than ever” in order to

<sup>14</sup> Prescott, Charles E., and Grace A. Giorgio. “Vampiric Affinities: Mina Harker and the Paradox of Femininity in Bram Stoker’s ‘Dracula.’” *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2005, p. 503

<sup>15</sup> Rubin, “The Traffic in Women”, p. 908-9

<sup>16</sup> Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 290-1

<sup>17</sup> Rubin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 912

speak in a “soft, voluptuous voice, such as [he] had never heard from her lips”.<sup>18</sup> Again we are at the helm of the aesthetic power, and the power of its difference—Lucy’s abnormally long and sharp teeth indicating her fully realized penetrative power, but within a soft, feminine mouth. Her voice is not only *voluptuous*, but it is also noticeably unfamiliar—something he had never heard before. The contrast shows that she has not only taken over a more dominant, masculine role—but that she has fused the feminine and the masculine sexuality into one, and that is what is truly seen as deformative and terrifying. Upon finding her in all of her vampiric glory in the churchyard, the men “recognized the features of Lucy Westenra” but not Lucy herself—Seward only calls “the thing that was before [them] Lucy because it bore her shape”. Lucy is both recognizable but impossible due to her abnormal aesthetic qualities—her lips “crimson with fresh blood,” her “eyes unclean and full of hell-fire,” her “voluptuous smile”. Her body gives away not only her overt sexuality and loss of innocence, but it also suggests the monstrous and nonhuman condition of her queerness. The blood signals, once again, the masculine power of penetration and the feminine receiving of fluid—just as she had received blood from all four men, against her will, she now receives blood of her own volition. The lack of gender distinction is simply too much to conceptualize for Seward, who resolves to calling Lucy a “thing,” and asserting that, “had she then to be killed, [he] could have done it with savage delight”.<sup>19</sup> His anger is directly incited by the sight of her body—and his perception of it as deformed, both wrongly female and wrongly male at once, and therefore totally incapable of fulfilling its sexual duty. Perhaps the most apt depiction of this horrifying liminality comes when Lucy is trapped between the men (who hold a crucifix) and her tomb, her refuge (where Van Helsing has placed sacred emblems): “The beautiful colour became livid, the eyes seemed to throw out sparks of hell-fire, the brows were wrinkled as though the folds of the flesh were the coils of Medusa’s snakes...If ever a face meant death—if looks

<sup>18</sup> Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 175

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221



could kill—we saw it at that moment” (222).<sup>20</sup> She is beautiful but livid; her mouth is lovely but blood-stained, feminine but masculine all knotted up in one. Her very flesh is compared to Medusa’s snakes—and since the snakes can be representative of phallic and penetrative power but also as feminine, flowing hair, her face becomes the very signal of this corrupted gender boundary. This very dualism that Seward describes, using descriptions of her body to create such dualisms, could, according to him, literally kill. Thus the fear of an aesthetic transgression, one that invokes a queer and non-normative presentation and signals an incompetency or inability to function *properly* within a system, is seen as so threatening.

In each description of the vampires in *Dracula* do desire and fear go hand in hand, which phenomenon Craft aptly calls a “mobile and polymorphic” sexuality which “[eludes] the restrictions upon desire encoded in traditional conceptions of gender” (111).<sup>21</sup> And in that desire/fear is the very empower-oppress dynamic that constrains the queer vampire. While vampires are not necessarily overthrowing the gender binary, their gender and sexuality simply “[present] a distorted image of human tendencies and behavior;” the real terror being in the similar yet unfamiliar, that which is “simultaneously different and a parodic mirror” (Stevenson 142).<sup>22</sup> All of the violence in the novel is violence against deviance—violence against the frightening, confusing, and immobilizing power of queer gender presentation, sexual desire, and sexual action. This deviance is presented and understood throughout the novel through the vampire’s aesthetic *disqualification* and *disfiguration*. Precisely in the aesthetic abnormalities attributed to vampires in the novel do the characters conceptualize otherness—and therefore it is the driving force behind all of the fear, oppression, and ultimate violence.

This speaks to the way difference and variety is so often villainized and terrorized. Sieber contends that aesthetic otherness “establishes differences between human beings not as acceptable or valuable variations but as dangerous deviations,” which call for

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 222

<sup>21</sup> Craft, Christopher. “‘Kiss Me with Those Red Lips’: Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*.” *Representations*, no. 8, 1984, p. 111

<sup>22</sup> Stevenson, “A Vampire in the Mirror: The Sexuality of *Dracula*”, p. 142

violence, expulsion, or eradication (1488).<sup>23</sup> Any deviance from the norm that signals some “biological inferiority” signals one’s inadequacy within the system. As Rubin says, a woman straying from her proper function “enables clinicians to try to accommodate women to a role whose destructiveness is so lucidly detailed in their own theories,” and that it “is the same inconsistent attitude which permits therapists to consider lesbianism as a problem to be cured” (916).<sup>24</sup> The female vampire is at once the penetrating woman and the impenetrable woman; she is at once seductive and repulsive, which figures her as deformed, mutant, and monstrous.

There is much more that needs to be written about the way queer bodies are both fetishized and reviled, simultaneously sensationalized and vilified. The real concerns facing trans and queer bodies (and particularly black, POC, and low-income queer bodies)—such as access to health care, proper media representation, and the *right to survive*—are and have always been immediate and urgent. We are forced to consider how we engage with non-normative gender aesthetics and gender nonconforming embodiment in and outside of literature. Literature, and specifically *Dracula* here, serves as a tool for revealing the way queer bodies and sexuality are displaced, discussed, and impaired. In no way do I mean to suggest that trans or queer bodies are monstrous—but simply that the vampire similarly transcends distinction and classification; similarly incites aesthetic judgments of pleasure and pain, lust and disgust; and that that very aesthetic judgment is used to justify their oppression, violence, and silencing. To return to the epigraph: neither Medusa, nor vampires, are deadly—which you would know if you only looked at them.

<sup>23</sup> Siebers, “Aesthetics of Human Disqualification”, p. 1488

<sup>24</sup> Rubin, “The Traffic in Women”, p. 916

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