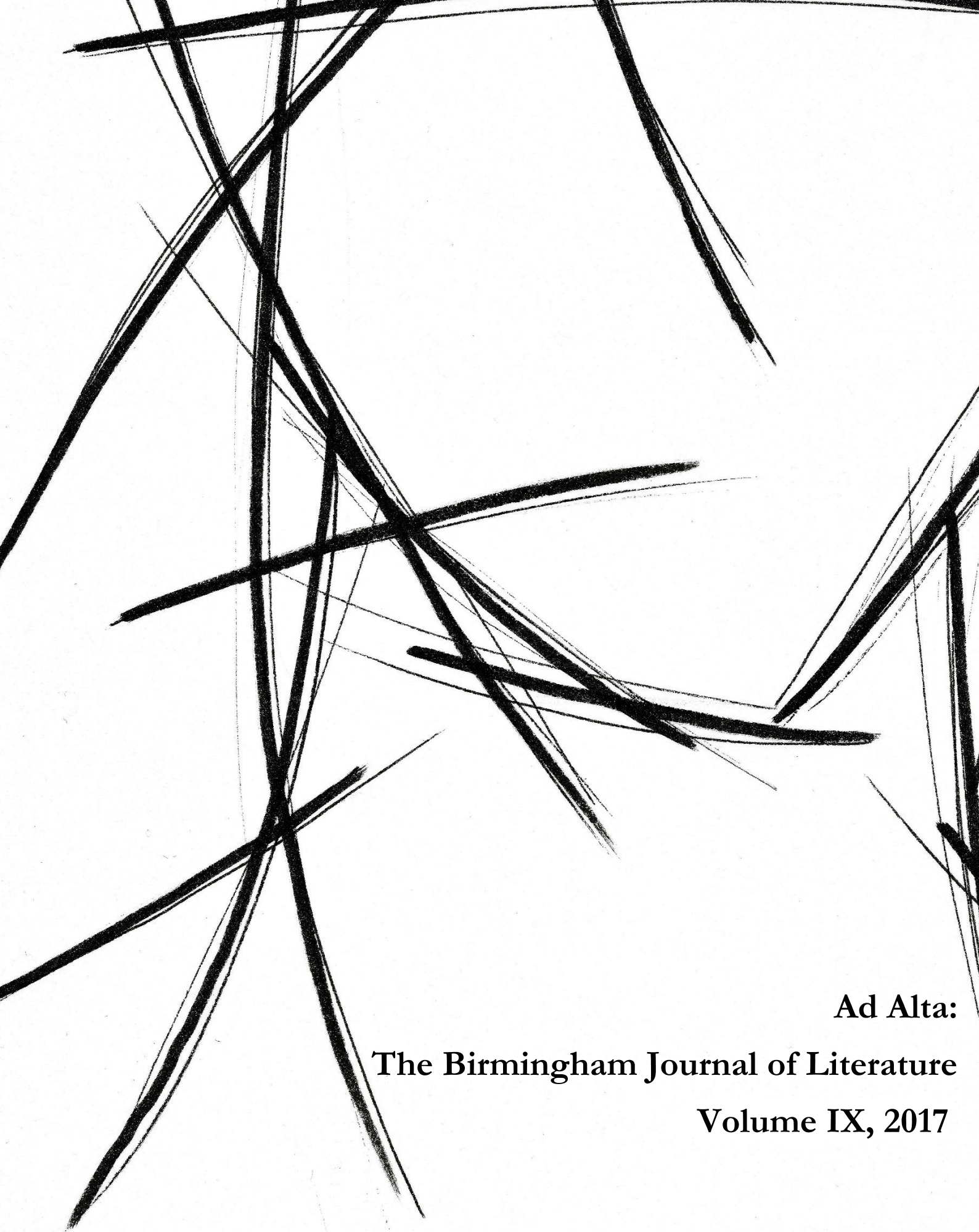

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Ad Alta: the Birmingham Journal of Literature wishes to acknowledge the hard work and generosity of a number of individuals, without whom this journal would never have made its way into your hands, or onto your computer screen. First, our editorial board Tom White and Emily Buffey should be thanked. Tom White, with tireless patience, was always available with invaluable advice and support throughout the entire process. Emily Buffey provided excellent feedback and commentary, sometimes at very short notice. Will Cooper of Central Print should also be thanked, without whose experience and expertise the publication of this journal would not have been possible. Also, our contributors, who dedicated so much precious time to writing and redrafting their submissions, and the section editors who guided and worked with them through that process. Last, but by no means least, we wish to thank the proof editor and reviewers named above for their time and extraordinary efforts.

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FOREWORD

Through adversity to higher things. This is a rough translation of the University of Birmingham's Latin motto, 'Per Ardua Ad Alta'. Why name a journal dedicated to the study of literature after the pursuit of a transcendent state? It is not novel to suggest that literature has long been viewed as a 'higher' pleasure. John Stuart Mill argued for the superiority of the arts above baser human pursuits. But this perhaps carries a pretension which literary types are often labelled with and for which they are attacked. While the reading, study and writing of literature is singularly important to a journal of this type we make no claim to raise ourselves above anything at all, we at *Ad Alta* speak not from a position of superiority but of honest enthusiasm. To us, literature is a high pleasure indeed.

Originally conceived in 2008 as *The Birmingham Journal of Literature and Language*, we have rebranded the journal as *Ad Alta* to reflect this value literature holds for us. More than that, *Ad Alta* is also a truer reflection of our own sense of the journal's identity and purpose. Our aim is to take postgraduate work from Birmingham and the rest of world and showcase the best that we could find. We have succeeded in that aim, as we showcase work from institutions around the world. In seeking to establish our identity as a journal, one can look to the words of Geoff Mills who writes beautifully on the nature of the University of Birmingham's iconic campus:

> The train disgorges its contents and I am carried along by the human slipstream, over the ailing canal, toward Paolozzi's cubist monster, his bronze bulk fastened to a goliath chair. The inscription at his feet urges us to 'Fare forward, you who think that you are voyaging'. I do; I am.

Mills tackles a notion of finding oneself amongst history, particularly at an institution such as a university. Whereas it might feel as though academia is an important yet insular world, it is crucial that one does not become even more insular within our own institution. Therefore, we enthusiastically look to include postgraduate work from institutions unrelated to Birmingham, as well as our 'home-grown' talent, in the hope of facilitating an inter-institutional, sincere and dedicated study and writing of literature. Per Ardua: indeed many at university have been and are currently dealing with a great deal of adversity in their own lives, but it is our hope that by demonstrating the best of the academic and creative work that goes on at a postgraduate level, we neither deny the individual's struggle, nor define them by it, but simply highlight that the position they achieve is more than the struggle they have fought against. These issues of identity and

adversity are reoccurring themes in this volume's submissions. From Chavonne Brown's shocking story of the Spanish colonisation in Mesoamerica in *Xochiquetzal*, to Christopher Fisher's exploration of social anxiety and political anger in his review of Rudy Francisco's *Helium*; from the making of an English gentleman in Ellen O'Brien's article on Chaucer, to giving a 'voice' to Robert Browning's murdered duchess in Julia Pirie's note on "My Last Duchess" – the submissions you will find in this volume deal with themes of constructing identity in a oftentimes unforgiving world. We state that identity is important not only to our contributors, or to our readers, but to the journal itself.

> I encroach on the Chancellor's Court, trim lawns wrapped by a russet palace, a semicircular sweep of Byzantine pomp. And at its heart lies the Great Hall, over whose entrance we find Pegram's pantheon of luminaries

It is a challenge to orient oneself in the storied history of an institution like the University of Birmingham, much has been written by far more knowledgeable people about the significance of each and every red brick in sight. In the face the Chancellor's Court that Mills evokes so wonderfully above, what does one hope to bring to such a story?

> The campus is a hotchpotch sprawl, a palette of styles jostling for precedence, each new form seeking to outdo the last.

Against adversity one defines themselves, what they value and who they are to become. The better knowledge of the self and the establishment of one's identity are crucial in a person's life. We have endeavoured to establish *Ad Alta* as a publication distinct in its aim: exemplary postgraduate output with its own voice, whether this is the supernaturally indirect voice of Faina that Marianne Cronin discusses in Eowyn Ivey's *The Snow Child*, or the distinctive observations of 'the flâneur' that Wenyan Gu explores in relation to Walter Benjamin, the reader will find strong distinctive voice calling out from all areas of this edition of *Ad Alta*.

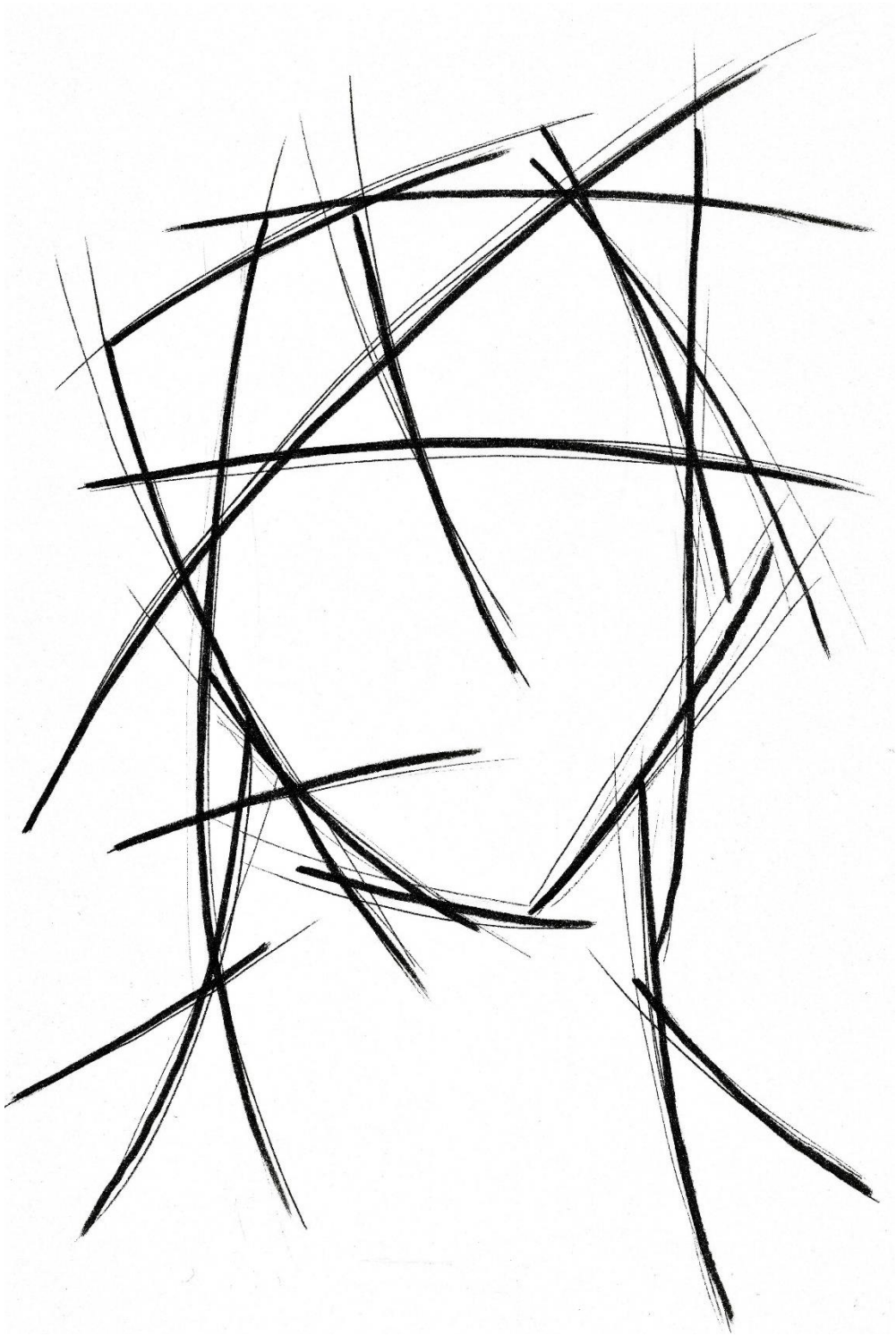
Josh Allsop and Jessica Pirie

General Editors

Over the course of this foreword we have borrowed the beautiful words of our reviews editor Geoff Mills and his wonderful prose-poem *Ad Alta*, which was originally used in 2014 as an audio recording for a BBC Birmingham exhibition at the Mailbox. We appreciate his lending of a rendition of the university campus, which is quite simply arresting.

AXIOM

WILLIAM BATEMAN



FREE DIRECT SPEECH PRESENTATION AND SUPERNATUAL AMBIGUITY: THE MAKING OF A FAIRY IN EOWYN IVEY'S *THE SNOW CHILD*

ARTICLE

MARIANNE CRONIN

In 1920s Alaska, Jack and Mabel, both grieving the loss of their only baby, have relocated to an isolated cabin in the wilderness. One night, they build a little girl out of snow, decorating her with a red scarf and mittens. The next day, the snow girl is gone and a blonde child, wearing the scarf and mittens, appears on their land. Her name is Faina and as they get to know her, Mabel is convinced that she is a snow fairy borne of the snow girl they built. Faina disappears each spring and returns in winter. As she grows older, Faina falls in love with and marries their neighbour Garrett. After giving birth to their baby, Faina becomes too hot and Mabel takes her out into the snow, where she disappears.

Throughout Eowyn Ivey's *The Snow Child* (2012), it is unclear whether Faina is a human or a snow fairy. In this article, I will explore how the presentation of her speech contributes to the supernatural ambiguity of her character. In particular, I will explore her unique Free Direct Speech presentation which has the unusual effect of altering the speech presentation of the characters who interact with her.

I. Dialogue, Character and Supernatural Ambiguity

The analysis of a character's dialogue can contribute to the understanding of their personality. Bousfield (118) argues that "a stylistic approach to understanding characters should– indeed *must*– explore the language that those characters themselves are presented as using" because the way that characters interact reveals the way in which readers "are being invited to see, to understand, to appreciate, empathise, sympathise or antipathise with those characters".

The central intrigue of Faina's character is the doubt over whether she is a human or a snow fairy. Smith (174) terms this type of uncertainty, 'supernatural ambiguity' and argues that supernatural ambiguity can make a character "compelling" (180). He argues that the supernatural ambiguity of the Headless Horseman in Irving's *Sleepy Hollow* is responsible for the narrative's popularity (174) and its influence on the great American ghost stories that followed its publication. Crucial to supernatural ambiguity, Smith argues, is that the ambiguity is never resolved (177). Indeed, he points to H.P. Lovecraft who argues that "a weird story in which the horrors are finally explained away by natural means" loses its element of fear (Lovecraft, 16). Like *Sleepy Hollow*, in

whose ending the possibility that the horseman was a ghost is implied "just enough to cast a delicious pall of uncertainty over the whole proceeding" (Smith, 179), the ambiguity of Faina in *The Snow Child* is never definitively resolved. Indeed, Tidwell interprets Faina as "a ghost" for the majority of the novel, noting that her maturation into a woman and pregnancy imply that Faina is human, only for her "fated disappearance" to cast supernatural doubt again (Tidwell, 2).

The ambiguity of Faina's existence is sustained by the fact that there is evidence to support either interpretation and that the two protagonists are at odds over which interpretation is correct. Jack and Mabel, who are a childless couple nearing old age, are mystified when the little girl appears on their land and they adopt opposing interpretations of her supernatural ambiguity. Jack, who follows Faina to her mountain home, buries a deceased man Faina claims is her father, and sees photographs of her parents, interprets Faina as a human child. However, Mabel, who is emotionally scarred by her miscarriage and discovers *Snegurochka* ('The Snow Maiden'), a Russian fairy tale about a snow daughter appearing to an old couple, believes Faina is a snow fairy. Mabel's belief is supported by Faina's aversion to heat, her apparent ability to summon snowstorms and that Mabel sees Faina hold a snowflake without it melting. Krenger notes that in literature, "the perception of childless women becomes the depiction of childless women as supernatural" (Krenger, 8), this trope is perhaps reflected in Mabel's willingness to believe in the supernatural interpretation of Faina.

> 'We wished for her, we made her in love and hope, and she came to us. She's our little girl, and I don't know how exactly, but she's made from this place, from this snow, from this cold. […]' (Ivey, 226)

Ivey's *The Snow Child* is based on the Russian folk tale character *Snegurochka* ('The Snow Maiden') which appears in the text as the fairy-tale that Mabel reads that convinces her that Faina is supernatural. In many iterations, such as Arthur Ransom's *Little Daughter of the Snow (1916),* which Ivey credits as the inspiration for her novel (411), a little girl appears to a childless couple after being fashioned out of snow. The Snegurochka's (and thus Faina's) legacy of appearing to a childless couple, means that her character functions as a wish-child, that is, a son or daughter who appears to childless characters who wish for offspring of their own. This is a motif found in medieval literature (Ashton, 45) and these wish-children inevitably bear a complex relationship to the parent(s) who wished for them. For example, in Angela Carter's vignette also titled *The Snow Child*, which amalgamates themes from *Snegurochka* and *Snow White*, the complex relationship between a mother and her 'wish child' is explored from a much darker perspective. In Carter's

story, the snow daughter that is created from the wishes of the childless Count becomes a rival for the Countess, who endeavours to kill her. Though Mabel in Ivey's work is desperate to love and keep Faina, both she and Carter's Countess share the ambiguity of their motherhood over their snow daughters. Sawden identifies that the Countess simultaneously occupies a role of step-mother in that "this child is not from her […] body" (2) and a role of mother in that she was present at the child's creation and birth. Mabel's relationship to Faina is much the same and the difficulty she encounters later in the novel when she tries to position herself as Faina's mother and to convince others of Faina's magical qualities is influenced by this maternal uncertainty.

Page argues that the most important function of dialogue in fiction is its contribution to "the presentation and development of character" (55). Indeed, dialogue is central to the supernatural ambiguity of Faina's characterisation in *The Snow Child*. In the present article, I will be focusing on the effects of Direct and Free Direct Speech presentation, based on an adaptation of Leech and Short's (260) speech presentation framework:

Narrator in control ⟷	Narrator in partial control			Narrator not in control
Narrator's Report of Speech Act	**Indirect Speech**	**Free Indirect Speech**	**Direct Speech**	**Free Direct Speech**
Dave promised his return.	Dave said that he would return tomorrow.	Dave would return tomorrow.	'I will return tomorrow,' Dave said.	I will return tomorrow.

Direct Speech (DS) is "the norm" for the presentation of speech in narrative fiction (Leech and Short, 268) and comprises the words spoken by the character inside inverted commas with a reporting clause. Free Direct Speech (FDS) is a freer version of Direct Speech in which "characters apparently speak to us more immediately without the narrator as an intermediary" (Leech and Short, 258). FDS traditionally consists of speech without inverted commas with/without a reporting clause. Though some studies (such as Semino and Short, 89) include speech in inverted commas without a reporting clause in the category of FDS, in this article, an absence of inverted commas will be taken to be necessary for coding of FDS. I argue that the stylistic differences

between speech with and without inverted commas are better addressed by grouping DS and FDS according to their use of such punctuation.

Thus, here, Direct Speech is understood to be dialogue *with* inverted commas which may or may not have a reporting clause. Free Direct Speech is dialogue *without* inverted commas which may or may not have a reporting clause, as exemplified in the table below:

Direct Speech (DS)	**Free Direct Speech (FDS)**
'I will return tomorrow,' Dave said. Or 'I will return tomorrow.'	I will return tomorrow, Dave said. Or I will return tomorrow.

II. Faina's Speech

Throughout the first part of the novel, Direct Speech is established as the norm for communication between Jack and Mabel and the secondary characters with whom they interact. In the extract below, Jack and Mabel communicate through their standard Direct Speech:

> 'I saw the child,' Mabel told Jack when he came in for dinner. 'The girl you described from the other night - I saw her behind the barn.'
> 'You sure?'
> 'Yes. Yes. […].'
> (Ivey, 59)

Speech is also communicated through Indirect Speech (60), and Narrator's Report of Speech Act (81). Throughout the novel, FDS is not used by any character until Faina begins to communicate. When Faina first visits Jack and Mabel, she is easily startled and entirely mute, communicating through head nods, head shakes and smiles.

> 'That's a nice little pelt,' he said and went to give it back to the child. But she shook her head.
> 'Put it back in your pocket so you don't forget it.'
> Again the barest shake of her head, a small smile. 'She wants us to have it,' Mabel whispered. 'Is that it? Is it for us?'

A smile.
(Ivey, 100)

This gives Faina an animal-like quality, but also has the effect that Mabel and Jack communicate with her as they might an infant learning to speak. Her continued silence means that when she *does* trust them enough to speak, it is emotionally foregrounded.

When Faina finally speaks, her speech is presented in a form that no other character thus far in the novel has used: Free Direct Speech, (speech with no inverted commas with/without a reporting clause). This provides another foregrounding effect as her speech stands out against the backdrop of Direct Speech that has been established. Throughout the novel, Faina's speech is always presented in FDS.

As he closed the barn door, he felt her small cool hands clasping at his wrist. She tugged at his arm so that he bent to her.
Will you promise?
Her voice small and frightened.
And before he knew the implications of such a promise, he was following her through the snow. […]
(Ivey, 107)

Throughout the first part of the novel, as outlined above, Jack, Mabel and the secondary characters communicate in Direct Speech. Faina's use of Free Direct Speech is thus internally deviant in the novel and so foregrounded, or 'perceptually prominent' (Short, 11) in the mind of the reader. Page notes that character speech can metaphorically represent the character using it (Page, 98). Adopting this viewpoint, we can consider that Faina's speech being unlike that of any other character might metaphorically reflect that Faina *herself* is unlike any other character in the novel.

Another effect of using FDS is ambiguity (Leech and Short, 259). This is certainly the case here, as the reader can't be sure that 'Will you promise?' is being spoken until they have read the next line describing Faina's vocal qualities. The uncertainty about whether she is speaking or not is compounded by the adjectives 'small and 'frightened' which contributes to the fragility of her communication. In using FDS, the narrator relinquishes control over the content of the speech. Thus, Faina's speech is unfiltered by the narrator, which, alongside the dramatic qualities of FDS, whereby FDS resembles a play script (Leech and Semino, 89), gives her words an immediacy and a dramatic quality.

In the extract below, Garrett, the son of Jack and Mabel's neighbours, is lost in the snow when Faina appears:

> You're lost
> Garrett jumped at the voice, an eerie whisper in his ear. Over his shoulder he saw the girl like a ghost in the snow. Angry at being startled, he shouted, What do you want?
> You have lost your way, she said, and again her voice was hushed and nearer than the girl herself.
> No I haven't.
> But they both knew he was lying.
> (Ivey, 305-6)

Here, Ivey gives direct definition to the quality of Faina's speech. Faina's voice is "an eerie whisper in his ear". The use of FDS reflects the ghostly quietness of Faina as her speech is less definite than that of characters where it is enclosed in inverted commas— we can't be sure that what we and Garrett are 'hearing' is even speech at all. Indeed, the possibility that Faina is communicating via telepathy is alluded to when Ivey describes Faina's voice as being "hushed and nearer than the girl herself". This suggests that perhaps the reason that her speech is presented in FDS is that she isn't actually speaking at all but somehow communicating her thoughts into Garret's mind. This gives Faina's speech a magical quality in that it transcends the physical distance between herself and Garrett.

Not only is there the possibility that Faina is communicating telepathically, but it is also possible, through the dreamlike effect induced by the unaccountable closeness of her voice, that her speech is coming from the hearer's own mind. In Faina's early interactions with Mabel and Jack, Mabel is convinced that Faina's visits are dreams. Likewise, Esther, Mabel's friend and neighbour also doubts that Faina exists. Unbound by the confines of inverted commas that clearly demarcate the speech of other characters, it is possible that the utterances Garrett hears are coming from his own mind. Garrett's speech is also presented in FDS as a direct result of Faina's presence and this shows that he has been enveloped into Faina's dreamlike world. I shall discuss Faina's ability to alter the speech presentation of other characters in section 3.

The accomplishment of "the creation of characters with recognisably individual elements" is often achieved through "a distinctive mode of speech" (Page, 99). By presenting Faina's speech in FDS, Ivey compounds this otherworldliness of Faina's speech as it is nothing like the speech of

the other characters. Likewise, the ambiguity of FDS not being presented like standard speech in the rest of the novel reflects the possibility that Faina is not actually speaking at all but is communicating via telepathy or as a figment of the other characters' imaginations. All of these things, of course, contribute to the supernatural ambiguity of Faina and suggest the possibility that Faina is an otherworldly being. The effect that Faina has on her co-present characters helps to solidify the supernatural ambiguity.

III. Faina's Influence On Other Character's Speech

What is most interesting about Faina's speech is that when Faina is present and willing to speak, her presence has the power to alter the speech presentation of the other characters who are co-present with her at the time, making everyone adopt FDS. This can be seen in her interaction with Garrett in section 2. The other characters in the text have been established as primarily communicating in Direct Speech and yet, when Faina is present and willing to talk, her presence alters *their* speech presentation form, making them speak in Free Direct Speech as she does. In relation to the Speech Presentation table (see above), this is a move to the right of the scale which "will produce an effect of freeness" (Leech and Short, 268). Page states that "qualities of speech" can be understood "as representing symbolically or metonymically, qualities of character" (Page, 98). Thus, we might ruminate that Faina is metaphorically 'freeing' the characters, welcoming them into her dreamlike world where the rules of reality are suspended, and Jack and Mabel are no longer a childless couple trapped in grief.

A good example of Faina's ability to 'free', that is, to convert co-present characters' speech from their usual mode (Direct Speech) into a freer version (Free Direct Speech), comes from one of her visits to the cabin. Here, we find Faina preparing to leave the cabin and return into the snow. She, Jack and Mabel are all communicating in Free Direct Speech. Once Faina leaves, however, Jack and Mabel's speech reverts back into Direct Speech, featuring speech marks and some use of reporting clauses, thus confirming that Faina's presence affects the speech presentation method.

> Faina had already fastened the shining silver buttons on her new coat.
> Please don't be angry, she said.
> Can't you hear the wind? Jack said.
> The child was already at the door. He waited for Mabel to protest, even to beg.

> All right, she said. If you must go, you must. But you'll be back, won't you? Promise to always come back.
> Solemnly, as if swearing an oath, the child said, I promise.
> Jack watched her leave, and it seemed like a disturbing dream, the child with her blood-smeared brow and twisted blonde hair and snowflake coat, and his wife, composed and accepting. He stood some time at the window, staring into the night. Behind him Mabel bustled with the dishes and sewing scraps.
> 'How could you have known?' he asked.
> 'Hmmm?'
> 'How could you have known she was coming back? Now? Ever?'
> (Ivey, 225)

It is only after Faina leaves that Jack and Mabel return to normal— that is, to Direct Speech, which is their standard way of communicating. This suggests that once Faina has departed, they leave the dreamlike world that envelops them when she is present. No other character in the text has the ability to alter another's speech presentation form and thus Faina's speech presentation influence is internally deviant and thus foregrounded and perceptually prominent. Additionally, I have been able to find no other examples in fiction where a character's presence alters the form of another's speech from Direct Speech to Free Direct Speech and so this is also potentially externally deviant against the backdrop of the reader's experience of fiction.

Above, I discussed that Faina's FDS, alongside the acoustic and physical properties she is described as having, give a dreamlike or magical quality to her communication. The reader is not sure if the characters are actually hearing her a human child speak, or if they are partaking in telepathic communication with a snow fairy. The fact that Jack and Mabel join Faina in her Free Direct Speech suggests that they are entering into the dreamlike world that surrounds her and this supports the magical interpretation of the supernatural ambiguity. It is also possible that Jack and Mabel, who are childless, are imagining Faina based on their wish to have a child. Indeed, this possibility is echoed in Jack's interpretation of the scene above as a 'disturbing dream'. Indeed, when Mabel tells their neighbour, Esther, that she and Jack have seen a little blonde girl running about the land, Esther not only doubts that Faina exists, but also implies that Mabel's childlessness is the cause of her delusion.

> '[…] Around here, they call it cabin fever. You get down in the dumps, everything's off kilter and sometimes your mind starts playing tricks on you.'

> Esther reached across the table and put a hand over Mabel's. 'You start seeing things that you're afraid of… or things you've always wished for.' (Ivey, 80)

Esther's perspective positions Mabel as a 'monstrous childless woman' (Krenger, 1). In literature and film, childless women are often depicted as unnatural and are "denied some of the respect and support that mothers earn". (2016:4). Esther is using Mabel's childlessness to legitimise her doubt over Faina's existence and thus deny her respect or support. Additionally, Esther is verbalising an alternative interpretation of Faina— that she is a figment of the imaginations of those who see her— which presents the reader with further doubt over what Faina actually is.

Infertility is a frequent subject in fairy tales, as Beall notes, "many folk tales and fairy tales are set against a backdrop of reproductive failure" (458) and it is the desperation resulting from childlessness that "fuels the characters". In contrast to scientific contemporary approaches to infertility, "folktale and fairy-tale heroes and heroines exploit the means available to them: magic, prayer, adoption, folk remedy, and bargaining with the devil." (Beall, 485). In *The Snow Child*, Mabel's solution to her childlessness is the 'adoption' of a supernaturally ambiguous surrogate daughter which results in her difficulty legitimising her maternal identity in the eyes of others and, to some extent, Faina herself.

Later in the text, Esther, her husband George and son Garrett arrive at Mabel's cabin unannounced and find Faina there. Even Esther, who so strongly doubts Faina's existence, enters Faina's dreamlike world, signalled by the transformation of her speech from her DS norm (as shown in her utterance above) into FDS.

> It's the girl, George, she whispered without taking her eyes off Faina. She's here. She's right here, in front of me.
>
> George laughed out loud, but behind him Garrett was silent. The boy's eyes were dark and wide, until he caught Mabel looking at him, and then he stepped back behind his father.
>
> Mabel nudged the girl.
>
> Hello, Faina said quietly.
>
> My God, Esther said. She is real. Your girl is flesh and blood.
>
> (Ivey, 295-6)

Mabel is vindicated, not only because Esther sees that Faina exists, but also because now that Faina is acting as Mabel's surrogate daughter, she is no longer a 'monstrous childless woman'. In that

respect, though Faina is an orphan/snow fairy, the novel conforms to the (potentially damaging) trope that childless women will attempt to "gain legitimacy" by stealing other women's children for themselves (Krenger, 9). For the rest of the scene, as Esther, Garrett and George exchange Christmas presents with Mabel, Jack and Faina, Faina's influence on the other characters' speech presentation results in all of the characters using FDS and symbolically entering her dreamlike world.

As FDS features no evidence of the presence of a narrator, there is a sense that in these extracts where Faina draws everyone into her dreamlike world of FDS, Ivey has left us alone with these characters to 'see' and 'hear' first-hand how they interact with the mysterious Faina without any narratorial interruption or interpretation. Ivey only returns to guide us through the narrative when Faina has departed. What we make of the FDS scenes between Faina and the other characters is thus more open to reader interpretation and as a consequence, more supernaturally ambiguous. Like Irving with *Sleepy Hollow*, Ivey never gives direct definition, or 'authorial summary' (Lodge, 122) about whether Faina is magical or not. This preserves her supernatural ambiguity and reflects the modern trend towards indirect presentation, where character information is conveyed through speech and action, rather than direct definition (explicit narrator summary) (Rimmon-Kenan, 59). Indirect presentation is more popular in modern fiction than direct definition, as "suggestiveness and indeterminacy are preferred to closure and definitiveness" (Rimmon-Kenan, 61). Toolan interprets the contemporary popularity of indirect presentation as being "out of respect for the ability of the reader to infer, evaluate and draw conclusions" from the narrative (Toolan, 90), which the reader is certainly called upon to do in *The Snow Child*.

At the very end of the novel, after Faina has given birth to Garrett's baby, she becomes too hot, so Mabel takes her outside where they sit together in the snow. Mabel wakes to Jack's question:

> 'Jesus, Mabel, you're buried in snow. Where's Faina?'
> She did not remember falling asleep. Who could doze in such cold? But she was warm in her cocoon of wool and blanket, her nose nuzzled down into her coat, and she did not wake until she heard the men's voices.
> Faina. Aren't you here, at my side?
> But she wasn't.
> 'She must be in the cabin, tending the baby.'
> 'No. She isn't there.'
> (Ivey, 392-3).

Jack, aware that Faina is not present, speaks in Direct Speech; he is not in Faina's dreamlike world. However, Mabel, who is drowsy and confused, believes Faina to still be by her side and so speaks in FDS. This confirms that it is not only Faina's presence, but Mabel and Jack's belief of being in her presence that can influence their FDS use. When Mabel realises that Faina is not there, her subsequent utterance is delivered in Direct Speech— she has been jolted out of the dreamlike FDS world and into direct speech, reflecting her return to 'reality'. Jack and Mabel discover Faina's clothes and shoes buried deep in the snow and though they search for Faina, she is gone. This supernaturally ambiguous moment entices the reader not to interpret that Faina has stripped naked and run away into a blizzard, but to believe that Jack and Mabel's snow girl has finally melted. Mabel's final hopeful utterance in FDS…

> Faina. Aren't you here, at my side?

…is the last time in the novel that Mabel or Jack speak in FDS. Once Mabel resumes Direct Speech, she and Jack remain in Direct Speech for the rest of the novel - Faina and her dreamlike world of Free Direct Speech having vanished from their lives forever.

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READING JUDITH BUTLER'S *GENDER TROUBLE* IN 2018

BOOK REVIEW

EMMA BRYNING

As a response to their historical underrepresentation, or misrepresentation, early feminist theory attempted to develop a language which could adequately represent all women. In her seminal text, *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler argued that this endeavour was politically problematic, as some of these early theories helped to perpetuate the assumption that the term 'women' denoted a common identity (4). It is this questioning of the common identity of women that formed a key point of analysis within Butler's text, which, although written almost three decades ago, is still a point of contention within contemporary gender theory and debate. Prominent figures within gender and feminist studies have continued to debate the very definition of 'woman', often forgetting to consider, or choosing to ignore, that defining what a woman 'is' as a unified concept maybe be an aim far too complex to achieve.

The pursuit of this singular and unified definition can often be isolating for those that do not fit within its defined boundaries. In 2015 Germaine Greer, one of the most prominent voices in the second wave feminist movement, claimed that post-operative transgender women cannot be women: "just because you lop off your penis...it doesn't make you a woman" (*The Telegraph*). Greer's thoughts on transgender individuals have led to her (and others who share her viewpoint) being described by critics as a problematic example of modern feminism, and as a TERF (trans-exclusionary radical feminist). Greer has also been very vocal about her disagreements with gender-reassignment surgery and described it as an "exorcism of the mother" in her 1999 book *The Whole Woman*. However, in contrast to Greer's belief in the unified definition of 'woman', there has also been evidence of society moving away from the biological binary. The increasing prominence of the gender neutral title 'Mx', which indicates a gender other than male or female, or no gender at all, (thus, often used by non-binary individuals) is just one example of this. In 2015, the word was introduced to the Oxford English Dictionary, indicating this title has increasingly become a part of the cultural lexis and that some elements of the social sphere may be moving away from the concept of the common identity of woman or man.

With this in mind, Butler's works are perhaps more relevant today than ever before. Throughout *Gender Trouble*, Butler dissected this 'common identity' of 'women' in a twofold fashion: first, if one 'is' a woman that is surely not all one 'is'. Second, the concept of gender can neither be consistent nor coherent as it directly intersects with one's racial, class, ethnic and sexual

identities and modalities of being, whilst also intersecting with the social and historic contexts within which one 'is' (5). She argued that it is impossible to separate one's 'gender' from "the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained" (*GT*, 5). Feminist theory which posits the female as a stable and singular subject and fails to account for multiple intersection with other modes of being, will inevitably be rejected by those who lie outside its representation, or by those who acknowledge its limitations. Trans exclusionary feminism, for example, often ignores the struggles of those who identity as women within the LGBTQ+ communities and is therefore rejected by those who feel excluded or those who align themselves with the excluded. The unity of the category of 'women' serves to refute the multiple intersections within which the array of 'women' are constructed: creating a category of 'women' which is normative and exclusionary, affected by racial, class and sexual privilege. Instead, Butler argued that the meanings for terms such as 'masculine' and 'feminine' are radically reliant upon geopolitical and cultural constraints, that is, dependent on who is imagining whom and for purpose (*Undoing Gender*, 10).

Butler further argued that this stabilised concept of gender is enforced as a result of the 'heterosexual matrix'. Within this matrix, there is an enforced belief in the close relationship between gender and sex. Gender identity within the cultural matrix, where gender is viewed as a binary, creates an environment in which identities which diverge from the matrix cannot exist, and are not socially acknowledged to exist – in cases where gender does not directly follow from sex. Many intersex and transgender activists try to move away from the assumption that anybody has an inherent 'truth' of sex (*UG*, 6). While the heterosexual matrix may have a stabilising effect on gender as it is widely defined, it may be destabilizing for individuals who do not fit neatly within it, and for whom gender has been "authored" elsewhere (*UG*, 16).

Not only is this erasure of identities within the cultural matrix incredibly problematic, the traditional view of the binary framework also serves to naturalize the dominant power regimes of sexual oppression (*GT*, 46). However, Butler argued that if one takes the view that gender does not exist within this binary, and as a result does not mirror biological sex, gender can become a "free-floating artifice": the masculine may signify a male or a female body, whilst the feminine may just as easily signify a male as it does a female one (*GT*, 9). When the concept of the heterosexual matrix is exposed as a fiction, sexuality does not necessarily seem to follow from sex, and sexuality does not necessarily have to follow from gender (*GT*, 185).

When removed from the heterosexual matrix, the view that gender, sex and sexuality are all interlinked within a concrete process and the concept that they each exist as a binary becomes destabilised. Butler thus argued that gender is not construed as a stable identity, "a local of agency

from which various acts follow", but that this matrix instead creates identities which are constituted in time and established in space "through a stylised repetition of acts" (*GT*, 191). These bodily gestures, movements and styles – produced on the surface of the body as the body's "performance" - create the illusion of the gendered self and consequently reveal how gender is the result of cultural construction and social temporality. Butler argued that if we take this idea that gender is enacted as part of the hegemonic culture, these acts thus demonstrate that gender is a social fabrication: they are "only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity" (*GT*, 186).

In *Gender Trouble* Butler referred to the work of anthropologist Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, to further elaborate on the social illusion of gender as told through the body of the individual. Within the structure of drag impersonation, the "'key fabricating mechanisms through which the social construction of gender takes place" are revealed (186). The illusion of drag can be seen to mock the very notion of an original or primary gender identity and the stylization of masculine and feminine identities. It is in the performance of drag that three dimensions of significant corporeality take place: anatomical sex, gender identity and gender performance, all of which can be distinct from one another. In female impersonation, by creating a 'unified' picture of 'woman', these false naturalisations and regulatory fictions – where gender is imitated – serve to reveal that gender is a construction itself. It is in these performances that "the sign" of gender is performed (*Bodies That Matter*, 181). In Jennie Livingston's influential documentary *Paris is Burning* (chronicling the life of drag ball culture in New York City in the mid-to-late 1980s), this ballroom culture is shown to focus on the gender binary, where extreme masculinity and femininity are performed, thus exposing these extremes as performances in themselves. Butler believes that the ideals of femininity and masculinity are almost always related to the heterosexual bond, and thus the matrix (*BTM*, 176). Through the performance of idealised genders, these impersonations expose how they are performed and naturalised outside of the drag performance, thus exposing their artifice (*BTM*, 176). If gender attributes are performative, then the concept of the binary gender identity is revealed as a fiction: gender is neither original nor derived.

It is in these performances that the concepts of gender and sex are de-naturalised and exposed as cultural mechanisms through their fabricated unity (*GT*, 188). The production of gender through this parodic recontextualization thus reveals that the very notion of the original identity, from which gender fashions itself, is in fact an imitation without an origin: gender parody imitates the myth of the original. It exposes the illusion of the primary and interior gendered self. Part of the comedy in drag comes from exposing this artifice. As Butler writes, "laughter emerges

in the realization that all along the original was derived" (*GT*, 188). Equally, gender performance can also be a strategy of survival for some individuals, who may be punished if others feel there is a failure to do it 'right'. For example, Butler pointed out that the harassment suffered by those who are "read" or discovered to be transsexual can never be underestimated (*UG*, p6). Within *Paris is Burning*, the most heart-breaking moment in the documentary comes when the view learns of the tragic death of Venus Xtravaganza, illustrating the immense difficulties suffered by trans women, and, in particular, trans women of colour. Like many murdered trans women, Xtravaganza's death is still unsolved and her killer has never been found. The violence inflicted on transgendered individuals, sometimes involving clear anti-transgender bias, often disproportionately affects transgender women of colour. The Human Rights Campaign has described how the intersection of racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia can conspire to deprive these individuals of employment, housing and healthcare, making them more vulnerable to violence.

The critical exposure of drag performances, for Butler, demonstrated the failure of the heterosexual matrix to ever fully contain their ideals, thus exposing the illusion of the 'unified; idea of the feminine/women and the masculine/men (*BTM*, 181). When gender is not viewed as a fact, the very idea of gender can be seen to have been created through acts and performances of gender. The repetition of these acts creates an agency in which these acts become part of the social or cultural psyche attributed to a particular gender. Although these acts are repeated, they may be slightly altered over time. Thus, these acts of gender designation are never complete or final but are in a constant process of being remade (*UG*, 10). When these acts are exposed as part of the gender artifice, the fixity of gender identity is also exposed, leading to questions on the construction of sex and gender as a binary, and how they operate in a hierarchical structure.

Within *Gender Trouble*, Butler expresses the hope that this exposure will lead to a time in which a stabilised notion of gender is no longer a fundamental aspect of modern life, where new feminist politics, construing a variable construction of identity, will be the norm. Although, thirty years later, we may appear to be closer to this new type of feminism than ever before, there is still a long way to go. Channel 4 recently began a new season of programming on the topic of gender entitled *Genderquake*, aiming to explore what it means to be a man or a woman in twenty-first-century Britain. Although the attempt by a mainstream channel to explore issues of gender may be seen by some to be progressive - with many of the individuals featured defining themselves as gender-fluid, non-binary or transgender - the very descriptor of *Genderquake* fully places gender within a binary framework by focusing on what it means to be a man or a woman and, thus, the heterosexual matrix that Butler described. Not only this, the season featured "The Genderquake

Debate", which was criticised by many LBTGQ+ activists and allies because the conversation was positioned within a debate framework, with many questioning: why should individuals have to debate their very existence? As Juno Roche, writer for *Gay Times*, stated, "I am resolute now in my stance that I will not debate my existence. I can debate the merits of my transness, my vagina, my surgery, my womanhood or personhood, but I will not discuss that with a cis opponent/s who would rather I didn't exist at all."

In the preface to the 1999 revision of *Gender Trouble*, Butler wrote, "Is the breakdown of gender binaries […] so monstrous, so frightening, that it must be held to be definitionally impossible and heuristically precluded from any effort to rethink gender?" (ix). Sadly, the existence of the gender 'debate' and its inclusion of high profile 'TERF's, such as Greer (alongside the fact Channel 4 tried to position its *Genderquake* season as 'progressive') demonstrates that there is still some distance to go before Butler's variable construction of identity is truly regarded as a social norm, and why *Gender Trouble* still carries so much relevance twenty-eight years after its first publication.

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XOCHIQUETZAL

[ʃoːtʃiˈketsaɬ]

SHORT STORY

CHAVONNE BROWN

The pale men had come to Cholula as intruders, welcomed with weary looks and tepid grace. They had been there for a week but Necahual did not know what to make of them. Her mother, Momotzli, had kept the youngster away from the strangers. Yet there was a Nahua woman among them. Necahual saw her one day, walking in the market with the bearded tlatoani of the pale men, and thought her beautiful.

She had run home to her mother and said, "Mother, who is the pretty Nahua maid with the pale men?"

"She is a whore and a witch," her mother had spat more venomously than Necahual had ever seen. Her daughter had flinched and Momotzli, seeing that she frightened Necahual, did embrace her child. "Do not trust her, she is called Malintzin, she smiles at us but whispers to the coyotes in their tongue. They do not know us, they will never understand us, and that witch deceives her own to help them."

Necahual went from her house back through the bustling market, which she saw now with the eyes of the stranger. There were deep scents that felt to her like comfort, but which must stink to the pale men. All the Nahua were vibrant, they gloried in colour as an expression of power and divinity; the newcomers too were boldly dressed. It was this which had confirmed for Necahual that they must be important. Just like how without the walls of Cholula fierce Tlaxcalan warriors waited, the golden feathers of their livery and great avian headdresses made them seem a mythic flock ready to fall upon the Mexica.

There was a commotion in the market and the fall of hooves. Necahual was drawn with a curious crowd towards the Temple of Quetzalcoatl. The rabble grew thick before the temple's courtyard, but she wrestled through the legs and thighs to get right to the front. There in the courtyard were all the nobles of her city, from the priests to the lords all were wrapped in fabulous cloaks of deep pinks, ochres, oranges, blues, and reds. Then came the pale men atop their tall stags. The crowd parted for them as the hare skirts the jaguar.

The bearded tlatoani spoke in coyote and Malintzin spoke again in Nahuatl, "How anxious these traitors are to see us among the ravines so that they can gorge themselves on our

flesh. But our lord will prevent it." Necahual did not know who the pale men called lord, was there another tlatoani that the bearded one answered to? Was it their gods?

"Why have you become traitors? Why did you decide this night just gone to kill us?" Malintzin continued to make the coyote's garble into words, "We have done you no harm, we have tried to help you, to warn you against the wickedness of human sacrifice and the worship of idols." Necahual felt something was wrong, she eased herself backwards, losing sight of the courtyard. Soon she could not see the nobles and only the plumes of the pale men's helmets. A noise like thunder cleaved open the air and terror spilled out. Necahual ran.

More thunderclaps roared out of the earth and the city fell to chaos in seconds. Stalls were overturned and people trampled as the pale men hunted her kinsmen through the streets. Necahual glanced back and saw a mounted coyote hacking at fleeing innocents. In the next moment, the screeching of a jaguar warrior distracted the brute and a toothed club was flung with such force that it plucked him from his tall stag.

Necahual raced for her life to find her mother.

Momotzli had run towards the temple not long after that first shot rang out.

Mother and daughter collided in panic and relief as screeching from outside the city told every Mexica that their Tlaxcalan foes had come to glut themselves with gore.

"We must leave, we must hide in the forest until the coyotes and the Tlaxcaltec go", Momotzli's voice did not waver, though her eyes were frantic. In one hand she held a flint knife and in the other a cloth sack; she tied the sack around Necahual and took her daughter's hand. They sprinted together as blood tumbled onto soil, as Mexica fought Tlaxcalan, as pale men issued thunder over their heads. Necahual would have cried but she couldn't spare the breath.

The woman and the girl had reached the edge of Cholula, safety was in the sight, the forest within their grasp. Momotzli cried out and stumbled, Necahual threw herself to the ground and checked her mother's writhing body. "I am hurt! I will die!" screamed Momotzli, pawing at her upper back where blood welled from a little hole and soaked her green cloak brown. Necahual wanted to cry but she was numb. Momotzli forced her daughter to take the dagger. "Run Necahual, run! Run! Run!" her mother looked wild and Necahual could do nothing but hurry into the forest. She could not hear Momotzli sigh a loving prayer for her child.

The tears came at last.

Necahual had lived her life in the shadow of two things. The temple and the forest. She did not know how old either was and she dreaded both. Not the dread meant in our times as pure fear, this is a discomfort mingled with an awe we cannot speak.

She had hidden herself between the thick roots of an oak tree and drawn close her cloak to sleep. In the shadow of its great leaves, she had dreamt of olive skin bursting under a spray of molten shards, of houses alight like serpent eyes, and temples heft from bone. And her mother's lonely corpse. Necahual woke in tears, grasping at the twilight, and knew only one thing. She did not care if she was a girl of twelve she would cut out a coyote's heart to honour Momotzli's spirit. As her resolve formed and she wiped the pain from her eyes, a big bird landed right in front of her. This was a quetzal, sacred bird of the east, its breast and wings were iridescent green, and its underside a hot, intense red – the air around it seemed to thrum in the dusk. With every step the quetzal took, a golden marigold emerged and turned its face to Necahual. The quetzal stepped slowly over the leafy ground, flowers and the girl trailing in its wake.

Necahual crept beneath the quetzal as dusk turned to dawn; it had flown up and taken up a place in the trees to hop from branch to branch. A steady fall of delicate petals marked where the sacred bird went until at last it stopped at the border of the forest and a rough road.

Necahual peeked out from between the pines and saw that a little further up was a procession of coyotes; she raised her dagger in imitation of a warrior. The quetzal dropped gently from the trees and rested on the girl's shoulder, watching the foreigner alongside her. Then it alighted again and made right for the mounted coyote at the back, looping out of the girl's sight, and returning with a wineskin dangling from one claw.

The conquistador had snatched at the quetzal but when he turned to look for it saw Necahual vanish into the forest. Pride must have compelled him to turn his horse and ride into the deep wood. Necahual would risk being killed over wine for her revenge.

The sacred bird flew deeper into the forest and Necahual had run after it, her dagger still ready for coyote blood. She had felt sorry for the tall stag that she knew led its rider to a place he would never leave. She would have his blood.

Necahual watched the conquistador as he came to a sudden clearing in the woods. There were tall blue and yellow flowers, the itinerant chirps of quail, and a wide, clear pool at its heart; in the gentle morning sun she looked across the creased gold of his brow. He looked awestruck, with wanting savage eyes. A nude maiden had surfaced in the water; to Necahual her breasts were plump, her hips wide, a formidable woman and in this light she glistened as if ready to dance with any she came into contact with. Necahual could see the excitement in the conquistador's movements. The maiden's appearance seemed to draw him to her faster than crack of the Tlaxcalan thunderclaps, flaring which still echoed in her ears. Necahual wondered why the maiden did not flee, and barely kept herself from screaming out. Fear had seized her in

that moment. Necahual stooped behind the tree on which the quetzal perched, frozen, forced to watch the coyote lust after the beauty. Her muscles were like stone.

The coyote reached for the maiden, who seemed to pay little attention to his advances. He took her bosoms under his hands and caressed them. Necahual saw a smile briefly flicker on her face and was shocked to see that as he pressed his mouth to the maiden's that she yielded, almost throwing her wet body against his, sopping his clothes.

Necahual did not know the ways of men and women, she had never been taught, but now she saw a coyote suckle on the maiden's teat like a famished babe, her holding his head like a nurturing mother. Now Necahual saw a coyote sink to his knees and put his face between the maiden's legs. The maiden threw her head back and looked to the canopy of leaves. Necahual saw a thousand, thousand slender vines slither out from the maiden and over the body of a man entranced. They ran over the length of his body, those vines that as they swallowed him grew sweet golden flowers. Now Necahual saw no man but the writhing mass of dark green limbs. Necahual met the eyes of the maiden.

They were entirely black.

Necahual was so startled by those eyes that she did not notice the vines draw themselves back inside the maiden. Only when the quetzal flew down to rest betwixt the maiden's thighs and lifted something in its claw did Necahual realise the coyote had disappeared. Necahual treaded reverently towards Xochiquetzal, the flower maiden. The naked goddess regarded her with those shining pits as she stooped to take what the sacred bird offered. A heart, fresh and moist.

A heart, to honour her mother.

AQUARIVA

GREG WOODIN

Chocolate aquariva ride

while tired eyes blur the lines

between real and unreal waters,

wonky and sleep deprived.

Wind tousles sun-bleached hair;

pushing past the theory

to the heart of the

matter.

Cruising:

bass rumble in my headspace,

sun beaming through the zenith.

A kind of vulnerability,

scarier than death, could turn

a cynical mind to the mystical,

equilibrium to chaos.

It's a watershed moment.

Through orange-tinged branches

up at the sky,

the warmth of another and

later fireworks erupt.

Looking back from distant coasts

I could tell this was special,

diving down to new

depths.

Combers crash in chocolate eyes,

glazed like gossamer,

longing to be

drifting aquariva,

and saltwater splash up on the hull

on seas of moments lost

and moments gone for

good.

CHAUCER'S FRANKLIN AND THE ASPIRANT GENTLEMAN: PATTERNS OF NEW GENTILITY IN THE ENGLISH COUNTRY HOUSE TRADITION

ARTICLE

ELLEN O'BRIEN

Scholarly opinion on the social status of Chaucer's Franklin is varied and indefinite, ranging from Specht's assertion that he is an established and respectable landowner (1981), to persistent uncertainty over the less-than-genteel term 'Franklin'. Rather than viewing the Franklin as a troublingly liminal figure isolated in the fourteenth century, this article suggests that he can be mapped onto a line of similarly indeterminate gentlemen that populate the English country house tradition. These gentlemen include Robert Sidney of Ben Jonson's 'To Penshurst' (1616), Sir Thomas Bertram of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814), Julian Jarrold of Vita Sackville-West's *Family History* (1932), and Rex Mottram of Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945).

Although *The Canterbury Tales* (1387–1400) pre-date the country house tradition by over two hundred years, the Franklin's description in the General Prologue deals with estate ownership in both practical terms, and with its complex mores of social hierarchy and aristocratic tradition. The Franklin's more recent counterparts deal with similar themes, along with the belief that social aspiration can be consolidated through estate ownership, and both the Franklin and his fellow gentlemen appear during unique historical moments of social disruption and increased economic opportunity.

This article does not claim that the Franklin's prologue or tale should be retrospectively considered part of the country house tradition, but that the Franklin is part of a longer cultural practice that saw social aspiration manifesting in the exclusive, genteel world of the country house. Rather, the recurring appearance of other socially ambitious gentlemen offers a new lens through which to view the social marginality of Chaucer's Franklin. First introducing the country house tradition in terms of its preoccupation with exclusivity, gentility and the past, this article will outline the Franklin's aspirations in terms of estate ownership, before exploring the varying circumstances of later liminal gentlemen whose values and social positions align with the Franklin's. The scope of this paper allows only for the briefest exploration of each gentleman's context, but with the assurance they will receive proper space and attention elsewhere.

I. Gentility and the English Country House Tradition

At the heart of the country house tradition is a dual fascination with gentility and nostalgia. The tradition values lineage and nobility, but is eternally backward-looking, perpetually seeking to return to a lost golden age. This sense of a just-missed, simpler time in which the evils of the present do not exist, when aristocratic practices were undiluted, is perhaps most conveniently expressed by the concept of *locus amoenus,* an ideal place of tranquillity (Dempster). Thus, texts written in the twentieth century look back to pre-war days; the Victorians look to the pre-industrial countryside; the eighteenth century looks to the golden age of Elizabeth; the Elizabethans look back to the pre-Renaissance middle ages or the classical period; and all ultimately look back to the epitome of the country estate: Eden (Wortham 140).

This retrospection is closely linked to the sense that age confers respectability: as each generation looked back to a time of departed simplicity, each desired to appear that they too, had a lineage stretching back to those halcyon days. It strengthened their family's association with 'ancient privileges' of estate ownership and its incumbent aristocratic responsibilities (Wortham 138). The passage of time was a vital ingredient to achieving respectability in the country house world, and it was this sense of long-standing estate management that inspired the first 'country house poem', Ben Jonson's 'To Penshurst,' (1616) which praises a landed family through their country house and estate. Specifically, Jonson aligns Penshurst Place with older medieval manor houses, and by association, consolidates the Sidney family lineage. Following this cue, subsequent country house works draw on social anxiety to make distinctions between the newer, socially mobile families, and the older, established ones. This translates to backward-looking snobbery and a constant awareness of social status within the literary tradition. By the twentieth century, class-consciousness in the microcosm of the country house had become a standard theme.

II. The Franklin's Ambitions

As the Franklin negotiates the highly-stratified society of the fourteenth century, an unspoken class consciousness informs the way he is constructed and how he might have been read by contemporary audiences. Although there is still 'no agreement as to whether [the Franklin] is securely of *gentil* status, or merely on the cusp of it,' the Franklin would have been perfectly comprehensible to Chaucer's audience (Greene 95). Families like the Franklin's had been appearing and disappearing throughout England with regularity, particularly during 'the less crowded conditions that followed the Black Death,' which took place during Chaucer's lifetime (Saul 46). A particularly well-documented example of this is the rise of the Paston family from farm labourers to country gentry in three generations in the fifteenth century (Castor). The social

conditions following the plague have been described as a 'demographic crisis', and while this 'made it easier to acquire land', there are also hints that such an acquisition 'did not necessarily in itself ease access into the landed class', or specifically, the gentle class (Payling 62). This paper takes the view that while the Franklin's social ambition was not unusual for the time, he nevertheless aspires to a more established and respectfully recognised social position.

The Franklin may be a newcomer to country house life, but he is careful to uphold the genteel practices of generosity and hospitality. The man is an epicure, 'to liven in delyt was ever his wone' (335) and Chaucer describes the quality of his larder and table in detail. This is reminiscent of later country house poems, which describe the generosity of the estate kitchens, orchards, streams, woods, and farmland. Hospitality and largesse are cornerstones of the country house tradition, but the fact that Chaucer pre-empts them indicates they belonged to an older cultural understanding and were part of a living practice of land ownership in the middle ages. Mapped onto the tradition as a whole, this reinforcement of aristocratic credentials through hospitality pre-empts the works of renaissance poets like Ben Jonson, Andrew Marvel, Thomas Carew, and Robert Herrick in their works 'To Penshurst', 'Appleton House', 'To Saxham', and 'The Hock Cart' respectively.

Not unlike Jonson's hyperbolic fish that 'leape on land, before the fisher, or into his hand' (37–38), Chaucer exaggerates the bounty of the Franklin's house and grounds, describing the Franklin as a 'better envyned man was nowher noon', whose house is so full of pies and wine, 'it snewed in his hous of mete and drinke' (Chaucer 342, 345). Just as Jonson later described the bounteous grounds of Penshurst, and Thomas Carew describes the way 'every beast did thither bring /Himself, to be an offering' (23-26) at Saxham, Chaucer's Franklin has many 'a fat partrich' in his mews, and 'many a breem and many a luce in stewe (349, 350). His house boasts an excellent cook, who is 'Wo but if his sauce were poynaunt and sharp' (351) and his table is laid all day; a conspicuous sign of wealth, suggesting that anyone could enter unexpectedly– not unlike King James I does in 'To Penshurst'– and enjoy a rich and varied meal.

While the Franklin's conspicuous hospitality indicates a level of wealth and generosity, it does not necessarily indicate the possession of aristocratic qualities. A key part of the later country house tradition is the understanding that 'hospitality meant more than big-hearted generosity in providing free dinners for all and sundry: it meant the acknowledgement that ancient privilege carried with it an onerous responsibility for the well-being of others' (Wortham 138). The Franklin, although enacting *hospitality,* perhaps falls into the former category, and, only over time, would his heirs embody that deeper understanding. Certainly, by the time Ben Jonson was writing, the Franklin's family could have become the latter.

III. The League of Ambitious Gentlemen

Wealthy and eager to be accorded the rank of aristocratic landowner, the aspirant country house gentleman must work to establish his credentials in his own lifetime, but is hopeful for those of his heirs. In the 'closed ranks' world of the country house, class anxiety is a fruitful theme, and new arrivals are typically hyper-aware of their *nouveau* status. Although leading courtiers, the Sidneys 'were as much "new capitalists" as they were "feudal aristocrats"' (Celovsky 179) and were awarded the estate of Penshurst by King Edward VI. They reinvented their lineage through the poetry of Ben Jonson and the efforts of Robert Cooke, a particularly creative herald who fraudulently traced their family back to the yeomanry of the fourteenth century (Brennan & Kinnamon xx). By aligning with the old country house practice of hospitality, and linking the family name to an ancient estate, 'ambitious courtiers' like the Sidneys were able to join a purer aristocratic cultural legacy (Celovsky 178). In the post-Reformation boom, when showy prodigy houses were being built all over the country, Jonson elevated the older Penshurst Place to the pinnacle of respectability. This 'ancient pile' (3) emerged organically from the English ground, and embodies, rather than proclaims, nobility. It represented the antithesis to new capitalist mansions of the sixteenth century, such as Hardwick Hall, Chatsworth, or Longleat, and through association with older, feudal values of hospitality, and idealised, symbiotic estate management, the Sidney family were assuring their connection with the sort of gentry they aspired to be.

Subtle reference to West-Indian plantations in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* sparked speculation about the social standing of the Bertram family, making it difficult to determine whether they are 'an old established landed elite… or a "new" commercial family, inward looking and defensive' (Sutherland 415). Sir Thomas Bertram's Antigua plantations carry the implication that he made his money in the New World and bought into the country house lifestyle, purchasing, rather than inheriting, their 'spacious, modern-built house, so well placed and well screened, and a real park, five miles round' (Austen 450). Arguably, Austen was subtly critical about the Bertrams' social standing, hinting that the stain of social aspiration had not quite faded from the family name. A sense of unease is derived from the fact that Sir Thomas brings in outside money to sustain the estate, whereas earlier manor houses such as Appleton House or Penshurst took pride in a self-contained economy. The Antigua plantations are a reminder that the Bertram estate is not supported by the structures of the feudal aristocracy. Further, Sir Thomas' plantation, a sort of inverted *locus amoenus* that implicitly profits from slavery 'represents a social phenomenon that many in Austen's England would have regarded with some distaste' (Steffes 30). Not only were

new capitalists buying up country houses as a means of legitimising wealth and social standing (Draper 3), but possibly, Sir Thomas could have purchased his seat in parliament too: at this time, the old nobility was selling them to new capitalists for a few thousand pounds (Steffes 30). Thus, we have a socially aspirant gentleman who is recently part of the landed gentry but not quite in possession of innate gentility, as evidenced by his wayward children, whose education is superficially complete, but lacks a deeper sense of moral compass or duty. Just as the Sidneys wished to establish their credentials, Sir Thomas is also keen to establish a marital connection with the Rushworth family, who represent 'the old semi-feudal order of the landed gentry' (Steffes 30).

Many industrialists of the Victorian era made their money through their workers and sank the profits into country houses, gradually shrugging off any less-than-genteel associations (Thompson 41). Literary examples include Mr Thornfield of Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South,* who made a fortune from cotton mills, the Jarrold family in Vita Sackville-West's *Family History,* who acquired a new fortune through coal mining, and Miss Havisham's father in Dicken's *Great Expectations,* whose fortune was brewed, rather than inherited. Julian Jarrold's wealth came from coal, and he knows full well he will never be considered a proper gentleman. However, he harbours aspirations of a baronetcy for his grandson, who he sends to Eton and forces to hunt. "That's the first bit of coal brought up from the pits at Orlestone. Look at it. That's what sent Dan to Eton. That's what made a gentleman of Dan" (Sackville-West 2). The elderly Jarrold hopes that over time the stain of industry will fade, and his descendants will be legitimate landed gentlemen.

The awareness that strategic charity can reinforce gentility is a shared moment of resonance between the Franklin and Julian Jarrold. While E. T. Donaldson argues that the Franklin 'seems to be one of the relatively few pilgrims who are capable of disinterested conduct' (1051) due to his work for the county as sheriff and parliamentary representative, this type of work was not without reward. The Franklin is able to reap the social reward of performing voluntary work, reinforcing his noble and selfless persona, while establishing himself as a man who is part of the systems that govern the country and upholds the monarchy, as opposed to someone exclusively mercantile and acquisitive. Sackville-West is quite clear that Julian Jarrold's charity 'was both lavish and discriminating,' (14) the result of which is Dan's expected baronetcy. In Jarrold's case, the 'discriminating charity' carries a hint of greasing the right pockets and is perhaps an allusion to the peerages that were effectively purchased in the decade leading up to *Family History's* publication, particularly during the scandal surrounding Lloyd George's resignation honours list (Crosby 330). Although impossible to prove, the name 'Julian' may be a deliberate allusion to Chaucer's Franklin and his similar social aspirations. Sackville-West studied English literature and history at Mrs Wolff's exclusive girls' school in London (Nagel 408), where she likely encountered Chaucer, who

describes his Franklin as a 'veritable Seint Julian' after the patron saint of hospitality (340).

Perhaps due to Evelyn Waugh's own peripheral position amongst the country house set, his novel *Brideshead Revisited* is populated with characters marginalised by their religion, sexuality, or class. Julia's Canadian husband Rex is an aspirant gentleman figure of the early twentieth century, eager to join the ranks of established families and consolidate his political power. Men like Rex 'coveted membership in the Commons' because it proved their 'financial muscle and social success,' but they used 'their country houses as a power base' and generally 'acquired landed estates before the election, not afterwards' (Watson 31). Brideshead, therefore, is the key to Rex's campaign for legitimacy.

And yet, although Rex occupies Brideshead, he never really belongs to it. He continues to invite bankers and businessmen to dinner, demonstrating his lack of acceptance in old established circles.

> There were half a dozen of these friends in the Tapestry Hall: politicians; 'young Conservatives' in their early forties, with sparse hair and high blood pressure; a Socialist from the coal-mines who had already caught their clear accents, whose cigars came to pieces on his lips, whose hand shook when he poured himself out a drink; a financier older than the rest, and, one might have guessed from the way they treated him, richer; a love-sick columnist, who alone was silent… (Waugh 256).

This dinnertime tableau parodies the country house mainstays of hospitality. The familiar imagery of the table laid for a feast and the 'Tapestry room' evoke a medieval setting, recalling the long lineage of the house, and emphasising the brash newness of the people gathered there. Waugh is briskly disparaging of the 'young' Conservatives, and the bluffing coal miner whose newly acquired accent, shaking hands and cheap cigars mark him as a socially aspirant interloper, whose hypocritical Socialism is weaker than his love of money. The respect shown to the older, richer financier reveals a group that values wealth and enterprise, aligning them closely with the business world where financial success trumps ancestry– evoking the medieval debate of whether virtue can be earned or inherited. Although not mentioned in this excerpt, Rex and Julia cannot have children, so Rex will remain out-of-place, an interloper and businessman, and his blood will never join the Flyte lineage that stretches back to 'barons [at] Agincourt' (Waugh 312).

IV. Ensuring the Bloodline

Lineage is a recurring concern for ambitious gentlemen, as their highest aspirations will only be realised by their heirs. As mentioned earlier, the passage of time can consolidate a family's position: what is out of reach for the aspirant gentleman may well be within the grasp of his son or grandson. Some gentlemen fear their heirs do not understand the importance of aristocratic behaviour and will undermine their hard work. Julian Jarrold despairs when his grandson Dan shows a marked disinclination for hunting, a sport he regards as the pursuit of the gentleman.

> "He shall hunt. All gentlemen hunt, don't they? When they can afford it, which most of them can't. No one shall say that Jarrold's grandson isn't a gentleman, or that his grandfather can't afford to mount him. Hunt he shall, and I don't care if he breaks his neck doing it." (25)

Apparently, death is preferable, as long as one is a gentleman. Jane Austen also depicts the distress caused by a dissolute son and heir, when Tom Bertram very nearly drinks and gambles himself to death. Fortunately, Tom redeems himself, but over the course of his rehabilitation his father is severely tested. In *Brideshead Revisited,* Evelyn Waugh notes the instability of lineage, which between the four Flyte children, is falling apart. 'It was odd, I thought, how the same ingredients, differently dispensed, could produce Brideshead, Sebastian, Julia, and [Cordelia]' (282). For various reasons, all are unlikely to have children: an older wife, homosexuality, infertility and spinsterhood are a reminder that four safety nets do not guarantee the continuation of the family name. These four will be the last in a line stretching back to Agincourt.

The Franklin, too, shares the trials of a father whose hard-won respectability is threatened by the self-indulgent behaviour of his heir. The opening of the 'Franklin's Tale' is framed as flattery of the squire– who he interrupts– and a complaint against his own son. The Franklin occupies a lower rung on the social ladder than the squire, and while he might have been a figure of authority in his county, to Chaucer's courtly readers he would have been a marginal figure, 'gentle, but more peripheral than the gentility of knights, squires and lords' (Crane 106). Why then, does the Franklin dare to interrupt when the superior knight will not, and even Harry Baily hesitates to exercise his influence as innkeeper? The Franklin's interruption could be interpreted as a presumptuous act, and certainly as one that exposes him as a socially ambitious *parvenu.* However, it also reveals his concerns about lineage and gentility, and his ambition to one day occupy a place alongside the knight and his squire. Most importantly his interruption is framed as a wish that his own son was equally accomplished.

The Franklin is concerned about the future of his estate and family name, and these concerns centre on his son, who represents the realisation of his ambitions (Carney). The Franklin may play the role of the gentleman, but his lack of lineage is an insurmountable obstacle: his son and grandsons, however, will not have this handicap. Accordingly, the Franklin is aware that his son must outwardly display the qualities of a gentleman in order to be considered one, and is disappointed by his son's lack of respect for this ambition. Although he should not 'snib' his son (688), the Franklin is frustrated that he 'vertu listenth nat entende,' (689) spends all his time 'pleying at dees' (690) and prefers to spend his time 'talken with a page' (692) than with 'any gentil wight' (693) from whom he 'mighte lerne gentillesse aright' (694) and forge new social connections. Talking with the servants is particularly unforgiveable, because the son must enforce the subordination of his inferiors to establish his own superiority.

Thus, the Franklin begins his tale by flattering the squire, expressing a wish that his son possessed the same discretion, virtue, and wit, in short, the gentility, of the young squire.

> I have a sone, and by the Trinitee,
> I hadde levere than twenty pound worth lond–
> Though it right now were fallen in myn hond–
> He were a man of swich discrecioun
> As that ye been. Fy on possessioun,
> But if a man be vertuous withal!

'Twenty pounds' worth of land was the traditional fee required to be a knight, and while the amount was outdated by Chaucer's lifetime, Melvin Storm argues that it had historical significance. The amount had been changed at times of conscription, and many non-military landowners preferred to pay off the amount than go to war. The Franklin is essentially saying that he would rather have a virtuous son than be given land: 'in effect, "I would rather have a son of knightly virtue than be given the amount of land that would once have made me a knight"' (Storm 166). Since twenty pounds was no great fortune during Chaucer's lifetime and the Franklin would likely possess such an amount already, it follows that he prefers his son would be knighted on account of his inner virtue, rather than his money.

Similarly, the Franklin repudiates wealth in favour of virtue during his tale and prologue: Aurelius cries 'Fy on a thousand pound!' (1227) and the Franklin exclaims 'Fye on possession, But if a man be vertous withal' (686–687). In spite of this insistence, the awkward fact remains that the Franklin's social advancement has thus far been reliant on the accrual and consolidation of wealth.

Returning to his son, the Franklin's disappointment is further evidence that he is aware of the importance of lineage and of the white-washing effect of time. In his own lifetime, the vulgarity of new money will remain an impassable barrier. However, as Julian Jarrold says six centuries later, 'It takes three generations to become a gentleman,' (26) and the passing of time, astute political decisions and an advantageous marriage or two could see the Franklin's descendants become legitimate members of the class he aspires to.

The Franklin may be a newcomer of indeterminate background and social standing, but just a hundred years later by the time of the Paston family, the Franklin's heirs would have been firmly established members of the gentry. With any luck, he would have been exactly the sort of landowner that the Sidneys of Penshurst aspired to be. Should his albeit fictional family have survived the Wars of the Roses, the Reformation, the English Civil War and the First World War (all conflicts that notoriously endangered the heirs of country houses) his descendants would have been able to look down upon the Sidneys, the Bertrams, the Jarrolds and the Flytes as relative newcomers. The Franklin's liminality is not an isolated literary or cultural phenomenon, but one shared by a long line of socially aspirant gentleman who recur throughout the English country house tradition.

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THE GIFT OF A NINE-HUNDRED-YEARS-OLD NAME:

REDRAMATISING "MY LAST DUCHESS" AS *THE LAST DUKE OF FERRARA*

NOTE

JULIA PIRIE

The Alan Bennett *Talking Heads* of their day, Browning's monologues were immensely popular during his lifetime and beyond. That Browning was prepared to engage in debate with his readers, to admit that his poems were open to interpretation, emboldened me to attempt an adaptation, into a stage play, of one his most enduring monologues, "My Last Duchess" (1842).

The monologue fascinated contemporary readers. Some of their questions are documented in an article "Robert Browning's Answers to Questions concerning some of his Poems" in the *Cornhill Magazine* published by A. Allen Brockington in 1914. In the year of the poet's death, Hiram Corson included some of Browning's answers in *An Introduction to the study of Robert Browning's Poetry* (1899). In 1929, Richard Howard was back on the case. His poem "Nikolaus Mardruz to his Master Ferdinand, Count of Tyrol 1565" finds Browning's envoy a name and gives him a voice in the form of a verse letter. Mardruz's advice to his Master is not to hand "the old reprobate" (201) any dowry "in one globose sum" (215), but to "drip" it "into his coffers by degrees" (216-7) thus ensuring the continuing safety of his daughter while attaining Ferrara's nine-hundred-years-old-name for the family (201-17). Both poet and envoy take Ferrara's "murderous temper" (208) as given; there is no attempt to explore what actually happened to his last Duchess.

Browning's poem has inspired questions and answers, some fiction, some in the form of more poetry but, as far as my research has revealed, no drama. There are, however, plenty of precedents for plays dramatising this period of history in Europe. In *The Duchess of Malfi*, for example, the power struggle involves a Duke and his brother, a cardinal. The historical Duke of Ferrara also had a younger brother, Ippolito, who was a cardinal, although not his adversary. In *A Man for All Seasons* the action is driven by another powerful Renaissance prince with a similar need for heirs and the same apparent disregard for the lives of his wives as the Duke of Ferrara.

Webster and Bolt are perennial favourites for revival in the theatre. Politics is very much on the agenda for current screen, stage and radio scripts. Power struggles and political scandals dominate the news on both sides of the Atlantic at the moment. So, while, I have not set out to write an allegory, I hope that my reworking of the story of Alfonso II, the fifth and last (direct) holder of the title, Duke of Ferrara, Reggio and Modena might strike a chord in audiences today.

Browning's poem "My Last Duchess" was given its present title in 1849; its speaker introduced in the prefix to the poem as *Ferrara.* If the technology had been available to him, this – and his other monologues - might well have been broadcast on the radio. Initially, I considered that medium. However, the fifth Duke of d'Este, Alfonso II, on whom the poem is based, has always been much more than a voice to me. In the poem Browning brings him and his entire world alive in a mere fifty-six lines of blank verse. Yet for the inquisitive mind, the story holds a further, and much more valuable, attraction: a gap, a hole, revealing a tantalising cold case, ripe for imaginative exploration.

History relates that the Duke married his first wife, Lucrezia Medici in 1558. They spent three days together before he left on his travels. By the time he returned to Ferrara, two years' later, she was dead. It was rumoured that she'd been poisoned. The twenty-seven-year-old was a childless widower and soon he set about exploring other avenues. However, until history records his meeting with Barbara, sister of Emperor Maximillian II in 1665, there seems to be no one else linked with his "nine-hundred-year-old" name. The marriage negotiations with the Count of Tyrol for Barbara's hand supplied Browning with the material for his poem. For him Lucrezia is obviously the 'last' Duchess. However, further digging revealed that Lucrezia's story was already on record. In her novel, *The Second Duchess*, Elizabeth Loupas investigates the death of the first one, using Barbara, as her sleuth.

I wanted an original way into the story. I was stuck. Maybe the dearth of candidates for the Duke's hand in those missing years was merely a result of the poison scandal. Would-be fathers might have been reluctant to put forward their daughters as candidates for the title of the next Duchess of Ferrara. But the gap 1662-1665 was still too big. I wanted to fill it. I thought of all those fathers undeterred from thrusting their daughters at Henry VIII despite the divorces and beheadings. I thought of Princess Diana's case. These thoughts led me to believe I could put a case for this father, Count Trapani's, character and motives. I made him of his time: flattered that his feudal lord wants to marry his daughter thus elevating the family's social standing and relieved to be rid of the slightly embarrassing elderly (by the reckoning of the time) spinster. He has others to look after him in his old age; he can spare her.

I called this daughter Daisy, which is a nod to the play's provenance – the naming of girls after flowers was a Victorian fashion. However, Daisy is also the English diminutive of the European name Margherita, and Margherita Gonzaga d'Este (1564-1616) really was the Duke's third wife (m. 1579). She too, as we know, died childless. This duchess of my own, though, proved harder to create, particularly in the current climate of gender politics. History remains vague as to how Lucrezia died. Browning's Ferrara as good as admits he murdered his last duchess, if only by

proxy. As in time travel, the logistics of filling in the gaps in other people's stories, dictate Daisy too must ultimately die. Alfonso must murder her. And he will.

It is a quandary, but for the moment she remains a woman of her time. To her, her father is as a god. She cannot disobey him. Her husband will take his place; marriage will cement that bond. How to convey this so the audience does not despise her passivity? For twenty-first century sensibilities, I hint - through her behaviour and her idiolect - that she is, perhaps, a bit naïve, simple - a holy fool or Lennie Small. But I can give her unseen weapons: integrity and candour (like Milton's Comus) which will mean I have the power to give Alfonso his come-uppance.

Whatever characteristics my duke needs he (as in life and Browning) is going to be proud. Pride is a kind of blindness. This is his fatal flaw. But Alfonso - and this is scary thing about tyrants real and fictional – is also unpredictable. In Act I the audience witness him ordering one servant hauled off to his death and another given a priceless jewel for his girlfriend within the space of thirty lines. Later, other characters nag him to remarry; to beget heirs. He will not be told what to do but when he sees Daisy– at a family christening surrounded by fecundity and sunshine – he wants her. He can have her, say his advisors; they are used to his collecting objects. But – and this is the climax to Act I - he doesn't just want her, he wants to marry her.

He does, and all goes well to start with. Daisy, in my words, has "the body of a courtesan and the face of an angel". Her Botticelli-like beauty draws her to him and I allow her innocence and *joie de vivre* to temporarily disarm him. There are brief scenes with the two of them laughing, teasing, at their ease physically and, I hope to convince the audience somewhere along the spectrum, mentally. The sex – we don't see it – is perceived as happy, joyous.

Fra Pandolfo arrives to paint the portrait and then their relationship sours; at least on the Duke's side. The duchess's fault, according to Browning, lies in her apparently light regard for her husband's "gift of a nine-hundred-year-old name". (Not a mistake that Lucrezia, with her equally powerful name, would have made, I feel). Daisy is someone much less prepared for greatness. She, like Browning's duchess, smiles at everyone, indiscriminately. I believe that this is all she does. There is no Iago here; I follow Browning in this. Any proof of adultery is in his mind and he cannot "stoop" to let it go (34). He will not share her. The portrait is painted from life but only in death will he truly possess her. He gives "commands" to have "all smiles stopped together" (45-6). This he freely admits. He too is a man of his time; others might say a man of all time. Why should he worry who knows it? Any man not over-burdened with the milk of human kindness would do the same. So, Daisy's story will be a tragedy but not quite as Browning perceived it.

Alfonso begins to poison her (we are in Borgia territory.) I use Browning's cherries, candied – like a child, Daisy has a sweet tooth (27). She is also pregnant, though neither she nor

Alfonso realise this. Thus, by killing her Alfonso is robbed forever of his "gift". There will be no heir, neither in my play nor in real life, to inherit his name. And Daisy, although unwittingly, will have denied Ferrara the one thing he most desperately wants – the continuation of his line.

These undocumented years in the Duke's history between wives give me an entry into the play's core. The lead is only a thread in a tapestry as rich as any Gobelin which might have been hiding the Duchess's portrait. My adaptation attempts to use that thread to embroider a wider canvas. The medium I have chosen is theatre because there the power of Ferrara can be most acutely felt, heard and witnessed as Keats might have said, on the *pulses* of the audience (85). Unprotected by radio waves or celluloid, takes and retakes, the director, actors and creatives will have to work at and with the audience who have invested in the performance and are already seated. The audience (an extension of Nikolaus Mardruz) will become accomplices in the action: without them there is no play. The proscenium becomes a metaphor which frames both Alfonso and Daisy. The audience is caught throughout in the dramatic irony of having arrived too late at the scene/in the story to save her.

My working title - *The Last Duke of Ferrara* – puns with historical accuracy (the direct d'Este line ended with the childless Alfonso) and balances nicely with Browning's title. This Duke is a tyrant; volatile and dangerous. Alfonso speaks the opening words of the play in a burst of angry invective over a sartorial trifle. By the time the audience meets his victim, my last Duchess, they will know she is doomed.

Browning's monologue could have stood as my prologue. However, suspense is a far superior dramatic tool than surprise. Although Browning's lines are ambiguous: "I gave commands … Then all smiles stopped together" (45), if I compromised Ferrara in his own words (as Shakespeare does Macbeth, albeit in an aside, I.iv.48-53) then I felt I would lose suspense for those who have not met Ferrara before. To open as I do means I have two bites at the cherry. Those ignorant of the deed will have to wait for when it happens; those who know will have the surprise of my pregnancy twist.

I chose therefore to introduce my Duke alone, centre-stage, as the first to speak. He thinks, as the audience will do, that he is driving the action. I want the audience as silent witnesses to a domestic atrocity they cannot avert. They will watch the stage being set - literally and metaphorically - and the main perpetrator being dressed for the part, in a 'dumb show' loosely reminiscent of Elizabethan/Renaissance theatre.

My stage directions have the Duke naked to begin with. For all their love of sumptuous clothes gentlemen of the time slept naked, except for a nightcap, so this would lend historical verisimilitude as well as dramatic power to the scene. First the audience see Alfonso naked. A man.

Just as a naked Buonaparte, Amin or Assad would be just men rather than emperors or presidents. Then the audience watch as he is dressed, in Renaissance costume, and becomes before their eyes: "Alfonzo d'Este the fifth Duke of Ferrara… the son of Ercole d'Este and Princess Renee of France … the grandson of Alfonso I and Donna Lucrezia Borgia". In a pre-unified Italy, Ferrara is the state and the state is him. I hope by this time not merely to have the audience looking at him, but also thinking about appearance and reality, power and frailty. The mime is played out to contemporary music. The stage is set for an historical drama with all its connections to present day domestic and state politics.

The plot then spools out as a three-act restorative drama ending with Browning's poem as the Epilogue. This is a much more effective position for it. I want the audience to hear Browning's blank verse as none of them has ever heard them before. I have not turned my duchess into a twenty-first century representation of a 'strong female character'. However, I hope that, by having Alfonso unwittingly kill his heir, to hoist both my and Browning's dukes on their own petards and give both history and the poem a new reading. My Duke is indeed the last Duke of Ferrara.

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CAMPFIRE

SHORT STORY

DANTE PRAGIER

The last time Amina had come to the forest, he had been with her. She can't stop herself from imagining him here now, walking alongside. They would have pointed at other campers and invented their stories. He would have laughed at her as she struggled to find her footing and called out to Georgia and Lars ahead in case they missed her blunder. But he is not here. She walks alone and her stumble goes unnoticed by the chattering pair ahead.

In a way, Amina feels like she's following them from above, trying to catch each word as it floats out in the afternoon air. She's distracted by the things she remembers and the things that are new to her and somehow this finds its way into their conversation, even though she knows that isn't possible. They're talking about him, she knew they would.

'Don't be ridiculous, he's not doing heroin,' says Lars.

Amina passes patches of grass and occasionally, filtering through the tree canopy, rays of light shine onto her face or graze against her hand.

'No you're not listening. I'm not saying I believe it necessarily,' Georgia's hands waggle as she becomes more animated, 'but you remember he had his little music group? And plus with everything going on with his dad, right? And you know about that punk and that guitar stuff he was always doing and then remember that time Sam was like, oh, does anyone want some coke, and he was like, yeah ok and we were like dude you can't do coke because I think we were like seventeen. So I'm not saying it's definitely true, but I think it's, like, possible, you know?'

She's not following them exactly. Their boots are all-terrain and they fearlessly bulldoze through puddles of mud and plow into ridged dirt. Her route is a little more opportunistic, with a meticulously-considered weave to each safe step.

'oh my god, seventeen,' says Lars, 'what is it, nearly ten years? Oh my *god*.'

'Right? I wasn't even drinking back then,' Georgia says, shaking her head.

Amina can't remember exactly what she looked like at seventeen. That was the year before she moved away. She's visited a few times since then, but this time Lars had the idea for the overnight trip. The three had met up for lunch the week before and he suggested it. Lars called it a reunion. Amina doesn't know if that's the right word. Either way, she hasn't been camping since she left. As teenagers, they had gone together to every sanctuary, national park, and wildlife reserve within a couple hundred miles. This one had been their favourite. She hopes it will be like it was, even if she knows it can't.

Ahead, Lars is whacking the grass with a stick. 'So, tell me more about this heroin debacle.'

'Oh, okay, well I've had to cobble the details together, but it's something like this.'

Amina loses track of the story here. She hears the phrase "slippery slope" repeated a lot. Something about a travelling band in a big van that seems to resemble the one from Scooby Doo, with fogged-up windows and plastic baggies and lighters being passed around such that just sitting in the car for twenty minutes is enough to reach nirvana in an ambient fashion. Her mind returns to the camping ground. She hardly recognises it at all.

The management has changed. The new owners have brought with them splashes of modern luxury: occasional power sockets, heated showers, a convenience store, a fire-supply station with kindling – Lars picks up a bag on the way – even hireable log cabins. Amina stares as she passes other campers, portable gas cookers, sullen-faced children, signs warning people not to feed animals or swim in lakes at winter or make too much noise or leave anything behind.

'So that's when he gets this idea, right?' says Georgia. 'And he runs it by the guys and they're all for it. So, what if, because they're getting paid a little for these gigs and they're just spending it all on drugs anyway, right? So what if they just cut out the middle man, you know, avoid the currency exchange or whatever, and just get paid in bags of assorted, like a lucky dip, of just all these drugs?'

'Georgia, this is ridiculous.'

'No, listen, listen, listen. Think about it, and now, like, it makes sense that he might be doing heroin, okay? So I'm obviously extrapolating from what I've heard, but he's doing heroin, is that horse?'

'I don't think anyone calls it that anymore.'

The three walk alongside a river as they head deeper into the woodland. It is only after they pass under the tree canopy that Amina, with some relief, begins to recognise and trace the route. There is an unspoken rule that they won't return to any sites that they've previously occupied. That would be too much, somehow. They need a clearing for the fire. She wonders who will tend to it; that had always been his job.

Lars is laughing at Georgia. 'So this is your theory?'

'And, wait, let me finish, and playing his music and cruising around in his van with his buddies and just living the high-life, you know? Haha, *high* life, oh my god, I'm so funny.'

They've picked a spot and start to set their bags down.

Lars is quiet for a moment. 'A life on the road, I guess it wouldn't be totally out of place, you know, for him.'

Amina likes the sound of this. She imagines him, she doesn't really know what she imagines, just him looking a little more ragged, maybe a beard, playing his music in the backroom of some bar. He has a smile on his face and his eyes are shut. He's swaying in rhythm with the bassist beside him. Then, piled into the van, he's at the wheel. He's still there, unchanging, or maybe it's the road. Perennial stretches of unchanging road, disappearing into starlit nights. Maybe one day she'll pass him by. She'll be driving and she won't notice the van approaching. There'll be a lull of sound from her car radio or her windshield wiper will squeak or her exhaust will rattle or just the feel of her tyres bumping over cobbled road will jolt her. She'll look up from behind the wheel just in time to see the van pass by with that same contagion for escape, that restlessness blues close behind.

There is a golden sheen to the afternoon, now. The sun's tenacious pursuit has wormed its way through cloud and treetop to the clearing they've chosen, absorbing colours and scattering a bronzed trail in his wake. Lars declares it the perfect spot. Georgia agrees. Amina keeps quiet, she doesn't mind either way. It does seem fine. Nobody else is within line of sight. They're enveloped by trees but there's enough space for the fire. Georgia is marking out a wide circle on the ground with twigs. Displeased, she turns to Lars.

'You must have a theory, oh my god you're so boring.'

Lars is pulling apart poles and removing pegs from the tent bag. He rummages for something but doesn't seem to find it.

'I'm not boring. I just don't, you know...'

'Have any personality?'

'What the fuck, Georgia.'

'I'm sorry, I dunno where that came from.'

'I think, like… Okay, so, if I had to guess.'

'Yes! Tell me.'

Amina sits cross-legged while Lars and Georgia prepare the site. As she watches, she realises they have done this many times since she'd last been with them – since the four of them had been together. They'd kept the tradition alive. Backpacks upend and carefully-rolled sleepwear unfurls. She listens for birds, maybe an owl, or even just the rustling of squirrels, but all she can hear are voices. The way they drift up and become lost.

'So you know there were rumours about his, like, girlfriends, or just, girls, or, I don't know, whatever they were. Right?'

'Uh-*huh*.'

'Okay. I don't like to gossip, but I mean it was so long. I always wondered, you know, if he'd got into trouble.'

'Got into trouble? Surely not!'

'Shut up. Like, because he never said goodbye. That's the thing I don't get. All of us, we were, you know, I don't know what the word is.'

'Inseparable?'

'I don't know, we just seemed like such a unit.' Lars pauses. 'Maybe I'm imagining that. Am I imagining that?'

'Na, you're not. Especially you two, the boys. Like, I kinda had my girls from dance as well, but you and him.'

'That's what I thought. And after he moved away, it was like, I don't know, just, he hadn't even said anything. That sucked for me.'

'I know, babe.'

'I guess I didn't really talk about it. I think I was a bit embarrassed. I know it's stupid.'

'It's not stupid.'

'He didn't say anything. He just left. What the fuck? Who just does that? He didn't give a shit.'

'I don't know, with his dad. And-'

'Fuck that.'

Amina is mesmerised by the ritual and the way their work continues around their conversation. They're grappling with a little gas cooker and their animated hands draw it into the conversation while they coax it into life. As Lars searches for the right word, he times the unscrewing of the valve with his hesitated sentences. As Georgia reassures him, she stresses each point by tapping against the lid's hinge.

Satisfied with the tent and implements, Lars begins the next task. He finds his hatchet and drags over a fallen branch. He begins to divide it. Georgia reaches into her backpack and pulls out the first bottle of wine. She opens it and takes a long swig, before offering it to Lars. Amina takes a bottle from her own bag.

'So, I guess I was thinking about what I'd understand,' Lars says in between hacks.

'What you'd understand?

'I mean, what could have happened, that I could understand or, I don't know, the secrecy. And then I was thinking about those, you know, just what people were saying, and I mean, it makes sense, if you think about it.'

'You've lost me. What are you saying?'

There is a pause here. Amina feels the stillness in the air, punctuated only by the rhythmic thwacking of the hatchet against wood. With each cleave, Lars rotates the log slightly, imparting a chiselled necklace. Once the circumference is complete, he props it up, angled against a tree trunk, then brings his boot down hard into the incision. The log splits. He finishes it off with the hatchet and begins a new section. A trickle of wine escapes down the side of Amina's bottle. She feels a little warmer.

Lars' words come hesitant. 'So, you know he didn't go to the funeral.'

'Hadn't he left by then?'

'I dunno. It was sometime around then. But, like, I know that whole thing… I know he didn't want kids.'

'Because of his dad?'

'I think he was worried it would be hereditary or something, you know? He told me he would never be a father. He said that to me once. I asked him about, I don't know, I think I was just kidding around telling him I would be the godfather to his children. And he stopped for a moment and just said that he wasn't fit for that, that he would never, you know...'

'I didn't know that.'

'And so, you know what people were saying that he was seeing someone and I'm thinking.'

'That's why he left?'

'Yeah. I mean, if he got her pregnant and she wanted to keep it. I think he would've left. I don't think he would have stayed.'

Amina remembers the wake. She remembers her shoulder damp with his tears. This was just before he left. He had asked if he was a good person or whether he was like his dad. She didn't know what to say to that. She never knew what to say.

The logs are banked and Georgia is pressing kindling and rolled-up bunches of newspaper into the gaps.

'I dunno,' she says, 'he would've told you.'

'You think?'

'I mean, maybe not the pregnancy, but if he was going steady or whatever.'

'We didn't really talk about that kind of stuff.'

'Yeah, seventeen-year-old boys don't talk about girls. What was I thinking?'

'Shut up.' Lars throws a twig at Georgia.

'Do you think he knows about us?' Georgia asks. 'Like, us two? We didn't hook up til a couple years later. I wonder if he stalked us on Facebook or something.'

'He doesn't have one.'

'Yeah, but we do, so he could, I don't know.'

'Yeah.'

Lars opens his matchbox. He's about to start lighting the newspaper but something gives him pause. He looks up at Georgia as though realising something that he's missed. Amina smiles.

'But that's not what happened,' he says. He lights the match. 'That's not what happened.' He dots the edges of each newspaper ball with fire as he repeats it to himself, then grabs his wine and sits.

'What happened then?' asks Georgia.

'I'll tell you what happened. He didn't leave, like, away from her.'

Georgia's smiling, too. 'Tell me.'

'He left with her. They left together.'

'They eloped.'

'Of course they did. I was thinking about it all wrong. Of course he did. They left together. She wasn't pregnant. They were in love.'

Amina moves closer to the flames. She watches how they permeate each layer. First, the newspaper – dramatically recoiling and shrivelling and darkening. Georgia is on her feet, using the handle of the hatchet to push the banked logs inward, directing towards the core. Next, the kindling, crackling and noisy and stubborn. While she circles, Lars follows with his voice. It's a story of two lovers escaping responsibility and burdens, finding solace in one another. He talks about fresh starts and self-discovery. They travel around the world. Picking up odd jobs. Stowing away on trains, or haggling fares for buses. Finally, the logs. The fire roars. They are in love; the logs are red hot.

'For a few years they're truly happy. They see all sorts of things, and meet so many amazing people.'

'And they love each other?'

'More than anything.'

'And they're happy?'

'They're happy.' Lars finishes his bottle and takes a second. The screw-top opens with a snap. 'And when tragedy strikes, they're on a tiny yacht off Croatia, one of the islands.'

'They're on a boat?'

'There's a storm like you'd never believe.'

Amina closes her eyes and imagines herself standing on the yacht with him. She feels the rain against her face, she sticks out her tongue and knows that it salty.

'It is pitch black and thunder that shakes your bones. The type of thunder where you see the flash of white and all you can do is brace yourself. The sails are whipping and spinning the boat and so they rock side to side. He's desperately trying to bring in the topsail, the mainsail.'

Amina tumbles from bow to stern, drenched in sea and clawing for anywhere to latch her hands. She can't hear Lars' voice anymore over the dismal grey orchestra, but she sees it all so clearly. She sees him there, arms outstretched, reaching to draw in the sails but his balance is at his limit and he falls and he is overboard and he sinks deep into the waves and they strike against him and his chin is stretched up towards the skies as he gasps for breath but his arms, numb and thrashing, cannot hold for long and eventually he lets them fall to his sides and searches for another place.

He finds it, beneath. He lets the waves slip over him and sees that they do not crash anymore and the wind doesn't howl into his ears. There is only warmth and silence and stillness.

The night is drowsy and comforting; the fire watches over them fiercely and Amina feels better for its presence. The three lie on their backs, gazes darting to the shifting points where fizzled sparks, glowing and leisurely in their ascent, become indistinguishable from the stars. They're still telling stories and down to their last bottle of wine. Like a ritual, one will contribute to the tale and gulp a mouthful – perhaps as payment for the story, perhaps searching the bottle for some mystic truth.

Georgia throws a twig at Lars.

'Ow, what?'

'Give me a cigarette.'

'I don't have a… you know I don't have one.'

'Okay. Fine. Okay. I've got one.'

'A cigarette?'

'No. I've got a… Okay, so it's a cold night. It's bright, you know those nights where maybe the moon or there's just this brightness, and he's restless. His dad is dead. How does he feel about that? He feels numb but white hot. Like, I'm trying to think of the feeling. Okay. You know when you burn yourself and there's just that throb of pain that's, you know, it gets worse,

it's incremental. In the panic of the moment you wave it about and run it under water and hop from foot to foot and it starts to feel better. You think you're better. But then you stop, you're calm, you try to be still and you realise that it's starting again. It's just as bad as it was, it's searing. You haven't healed anything, you just masked the pain under all the motion.' Georgia is wrapped up in her story and seems not to notice Lars begin his own.

'What do you think it was like for him?' he asks. 'For his dad to go like that?'

'So, he's restless,' she continues. 'He needs that motion. He punches a wall but it's not enough and now his knuckles have had a taste so he's, like, he needs to move. So, he goes for a drive. He's looking for something. What's he looking for?'

'He hated his dad. But, like, still. I can't imagine. I feel like, I don't know, I feel like something is happening. Do you have that feeling?'

'He finds a bar. The dirtiest one he can find. It's called Cherry, not like, in the maraschino in your cocktail sense, in the like, I'll come to your Catholic school and pop yours sense. You know?'

'Yuck, Georgia.'

Amina is glad she came. She has the strangest feeling that she's been here before, in exactly this moment. Or perhaps some part of her has been missing for so long that it's almost a relief to remember it exists.

'He picks the biggest, baddest guy he can and he doesn't say anything he just starts wailing on him,' says Georgia. 'You know? Like a king hit and then, desperately, again and again hammering this guy's nose back into his skull. Like, he's just going to keep hitting until this guy is mush. And it's infectious.'

'Actually, he could have joined a gang. And you know the initiation? Part of it is he's not allowed to go home ever.'

There's so much noise. Amina thinks she can't quite be listening right, because the stories are starting to overlap. She needs to be higher, almost, she needs a top-down view to make sense of it all, to hold on to all the words.

'What if he joined a circus?' That's a thing people do, right?'

'So, someone else stands up now. Picks a dude at random and they're fighting, too. Then it's chaos. The bartender like leaps over the counter and bottles some lady.'

As the fire roars and the tellings become more frantic, Amina realises that they all end the same way, with death, with violence.

'Ooh, what about witness protection? He saw a crime, a murder. The police, they're trying to keep him safe but the mafia find him. They slaughter everyone. They fire through the windows with those, you know, those machine guns from the second world war.'

She understands why: they are releasing him.

'It's a massacre, dude, and not just fists. People are improvising weapons, like prison style. The band keeps playing, they never stop playing. They lose their bassist to a throwing knife but they keep going.'

They need the violence. They need the death. They are sacrificing him to the fire.

'He is bitten by a beast and starts to become that beast.'

'He has an ancient curse that longs for blood.'

'They get their revenge on him.'

'His face is bloody and his hands are bloody.'

'And they catch him, of course.'

'And it's a scene from horror.'

Amina sees into the fire and sees the massacre and she hears pain but it is their pain and it is desperate and guttural and she doesn't know how it could sound like this, metallic, or astral, or from a vacuum, or that it could bubble out of their throats like blood.

'And that's the end.'

Exhausted, Lars and Georgia collapse on their backs again. Their stories have swilled together and, to Amina, they are all true. She knows this that he is here somewhere, hidden behind all of this.

She thinks of his adventures now. She thinks of his travels, of his music, of his violence, the romance he has shared, the journeys he had endured and enjoyed, each of them truth.

All she had wanted was for him to be happy. This is what she cannot reconcile. All she had wanted was for him to be happy. He didn't have to be happy, but she had wanted it. No one can be happy all of the time, but she had wanted it.

'Amina?'

She sits up to see Lars and Georgia both staring at her. She doesn't know what to say, she is just glad to be here.

Georgia offers her the wine. She takes it. 'It's your turn, Amina.'

'Oh, I don't know about that.' Her voice sounds croaky and foreign. 'I don't like to tell stories. I don't want to suppose. I guess, I just hope that he's happy. I hope that it worked out, you know?'

'Tell us. We didn't know him like you did.'

She taps her thumb along the label of the wine bottle, sets it down, and picks it up again. What would she have told her herself?

'He wasn't always quiet. He could be quite loud.'

She sifts through the stories she hears and those she remembers. She imagines that they have patched together a new person, alive in his own way, and all the gaps and secrets filled with rich stories: a mosaic.

'We want you here with us, Amina.'

She wants them to see that he is still here. Even now he sits, legs crossed, and they pass him the bottle and he takes a swig and he smiles and he loves their stories. Doesn't he just love their stories? Here he is, and he's reminding them that he never left. And the fire.

'Stay with us.'

What would make her feel better, if she could speak to herself back then?

'We want to hear if you want to tell us.'

Watch the fireflies in jagged flight. Watch them dance with the smoke. The smoke; the smell of smoke, the smell of pine. Eyes watering to the heat; the heat like a sepia tone. What would she have told herself?

She smiles and knows exactly.

'Here is the truth.'

SYLPH

JAMES THORP

She's ringing the bells
and howling into the night
for your attention.

Air is the youngest child of the elements,
the liveliest, a party girl
who knows more about vodka and disposable cups
than responsible atmospheric circulation.

She doesn't mind turning it up to eleven on the regular,
screaming through hurricanes and storms
to tell us that she must not forget to deliver unto us her message.

So we gather round and listen
only to hear her say:

"It's important that…uh…you…umm…that you guys…uhhh…can I have a minute?"

She did have it written down somewhere…

It was something profound,
she remembers that much.
She can't believe she forgot.

She'll claim the party was worth it but we'll disagree.

Her hangovers are the worst,
wreckage and debris spread across the environment
instead of memories to smile at.

"No point worrying," she thinks,
"It all blows over in the end."

RUDY FRANCSCO'S *HELIUM*

BOOK REVIEW

CHRISTOPHER FISHER

There is a profound joy to be had when you stumble across a poet whose voice instantly resonates with you. Rudy Francisco is that voice for a diverse and growing fan base, as he eloquently displays the highs and lows of life as a single man in the modern world. As a spoken word poet he evokes the raw emotions that his generation is feeling in the modern technological age. Francisco has become an internet sensation. His live shows are becoming increasingly popular and his claim as one of the most important voices in contemporary poetry is ever strengthened, not least by his San Diego team's victory at the National Poetry Slam Championship. Francisco has recently expanded his repertoire and ventured into written poetry with the release of his first full-length collection of poetry: *Helium*.

Francisco's wonderful first collection tells an honest tale of love, loss and vulnerability in America. *Helium*, with its beautifully simple front cover image of a young black boy being lifted to the stars by a balloon, is clearly intended to be up lifting. The collection resonates with audiences, whether they have attended his shows, watched his videos at home or, like myself, read his works. The tone of reflection is established in the first poem, "Water", which prolongs the metaphorical sensation of drowning when greeting a group of people. Such metaphors are scattered throughout *Helium*, adding the depth to the work which makes one question their own relationships and role within society, and can be seen again in poems such as "Accent", "Waves" and "Haunted".

The main momentum lies with the rhythm of the poems, which speed up and pause for dramatic effect, and this encapsulates the passion in the words on the page, which penetrate society's weaknesses and expose them to the world. "Complainers" inspires the reader to adopt a more positive outlook on life and its hardships; whether the glass is "fall full or half empty, there's water in the cup. Drink it and stop complaining" (90). "The Man Standing on the Corner" uses the same techniques to take aim at a different target, this time at those who pervert religion for socio-political reasons and "worship their own reflection" (67). The passionate anger with which he writes these poems lends itself perfectly to his live shows, which have become a global Internet sensation. Francisco's direct and frank tone engages those listening in the comfort of their own homes and penetrates their own insecurities and fears, from minorities who are afraid of persecution, to young people who are trying to cope with the pressures of adolescence.

Francisco demonstrates the quiet power of subtlety in deceptively hard hitting short poems such as "Liberty" and "Margin". "Margin" explores the disillusionment which many minorities face in the US, using the metaphor of shining stars in the ever-darkening sky to encapsulate those anxieties. "Liberty" explores the disappearance of the all-important American ideology. Within these metaphors lie an exploration of society's ills, to which the audience is left considering their own contribution or passivity. Francisco challenges the reader to evaluate their attitude to conflict and its resolution in "And Then After", a call for peace.

For all the powerful imagery Francisco creates, the structure of the anthology can, arguably, appear incoherent. The four sections into which *Helium* is divided are not organised to address themes. Instead, topics and issues are addressed sporadically throughout, and each section's narrative is convoluted by a lack of structure. Sections do contain poems with some similar themes. The reflection in Francisco's mirror in Section 1 is evident in "My Honest Poem", and Section 2 explores his relationships with "Scars" and "To The Random Dude". However, the themes for Sections Three and Four, though containing some of his best work in "98" and "Welcome", are difficult to decipher. The flow of *Helium* is also interrupted when themes reappear in later sections, even when poems as dramatic as "Rifle II," a reflection on the inherent violent nature of Francisco and society, appear in Section Three but would have been better placed alongside 'Instructions' in Section 1. The impression is given of a randomly compiled selection of poetry, with only a limited attempt to structure it, which results in the reader's struggle to find a narrative running through it. It is perhaps Francisco's strength as a spoken word poet that has held *Helium* back in this regards, as on stage he is able to jump between the subject matter and invoke different emotions at ease meaning that themes can be intertwined more comfortably, something which is currently lacking in his written works.

Francisco undoubtedly has the ability to create both paradoxically hard hitting and subtle poetry. Francisco sets himself up as a leading poet of his generation, and one who can speak on behalf of many, regardless of ethnicity, owing to a poetry that resonates beyond any religion or skin colour.

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STETSON

ELDEN MORROW

There's a lady sitting in front of
me in the pictures with an incredibly oversized hat,
and i think what the hell are you
doing wearing an incredibly oversized hat
like that to the pictures?

i tap her on the shoulder really gently
and i quite measuredly say why oh
why lady are you wearing that incredibly oversized hat
did you not think about the people
who were going to have to sit behind you and not
be able to see the screen as a result of your incredibly oversized hat?
She turns around to me with the most outlandish glint in her eyes
and says without the slightest hint of self-reflexivity
that she must wear this hat. If she
removes it then the spread of populism
will never be halted. It is the albatross on her head.

So i leave the cinema and i hear the noises of the construction workers
and the yells of the vendors and smell the
the tobacco shops and the incense stalls
and the drills and the concrete and the incense and the hollers all mix
and it's bullshit isn't it? The Metro and
Frank O'Hara and independent coffee shops and street musicians
and the UFC.

i miss you.

THE CHRONOTOPE OF NIGHTMARE: WALTER BENJAMIN AND THE PHANTASMAGORIA OF THE *FLÂNEUR*

ARTICLE

WENYAN GU

The modern world has an urban staging. Studies on modernity have centered on this "staging" in its transient form of infinitive rather than the city as a static stage. When Walter Benjamin reiterates the poet Charles Baudelaire to define modernity as "the world dominated by its phantasmagorias" (77), he has designated one precise time-space to the ceaseless changing and "staging" of modern phantasm: nineteenth century Paris. This urban world of phantasmagorias, or going back to Baudelaire's original wording, the dream-like world of "the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent" (69), cradles the quintessence of the *flâneur*. Characterized by his strolling gait and observing gaze in big cities, the *flâneur* takes pleasure in the fleeting performances of his crowd and his age. The *flâneur* moves, aimlessly yet critically, in accordance with the modern pretense of moving. With an ostensible frivolity inherited from his Romantic precursor, the *flâneur* traverses the modern metropolis while his every step gains on urban gravity. In his compass study on the *flâneur* in modern conception, Harald Neumeyer distinguishes the movement of "*flanieren*", from mere wandering, "*spazieren*", by pointing out the particular footing the *flâneur* undertakes: "The difference between ‚*spazieren*' und ‚*flanieren*' lies in the treading space, and since ‚*flanieren*' is connected to a particular infrastructure of the big city, its origin shall be dated to the first half of nineteenth century in Paris." (11) For Neumeyer, Paris in early modernity does not only condition for the birth of *flânerie*, but also designates this specific form of movement to be the method of city perception: "It is not only a certain walking movement, but also its associated disposition for perception that will be transferred to the metropolitan space."(12) Only in corresponding movement can one perceive a world dominated by its ephemerality, as the *flâneur* does perceive, although his tardy pace in strolling appears to be everything but corresponding. Nevertheless, it is not surprising that the examination of *flâneur* rarely evades the phantasmagorical urbanity in Baudelaire's vision, as does the canonic study, *The Arcades Project* or *Das Passagenwerk*, by Benjamin, who unfailingly re-inscribes the figure of *flâneur* on the front page of modernity.

If Benjamin undertook the task of pinpointing the *flâneur* as both a socio-historical and a literary figure in the nineteenth century Paris, he did not finish it. Moreover, there is no sign of him intending to finish, since the paradigmatic *flâneur* in his text bears the stylistic paradox of being by "not being". As Neumeyer correctly recognizes, Benjamin's definition of the *flâneur* is dialectically inconsistent, for all litterateurs once attributed by him as *flâneur*, including Baudelaire,

are at one point or another denied of the *flâneur*-status by this very same critic. "The *flâneur* who is not a *flâneur*" (14), so summarizes Neumeyer, might not chance to claim an exact position in traditional historicity. Nor does he need one, since Benjamin explicitly spells out one characteristic of the *flâneur*: his ability to remain traceless and "unknown". Neumeyer's conclusion leads Benjamin's contradictory *flâneur*-identification to a revelation of the *flâneur*'s more important functional role: the *flâneur* as "*Funktionsträger*", who will eventually reflect the precarious as an ironic situation of the exiled author himself on the modern threshold, facing towards a growing capitalist society (Neumeyer, 25).

Although Neumeyer's argument is accurate in its logical deduction, it lands on the slippery slope towards a reductive interpretation of Benjamin's *flâneur*. Benjamin's ambivalent definition does not merely yield the "function" of *flâneur* but highlights his fundamental dialectical method in reconstructing the time-space of the *flâneur*'s habitat – a homeland only to be seen in ruins and remembered as phantasmagoria. This phantasmagorical time-space – historically recognized as Paris of the Second Empire – in Benjamin's formulation renders the *flâneur*'s dialectical image in its four dimensions, or to use Mikhail Bakhtin's concept, the literary "chronotope" of phantasmagoria imprinted on the *flâneur*-imagery, for literary images are all marked by forms of time and space and are therefore essentially "chronotopic" (Bakhtin, 257). Here, the chronotope is not merely a mold in which the *flâneur* appropriates himself, but a prism of urban phantasmagoria where *flâneur*s, as so other types of modern beings are illuminated in the countless beams of its distorted light. Through this prism of phantasmagoria, one might get a glimpse of the spatio-temporal imageries of the literary and historical *flâneur* and hence a more comprehensive *flâneur* metaphor. If we follow Benjamin's methodology in regarding image as "dialectics in a standstill" (V, 577, N2a, 3), these metaphorical images and imageries cannot be unveiled unless the prism is placed under the dialectical lighting. It is this aspect of Benjamin's *flâneur* image central to his dialectics that I wish to elaborate upon further.

In his 1935 explanation of *Das Passagen-Werk*, Benjamin devotes one section to Baudelaire under the caption "*Baudelaire oder die Straßen von Paris*", in which he develops the quiddities of the *flâneur*. This section finds its consolidation majorly in two convolutes of the whole *Passagenwerk*: convolut J Baudelaire and convolut M Der *Flâneur*, in which the original form, or the *Ur*-form of the *flâneur* is assigned to Baudelaire. Consistent with his general analytical interest, Benjamin is not heavily concerned with forms and styles of Baudelaire's poetry, but its philological assertion within the subject matter. The subject of Baudelaire's poetry, here referring specifically to his most remarkably modern collection in 1857 *Les Fleurs du Mal*, is Paris, even though the lyrical allegorist gazes into the city not as a Parisian native, but a foreigner, an alienated *flâneur*:

> This poetry is no art of homecoming, but rather the gaze of the allegorist upon the city. It is the gaze of the alienated. It is the gaze of the *flâneur*, whose form of life glows in conciliation with the growing desolation of the metropolitans. (Benjamin, 54)

The *flâneur* makes his debut as a beholder of the estranged gaze, together with other isolated metropolitan locals who have made it to Benjamin's list of city-types as rag-pickers, collectors, prostitutes, gamblers and so forth. The *flâneur*, here as the double of the modern poet, retains his agency in the "coming desolation of metropolitans" by standing still on the "threshold of the metropolis and of the middle class". The longer he stays still on this threshold, however, the more fugitive becomes his form of movement, "*flânerie*", as his need to "seek asylum in the crowd" grows. Neumeyer is certainly right to have pointed out that the *flâneur* wanders aimlessly yet by no means free of intention (52). In fact, the *flâneur*'s intention is clearly outlined by Benjamin, extracted from the last poem in *Les fleurs du mal*: "Le Voyage. '*O Mort, vieux capitaine, il est temps! levons l'ancre!*' The last journey of the *flâneur*: the death. Its destination: the new" (Benjamin, 55). Here, the "newness" as the "destination" of the *flâneur*'s last journey of death is indeed his intention rather than aim, for it wears the infernal stain of "always the same", forbidding it to be aimed for but only to exist in dialectical intention. As Benjamin specifies in the 1939 French exposé one year before his final writing of *Das Passagen-werk* and the end of his own life, it is exactly this perpetuation of repetitiveness that determines the thematic tone of Baudelaire's poem to be "infernal" and the phantasmagoria of modern *flâneur* to be nothing but terrifying: "But the newness that Baudelaire has fought against all his life is made up of no other material than this phantasmagoria of 'always the same'" (71).

The *flâneur* wanders and waits in vain. He sees through the city phantasmagoria in hope for the new while the novelty he has long waited for brings him back to a primitive fallacy. Under the influence of Marxist theory of historical materialism, Benjamin associates the delusionary phantasmagoria of *flâneur* to the false consciousness in collective form under a monstrous capitalist society. The illusory appearance of this "always the same" novelty powders the face of commodity value and employs fashion as its "relentless agent" (Benjamin, 55). Benjamin does not put the *flâneur* in a privileged position where this "magic" yet vicious circle of novelty can be broken by his gaze. Rather, the *flâneur* who has intended to seek novelty realizes the fatality of his standing threshold only during his last journey of "death" through the on-going fetishism. Escape in any suitable form becomes his last resort, whilst the wisest option is to camouflage: "The crowd is the veil, through which the inhabited city signals at the *flâneur*" (54).

The metaphor of the crowd as the veil on city phantasmagoria is most likely derived from Baudelaire's famous passage in his essay on Guys "*Le peintre de la vie moderne*", where he designates the observer *flâneur*'s profession and passion as "espousing the crowd" and elevates the distanced city observer to an aristocratic hierarchy: "the prince who enjoys foremost his incognito" (Baudelaire, 65). Different from Baudelaire's "*flâneur* parfait" who finds immense pleasure of homecoming in observing from the center of the world and at the same time remaining hidden from the world, Benjamin's *flâneur* is imprisoned in his aristocratic mode of seeing, where the menacing phantasmagoria behind the veil of the crowd returns his gaze with a wink of petrification – to quote his later usage of mythical analogy – "the gaze of Medusa for the Greeks" (Benjamin, 72). In other words, Benjamin gathers the most forlorn traits of the *flâneur* from Baudelaire's melancholic allegories to render a new *flâneur*-figure dying on his awakening discovery of infernal "newness". The *flâneur*'s wandering stops when his observing sight weakens at the returning gaze of the phantasmagorical Medusa, whereas commodification takes the place of petrification to be the modern Medusa's new mystic power. The threshold on which the *flâneur* stands is actually the edge of his own historical extinction, for every step of his wandering leads him toward the final capitulation - to the bourgeois rules of selling and possessing, while his less observant gaze betrays the commodification of himself as an object.

Here, Benjamin's *flâneur* follows a dialectical path to make sense of his devastated habitat in between the binary poles of urban phantasmagoria: the simultaneous "new" and "always the same". The dialectics of *flânerie* in Benjamin's own definition is related to the ironic mannerism of perceiving such phantasmagoria, which he surmises to be the thesis of Edgar Allen Poe's "Man of the Crowd" (529). Echoing Baudelaire's *flâneur*-motto, "to see the world, to be at the center of the world, and to remain hidden from the world" (65), Benjamin demarcates the *flâneur*'s passage and scopic by stressing his fugitive character, his paranoiac feeling of being seen and followed like a suspect, and his tenacious effort to remain unknown. The *flâneur*'s fear of being seen is one of the concomitants of his urge to survive in the eternally repetitive phantasmagoria of modern commercialism, or the "*mode-eternité*" (72) as Neumeyer concludes from Baudelaire's writings, which will eventually devour his individuality. Since the loss of individuality links directly to the loss of the individual scopic of the city, the new urban phantasmagoria threatens to alter and even negate the *flâneur*'s distinctive mode of observing. The dialectics of *flânerie* is, as matter of fact, the dialectics of seeing and perceiving, as Neumeyer's thesis as well as the title of the very intriguing study on *Das Passagen-werk* by the American scholar Susan Buck-Morss *The Dialectics of Seeing* both suggest.[1] Without his distinctive observing gaze that also defines his distinctive observing gait, the

flâneur will either walk in the collective dream of fetishist celebration as a mere "*promeneur*" or vanish indefinitely in the phantasmagoria of his hometown-no-more.

In this way, Benjamin's method of dialectics is exemplified in the concept of phantasmagorical novelty and the figure of *flâneur*. It includes revealing the "new" to be "always the same" and preserving the *flâneur*'s distinguished visual perspective by granting him invisibility. These two sets of oppositions, new in the same and seeing by remaining unseen are juxtaposed in the quasi-aporia formula according to the "canon of dialectics" on which Benjamin bases his fundamental methodology for *Das Passagen-werk*: the valorization of dream elements in course of awakening.[2] In other words, Benjamin's dialectical paradigm dictates the forcing of awakening by plunging into the dream. This dream, at one point specified to be capitalism in its natural appearance with mystical forces over the entire Europe (494), and abstracted at another to bestow the phantasmagorical veil to numerous modern topos – dream-house of museum, church, department store, fountain head and dream-city of Paris[3] – as well as modern epoch of nineteenth century as a historical dream, dates back to the inception of this urbanism project, as agreed by most scholars to be Benjamin's interest in surrealism after having read Louis Aragon's surrealist confession *Le Payson de Paris* in 1927. Indeed, Benjamin's notion of infernal "newness" responsible for the mythical circle of eternal commodification might meet its archaic image in Passage de l'Opera, the oldest passage in Paris whose extinction, as one of the *Das Passagen-Werk* scholars Bernd Witte notes, "has already provoked Aragon's surrealistic phantasies" (7). Like Aragon, Benjamin probes into the disappearance of Paris arcades as a fading historical dream, using dialectics as his instrument and the surrealistic approach of "literary montage" as method. The historical dream of the Paris arcades, together with historical figures inside, is turning into a nightmare under the harrowing threat from modern phantasmagoria already described by Aragon as the emblem of modern ephemeral cult (Aragon, 19). The *flâneur*, once felt "at home" in these arcades (Benjamin, 538), now stands in the unprecedented dream ruins and waits anxiously for the awakening without looking forward to tomorrow.

This standing point of the *flâneur*, however, is where Benjamin departs from Aragon and other surrealists. Instead of recounting dream tales and re-presenting dream images, Benjamin puts the literary images on an oneiric montage display for an analysis that will serve to accelerate the "awakening". "Montaging" is surely not merely a method of "showing" the dream, but a road-paving process for a clear view of its entire structure (575). The dream construction in historical totality certainly refers to Marxism, since one of Benjamin's methodological objects in *Das Passagen-Werk* is to demonstrate historical materialism in Marx's classic dialectical formulation anew: the capitalist concept of "progress" exists on its self-negation and its "actualization" (547).

Nevertheless, by rendering *Das Passagen-Werk* as an urban dream-work woven by various dialectical dream-images ("Traumbilder") from historical and personal memories, Benjamin sketches the possibilities of a historical "awakening" from the nineteenth century dream, as he mentions Marcel Proust to clarify his theoretical inspiration (580). The appointed dreamer (or awakener) is the *flâneur*, who intends to see through the urban phantasmagoria by recognizing the nihilistic "newness" in "always the same". The phantasmagoria, as Bernd Witte once suggests, is precisely the synthesis of the new and the same (21), made up of numerous dream-images that are "dialectical" in sense of ambiguous by nature. Even though the *flâneur* can only see through the phantasmagorical dream images by avoiding its returning gaze and by fleeing sporadically in shadows of the city, he becomes the harbinger of his age, an allegory for individual awakening in the collective historical dream.

Yet, the world the *flâneur* wakes up to is not in the least one free of menaces. Baudelaire's lyrical lamentation of Paris will eventually find its grieving tone in Benjamin's requiem for a nightmarish "drowning city" (55) where the *flâneur*'s dialectical mode of existence becomes a peremptory necessity for delaying his own inevitable funeral. In this instance, Benjamin the modern intellectual and the Paris exile becomes the melancholic *flâneur*, waking alone from the collective dream of fetishism and landing in another "new" phantasmagoria all by himself. The *flâneur* wakes up from a historical dream but finds himself in the *same* city of nightmare. This demoniac and aporetic irony, echoing Friedrich Nietzsche's existentialist cry of the "*ewige Wiederkehr*", constructs the *flâneur*'s last phantasmagoria. Once again, to repeat Benjamin's accentuation of Baudelaire: "*le monde dominé par ses fantasmagories*" is the *flâneur*'s modernity, and punishment of the infernal figure bearing "*peines éternelle et toujours nouvelles*" (Benjamin, 77), his last judgement.

Although the *flâneur*'s awakening appears to be a futile "recognition" of the nineteenth-century collective dream, it is at the moment of his awakening that the exact image of the "timeless" dialectics unfolds. On the one hand, the *flâneur* recognizes the "real face" of "timelessness" to be the nightmare of eternal repetition and attempts to flee from it; on the other hand however, in hoping for the original and utopic "awakening", he has so good as all the stigmas of modern phantasmagoria stained on his own dialectical image. The presentation of a dialectical image or the creation of a dialectical imagery predicates ambiguity and self-contradiction, which is precisely the "law" of dialetics at a standstill (Benjamin, 55). Returning to Neumeyer's observation, Benjamin's incoherent *flâneur*-identification goes beyond the functional metaphor for marginality and acquires its methodological significance. With the capacity of presenting and creating a

"timelessly" ambiguous self-imagery, the *flâneur* becomes the personification for Benjamin's dialectics.

Following the dialectical principles, the "timeless" image of the *flâneur* is intrinsically marked by forms of time that also relate directly to passages of his stroll. The *flâneur* has his right to wander in the phantasmagoria of space, which is loaded and reloaded with infinite time: "The *flâneur* to charge time like a battery charging energy" (164). Every movement and every standstill is charged with the sense of "timelessness": "The street leads the *flâneur* to a disappearing time" (524). The imagery of the *flâneur* is then perfectly chronotopic, since it reflects what Bakhtin calls the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships" (84). Borrowed from the relativity theory of time and space like a "metaphor", literary chronotope in Bakhtin's terminology harbors the "melting of temporal and spatial characteristics into a rational and concrete totality" (84). The corresponding literary images, or "images of man in literature" especially of Bakhtin's concern, are also determined by the chronotope. In one footnote to the "chronotopic images", Bakhtin clarifies the origin of his theory to be different from Kant's transcendental aesthetics but concerns "forms of time and space leading to reality", while moving on in text to remind his readers of the relative "newness" of this literary approach (85). Benjamin would have been one of the "very few critics" who have employed this method, since he never fails to fill his dialectical images with the constellation of time and space, by bringing the past and the present to the same historical stratum yet in different geographical topoi. As one of Benjamin's dialectical personas, the *flâneur* traverses the phantasmagoria of space with a flowing sense of time. Nineteenth century Paris as a general chronotope does not only determine his exterior milieu but also his interior image. Even when he steps across the century threshold and wakes up into the next nightmare, he carries the very same phantasmagorical time-space with him like a secretive imagery of his own. In this sense, Bakhtin and Benjamin use the same modern concept as method in literary criticism and to quote one comparative analysis of their thoughts, this might be connected to their shared view on the "fractured nature of specifically modern experience"(Beasley-Murray, 1).

Before concluding by outlining the relation between the chronotope theory and the *flâneur*'s self-imagery in Benjamin's text, one more converging point of Benjamin and Bakhtin should be noted to affirm that this theoretical juxtaposition is everything but arbitrary. In the concluding section of his essay on chronotope, Bakhtin gives four major chronotopic forms that parallel peculiarly with localities that are also essential to Benjamin's ambigious *flâneur* figure. They are, namely, the chronotope of the road marked by encounter and contingency, the castle or archaic places carrying historicity, the café or parlor where private and public lives merge, and finally, the chronotope of threshold suggesting a "break" of life. All these four chronotopes are representative

and visible in the dialectical imagery of the *flâneur*. Further probing into each might be worthwhile, even though the *flâneur*, whose intention of the real, new awakening retreats into the old phantasmagoria, might be eligible to claim a separate category of chronotope. The time and space determining the *flâneur*'s ambiguous identity is the essentially modern chronotope of nightmare: the cyclic and fleeting phantasmagoria in urban labyrinth.

Benjamin presents the dialectical silhouette of the *flâneur*'s imagery in the chronotope of nightmare, while his biographical *flâneur*, born on the century threshold, woke up to capture the same chronotope of a recurring nightmare. Benjamin's last journey, which was intended to be a flight from the worst nightmare of Nazi-occupied Paris to Spain, ended up like the last voyage of the *flâneur* in his diction.[4] Death strikes as his final solution for a tormenting realization of the impossible destination "das Neue", as well as his irresoluble alienation. The chronotope of nightmare is encrypted on the imagery of the *flâneur*, who stands on the threshold of modernity, waiting for the *new* phantasmagoria to be always the same.

Notes

[1]This study is highly inspirational for an understanding of the original dialectical method of Benjamin. and how textual construction of *Das Passagenwerk* effectively reflects historical phenomena and vice versa. Its methodology is revealingly dialectical, albeit unconventional, as it deviates from the traditional hermeneutics to center on the "interpretive power of images that make conceptual points concretely, with reference to the world outside the text". See Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, 6.

[2] This exact phrase first appears at the end of the 1935 exposé: "Die Verwertung der Traumelemente beim Aufwachen ist der Schullfall des Dialektiks" and later in the methodological convolute N as the canon of dialectics. Cf. Benjamin, V, 59 and V, 580 (N4,4).

[3] Cf. Titles of these two convolutes in *Das Passagen-Werk*, Konvolut K Traumstadt und Traumhaus, Zukunftsträume, Anthropologischer Nihilismus, Jung and Konvolut L Traumhaus, Musuem, Brunnenhalle.

[4] Benjamin ended his life before landing in Spain for his second exile from Paris in 1940. For a more detailed biographical recording of the last incident of his life, see Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, 331-337.

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