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The Birmingham Journal of Literature and Language (*BJLL*) 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: Will Cooper of Central Print should be thanked for his advice and patience; our editorial board for sharing their experience, and for their words of encouragement along the way; all of our contributors for considering us worthy of their work, and for their due doggedness during a grueling peer-review process; our section editors, who acquired and worked tirelessly on the pieces contained within this edition; and, last but by no means least, we wish to thank the reviewers, proofs editors and staff readers named above, whose judgement was sound when the General Editors doubted themselves, and who frequently went above and beyond in their efforts.

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POETRY AND ARTWORK:

FOREWORD

A hundred years ago this spring, a young academic, living on Wake Green Road in Moseley, was busy experimenting with prose and poetry. He had just left the military hospital based at Birmingham University, after being treated for trench fever following his experiences at the Battle of the Somme. Several of his closest Birmingham friends had died in the battle. If the doctors at the University considered him recovered, he would soon be sent back to the war. Would he live and write, or fight and die?

That young JRR Tolkien was on my mind as I read the work collected here in Volume VIII of *The Birmingham Journal of Language and Literature*. Created to showcase the work of early career academics, the journal offers an exciting glimpse of what's next; who's coming up, and with what, in creative writing, thinking and research. With its youthful, forward-looking agenda, it's fitting that this issue of the journal has a sharp eye on the threats and thrills of what concerns all young people across time: the future.

I came to the University of Birmingham last year to work as Creative Fellow in the School of English, Drama, American and Canadian Studies, and to research Tolkien's story for adaptation into a screenplay. I'd become interested in his early life after I moved into a house near Moseley Bog, an ancient woodland where Tolkien played as a child. I came to know the tragic events of his youth more deeply while researching a programme for BBC Radio 4, *Tolkien in Love*. His young life was rocked by shock after shock; misfortune, accident, bereavement, and ultimately luck.

The unexpected powers this edition of the journal. In Som Pancharle Thongpanich's short story, *At the Temple*, a fortune teller predicts trouble ahead for a sensitive young monk. The futurists John McGhee meets at the World Future Conference 2016 might not have much time for bad karma as a tool of analysis or prediction, but they'd surely be interested in Lynda Clark's essay about what's next for narrative: *It's A Kind of Magic: The Tricks of Interactive Fiction*. In poetry, essay, art and fiction this edition of the journal looks round the corner to see what's coming next—warning and exciting in turn.

In 1917 a friend advised that young academic on Wake Green Road to 'malinger' in Moseley for as long as possible in order to continue with his writing. That's the exact same thing I have been trying to do for the last twenty years. To all the writers collected

here I hope that you withstand the shocks of the future, find good luck and keep writing so well.

Helen Cross
(www.helencrosss.net)
Department of Film and Creative Writing

GENERAL EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Put a number in each of the boxes below, where 5 is strongly agree, and 1 is strongly disagree. There is no 3, as such, just a spoiled ballot, and an opportunity dodged:

[ ] The economy is a wallet
[ ] Immigration is not a flood

[ ] Politics is the mandate to trade low-fidelity metaphors for hearts and for minds

Mandate is a word that has been bandied around a lot lately. A dry, dry word. *Decree* is silkier, whilst *ratification* flaps and snaps like a rubber band split by a wad of legal documents.

But *mandate—mandate* is the word we have been hearing, and *mandate* is dry. It sounds like two straight, paralleled lines:

=

It sounds like an equals sign.

And so, put a cross in the box that best describes what you are:

[ ] One of the 51.9%
[ ] One of the 48.1%
[ ] The sparseness between these two values

You've come this far. We will assume that you feel that the writers contained in this journal and others like it have a mandate, of sorts, to say something about the world, its language and its literature—about how it was and is, about how it will and, most importantly, should be.

And so, put a number in each of the boxes below, where 5 is strongly agree, and 1 is strongly disagree. There is no 3, as such, just a shrug of the shoulders and a free journal tossed and left skewwhiff on a university table for somebody else to pick up:

[ ] Politics is interactive fiction
[ ] Politics is traditional plotting
[ ] Politics is creative non-fiction
[ ] Politics is stylistic construction
[ ] Politics is a ballet, Shakespearean or frozen in time, in paint—the mere illusion of movement
[ ] Politics is dull futurism, it's yesterday's epiphany
[ ] Politics is fortune-telling, as recession is the Benjapes
[ ] Political parties are each of them jellyfish: 'The thing on the sand has no brain, so I guess in that sense it's kind of all brain'
[ ] Politics is a typecast Natalie Portman
[ ] Politics is space creation, it's uninhibited voices
[ ] Politics is surveillance, loitering in a West Midlands shopping centre for a whiff of how they think, of what makes them tick.
[ ] Politics is an entire island unto itself
[ ] Politics is a kind of rehearsal, talking all the livelong time
[ ] Politics is bloodletting (specifically from the veins next to the anus)
[ ] Politics is red and black minimalism on a postcard
[ ] Politics is auto-ethnography
[ ] Politics is a crank turning, infinitely and without jest

[ ] Writing is the mandate to trade low-fidelity metaphors for hearts and for minds

Thank you to all our readers and contributors, to everyone everywhere who offers a lens through which to see the world anew, or a model for how it can be arranged into a semblance of sense. Thank you to our section editors, peer reviewers and proofreaders, without whom this edition of *The Birmingham Journal of Literature and Language* would be a shadow of what it is.

Tom White and Ed Corless
General Editors

WEAK SIGNALS

ARTICLE

JOHN MCGHEE

The World Future Society *is a not-for-profit organisation for people interested in studying and shaping the future. Held in Washington DC, the Society's 2016 annual conference marked 50 years since its formation.*

1.

Never switch on the television in a hotel room. Find something else to fill the time, rearrange the leather binder of guest information into a random order, transpose the in-room dining menu and the details of car rentals, muddle up evacuation procedures with lists of local attractions: anything, rather than indulging that restless shuffling of available cable. Woozy in the seminar room, I recall the way in which I twitched in and out of sleep the previous night as the movie *Jumanji* played on the flatscreen at the end of the bed. As the speaker on the podium asks if we know how much radioactive material it would take to destroy Silicon Valley utterly (answer: about the size of a grapefruit), I think about the forthcoming *Jumanji* reboot, about how many times *Jumanji* might be remade in the future, and how many of these I was likely to see in my lifetime.

2.

Futurists analyse the future, in the same way that historians analyse the past and journalists analyse the present. I people watch the foyer and try to guess which guests are futurists. Them: the men in dark suits and moccasins telling one another jokes in Japanese? Her: the teenager with comma hair shouldering a humongous bright pink holdall? Him: an older man, moneyed with wide tie hanging too low below his belt, hairline surrendering? From appearance alone, it is impossible to tell how people feel about the future, or whether they think of it at all.

3.

Ethnography is *thick description*. It is like "trying to read a manuscript—foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries." Said Clifford Geertz.

4.

Scanning is a basic technique of futures studies, a methodical seeking of emerging changes in the world that might become more important in the future. These changes, called *scanning hits* or *signals*, are collated, sifted and grouped into trends, which one can then act upon, to anticipate, accelerate or avoid them. To be useful, signals need to be spotted early. The appearance of telepresence robots in the sitcom *Community*, the humanised artificial intelligence of the movie *Her*: Far too late and mainstream for these to be counted as useful signals now. Futurists look instead to the outer fringes: artistic works, the alternative press, academic grey literature, patent applications. Breadth and novelty are prioritised. Multiple sources are triangulated, as individual signals may not in themselves mean much—in fact, they may not mean anything. Though taken together, signals tantalise, give a glimpse of what might be coming next.

5.

"Features of your cat: soft fur inspired by real feline breeds; authentic cat sound effects; *VibraPurr*™ realistic cat purr; movements that mimic a real cat. If your cat stops working, try switching your cat off and then back on again. To avoid tripping, never put your cat on the floor. Available in Creamy White Cat, Silver Cat with White Mitts, Orange Tabby Cat." Said *The Joy For All Companion Pet Cat Care Guide*.

6.

The history of futures studies is inextricably linked to defence planning and corporate strategy with theory and terminology shared between these disciplines. The future tends to emerge in the military and the marketable, weapons and toys. The future makes itself real at the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory in Virginia, the New York Toy Fair, the Adult Entertainment Expo in Las Vegas.

7.

I overhear a man in golfwear speak with an older woman in a black pantsuit: two delegates. They have met before and remind one another of what they do for a living, relate which presentations they intend to go to, then walk off in opposite directions. After a beat, the man turns around, catches the woman by the arm, says "Sorry, I meant to say: how *are* you?"

8.

The geography of large nations debilitates. All conferences held in North America are places for professional interaction mediated by sleep deprivation. Everyone is groggy by default.

9.

Renata at the reception desk beckons me to sign in. She gives me my delegate's badge, an oblong of heavy cardboard attached to a dangling lanyard. Underneath my name, embossed in larger letters, the badge reads: DEDICATED FUTURIST. Beneath that is a line of three coloured spots, three stickers in red, yellow and green. Renata does not explain the purpose of the spots. Other DEDICATED FUTURISTS have different configurations of spots on their badges: red and yellow; red and green; yellow and blue; red, yellow, green and blue. I notice that one delegate's badge is purple, no spots.

10.

"In the past, Citizens used their Talents to accomplish great things. They built their city upon a single promise: to strive for shared values, shared futures and shared fortunes. Now the Citizens must work together to build Hope City. But it won't be easy. PUNKS threaten the city with Chaos and Corruption. If Citizens become corrupt, they Break Bad. The Mayor becomes the Mobster; the Doctor, the Drug Dealer. Is the city then beyond hope?" Said the rulebook of the board game *Hope City*.

11.

"Randomness, openness to accident and serendipity, spontaneity; artistic risk, emotional urgency and intensity, reader/viewer participation; an overly literal tone, as if a reporter were viewing a strange culture; plasticity of form, pointillism; criticism as autobiography; self-reflexivity, self-ethnography, anthropological autobiography; a blurring (to the point of invisibility) of any distinction between fiction and non-fiction: the lure and blur of the real." I pencil-mark the margin beside this paragraph in the copy of David Shields's *Reality Hunger* I buy from *Kramerbooks* the night before the conference starts. I commit to this list as a roadmap for interaction with the futurists over the coming days. Then I tear out the list of citations from the back of the book in accordance with the author's wishes.

12.

The conference is held at the Washington Hilton, a modern, borderline-brutalist hotel just north of Dupont Circle. The hotel is notable for being where newly-elected President Reagan was shot by John Hinckley Jr. in 1981. Sitting in the hotel's coffee shop, I notice the ticker on the rolling news. A judge ordered Hinckley, who was found not guilty by reason of insanity, to be released from St. Elizabeth's Hospital in the autumn. Hinckley now presents no danger to others in the reasonable future, his doctors say.

13.

This summer, Dallas police attached an explosive charge to a bomb disposal robot to kill Micah X. Johnson, a sniper who had earlier murdered five police officers. The technology's intended use was inverted, detonating rather than defusing. This puts me in mind of navigating an unknown path ahead by consulting the back of a map.

14.

In the break out session, we discuss how futures studies seems to some to be an impractical abstract exercise, not serious, a distraction from the real work. When your immediate surroundings are on fire, it can be hard to maintain the mindset of generous curiosity that futures studies necessitates, an openness to the ludic: games and simulations, thought experiments, roleplay and improv, purposeful play. "A child shows his toy, a man hides his." Wrote Antonio Porchia.

15.

We try to be objective. We try not to editorialise. We try not to make stuff up. We play join-the-dots to reveal a hidden image, but the page is covered in so many dots, it is already a black square.

16.

Exactly one hundred and sixteen minutes after the conference starts, I hear someone use the phrase "The future is already here—it's just not evenly distributed." An incisive aphorism but I had lost count how many times I had heard this phrase before, quoted past the point of cliché at every gathering on the topic of the future I had ever attended. As in every specialism, the more one becomes familiar with futures studies's best zingers, the less one is wowed by them, although I still get a kick from Dator's Second Law: "Any useful idea about the future should at first appear to be ridiculous."

17.

Epiphanies are ludicrously ubiquitous. One is now not surprised when a businessman, standing in front of other businessmen, irrespective of the venue or the topic, talks about a single moment that totally recast their take on life. The prototypical epiphany of this sort is that of the industrialist Ray Anderson, who fundamentally reshaped his carpet tile business to reduce its pollution to zero after reading environmentalist Paul Hawken's book *The Ecology of Commerce* (sample quote: "Given current corporate practices, not one wildlife reserve, wilderness or indigenous culture will survive the global market economy […] There is no polite way to say that business is destroying the world.") Anderson described this as his "spear-in-the-chest moment". After Anderson, there is a spear aimed

sooner or later at the chest of every businessman, or so it seems. TED talks are full of them. It would take no effort to be cynical. It is a neat narrative for a well-off capitalist: a life in the marketplace, ultimately repented. In my mind, I am inclined to let it slide. Epiphanies for everyone! If future studies has a role to make the future better, then perhaps this role involves a routine inspiration of epiphanies in those who desperately need to have them.

18.

"Conventional economics is a form of brain damage." Asserted David Suzuki.

19.

"But TED talks are bullshit, right?"

20.

The first World Futures Society conference was held here, in the Washington Hilton, in 1971. The interior design of the hotel still resonates of an earlier age; it does not feel futuristic at all. This dissonance between topic and venue crystallises in the kvetching of delegates about the design and condition of the carpets in the meeting rooms. "Are we in the fifties?" one speaker asks hammily, referring to the faded purple and beige whorls covering the floor. Another insists that if they never again found themselves in a meeting room like this, it would be too soon. I talk with a futurist who reported on the future of floor coverings for a client: trends in adhesives, installation and construction, relative prospects for LVT versus laminate, advances in tufting machines and twisters. I do not mind the Hilton's décor so much. It reminds me that much of what is needed for the future is already built, the future is crafted from the present, that we never have the luxury of working from a blank piece of paper. Things that exist persist, even those we would prefer did not.

21.

In the sixties and seventies—the formative days of the discipline—futures studies claimed too much, and its rise was compromised by failed predictions. The academic futurists and commercial consultants who speak at the conference are self-effacing in the main. They pre-empt potential criticisms of their forecasts, undercut their own methods, note the limitations inherent to their science. "We don't think our way is better than any other way", one speaker says of their thinktank's methodology, "It's the best way we've worked out so far and we hope it works for you." Intellectually, I understand how it misses the point to judge futurists after the fact on whether what they said came true. Rather, the value of the work is determined by whether we choose to do the right thing now based on

what they say about what's next. But there are no future facts. About the future, everyone is right until they are proved wrong.

22.

1967 *The Year 2000*
1967 *The Art of Conjecture*
1968 *The Population Bomb*
1971 *Future Shock*
1972 *Limits To Growth*
1973 *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*
Peak futurism.

23.

The first episode of *Star Trek* was broadcast on 8 September 1966. The founding of the World Future Society was announced a month later on 28 October 1966. Gene Roddenberry became a member of the Society in the early years, and gifted a membership to Leonard Nimoy. Fifty years on, *Star Trek* remains dominant as the most coherent, most compelling positive popular vision of the future. When the co-founder and CEO of private space firm *Moon Express* speaks, his influences are revealed in his aphorisms: "We live on the best planet in the solar system"; "Capitalism may not work on earth but it works in space"; "When we travel to the moon, we will uphold the Prime Directive."

24.

Futurists bring an expectation with them, that you will hear something strange, something you did not already know. But the bizarre must be titrated, as what is enough for one client is too much for another. Fringiness is expected but must be defused, made safe. Tell them about extinguishers that put out forest fires with sound waves. Do not refer to alien megastructures.

25.

All conferences are awful because all conferences demand networking. Delegates introduce themselves. I have never heard of the companies they work for and vice versa. One has to prepare oneself, otherwise the question "Who do you work for?" can lead to excessive and paralysing philosophical reflection. There is a self-promotional aspect to all disciplines, but futurism is tinged historically with hucksterism. One delegate passes me a business card the size of a paperback novel, containing contact details, Hollywood-style headshot, extensive mission statement and a short story about a professor who spends his life staring down the wrong end of a telescope.

26.

DARPA, the US military's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, has a long-standing project on storytelling, one delegate tells me. It relates to how stories persuade. You hear a story, say, about a poker game in which a con artist swindles a businessman out of a large sum of money through card manipulation and use of a trick deck. The businessman is left destitute and distrustful. The con artist retires to a private island where, four years later, he is attacked and eaten by a crocodile. DARPA's research suggests that how you respond to a story like that depends on the fate of the character with whom you most identify. Stories that end well for your character will motivate action, but only in the long term. Stories that end badly for the character you see yourself as, these motivate you much more strongly in the short term. So, do you see yourself as the businessman or the con artist? Or the crocodile? I fear I may have been negligent here, as the writer of this anecdote, for not considering the moral impact of this story on your future actions. I am reminded that all futurism is about unintended consequences.

27.

"The *NUKEMAP* is aimed at helping people visualise nuclear weapons on terms they can make sense of - helping them to get a sense of the scale of the bombs. Google Maps data is displayed along with a custom-built Javascript model to show various nuclear weapons effects. In simpler terms, this means that the *NUKEMAP* is code that can work with Google Maps technology to show you what happens when a bomb goes off."

28.

"It is a paradox: we have to point to evidence in the past, and things that are happening now, in order to convince people about what could happen next. Otherwise, a client might ask: what did you do, smoke a bunch of dope and make this stuff up? It is a balance. Too safe, and what you say is dismissed as obvious. Too much imagination, you will never be believed."

29.

Around the dinner table, the futurist sitting next to me mentions he majored in anthropology. There are nods of approval, as six of eight delegates around the banqueting table also had studied anthropology. My neighbour says futurists should give more consideration to anthropology's notion of "embodiment". Our bodies are affected by what we think about the future. When we envisage the future, we *feel* the future, he says gesturing his fist towards his chest.

30.

The future of granola. The future of dip and dunk film processing. The future of the school garden movement. The future of inner city credit unions. The future of smart carpets. The future of brain enhancement. The future on anticipatory government. The future of cockfighting.

31.

I admit it. I am looking for out-and-out goofballs. I cannot find any out-and-out goofballs. In the opening speech, we are told "Weird people are winners." I see thoughtful educated people who are genuinely concerned about humanity. They do not seem all that weird to me.

32.

"Future forecasting is miserable work that leads you to consider the worst-case scenario for everything", according to Warren Ellis, whose recent novel *Normal* is set in an asylum for depressed futurists suffering the effects of "abyss gaze". A conference speaker comments that it is ineffective to be a depressed futurist. The more you study the future, the more tangible become the dark and desperate futures that are all too probable. Eschatology mesmerises. Not all problems can be intellectually conjectured. Those that can are typically: one, sufficiently worrying that they are worth addressing and two, not so terrifying and unsolvable that we sink into despair whenever they are mentioned.

33.

Supervolcano, meteor impact, anthropogenic climate change, worldwide pandemic, nuclear Armageddon through war, error or terror, out-of-control artificial intelligence, particle accelerator accidents, misuse of biotech or nanotech, cataclysmic economic collapse and global totalitarianism. When thinking about the future, it is easy to become distracted by catastrophe.

34.

"That is just the beginning. I've seen things you've only seen in your nightmares. Things you can't even imagine." From *Jumanji.*

35.

In seminar sessions, we measure with accuracy the dimensions of our filter bubble, accuse ourselves. Futurists do not make anything happen. Futurists talk to themselves. Futurists are liberal and middle-aged, white English-speaking men educated to the point of

being over-credentialed, in love with science fiction, technology, disruption and good stories. We are sincere, we say. We know our flaws.

36.

It is not novel to note that futures studies arose from a western, technocratic academic base. Maybe I'm projecting but the futurists here are rather embarrassed about that. Nearly a quarter of a century ago, Ziauddin Sardar argued that futures studies was a way for a cadre of American, male scholars to de-legitimise non-Western and female voices in discussions about the future. This elite sought to *colonise* the future. I look at my fellow delegates listening intently to an explanation of how vaccine-carrying drones can best manoeuvre through tropical rainforests and conclude we would see ourselves as awkward colonial governors. Advisors, not kings.

37.

"Honda develops mindreading cars that know how drivers are feeling. Levitation of nanodiamonds could bring advances in quantum processing. US Air Force creates Space Mission Force to prevent war in space." Reports *Futureseek*, an online digest of signals.

38.

When you watch a stage musical, there are moments when you know the company is about to break into song before they start. You have a premonition or intuitive flash before the actor takes a deeper breath and the music rises. I have just this feeling as the chair of the Society's board, spot lit, addresses the darkened auditorium. "If just one person believes in you, deep enough and strong enough, believes in you …" She speaks the phrase initially, then half-sings, then goes full-Broadway. "It stands to reason, that someone else will think, 'If he can do it, I can do it.'" I fail to recognise the song. The chair has a solid musical theatre voice. She is joined on stage by her young daughter, and they duet. "Making it two whole people, who believe in you ..." From seats in the ballroom, more people stand and join the chorus on the stage behind the chair and her daughter. I wonder if I should stand up and walk to the front with them; fortunately before I do, I realise I don't recognise any of the singers, conclude they are not delegates but probably locals brought in specially for this episode. The choir concludes: "Maybe even you, can believe in you too!" It is the end of the first day of the conference. Delegates head out to the bar or their hotel rooms, some uplifted, some merely puzzled. Back in my room, I identify the song as "Just One Person", the last number from the fifty-year-old show *Snoopy: The Musical*. I learn that *Snoopy: The Musical*, just like its predecessor *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown,* consists of a series of loosely-connected vignettes, virtually plotless.

39.

"*Poetic voice*, n. A new breed of artist and speaker who gives voice to your most powerful story, and shows you the best version of yourself to help you live into it. When Sekou Andrews tells people that, before creating a new inspirational speaker category, he was a successful 'full-time poet,' you would think that he had said 'full-time mermaid,' or 'freelance unicorn' based on the reactions he gets. But the truth is no less fantastical." Reads the website of Sekou Andrews.

40.

One futures studies technique is to create personas, conjure up named characters living in an imagined future to test scenarios and generate empathy with future generations. A woman is treated for PTSD through virtual reality after losing her husband in an autonomous car crash. A nine-year-old is on the run from cyborg policeman after committing fraud on the blockchain. But character is action. Without stories to bring them to life, without *agency*, these personas are no more real than the flat characters of history books and newspaper reports.

41.

"Eyewitness accounts become mistaken as the only ones that matter. Privilege becomes the ability to curate one's own experiences. In the old colonial world and in the Third World, personal experience crushes and demoralises. It is something that happens to the individual and to the collective. It is not a supermarket where one is able to choose and pay for carefully packaged and sterile experiences." Wrote Brian Fawcett.

42.

Thomas Friedman conceived the "super-empowered angry individual", noted how access to increasingly sophisticated technology enables individuals working on their own to cause greater and greater disruption. The futurist James Cascio countered with the concept of "super-empowered hopeful individuals" who, through technology, might bring about massive positive change in the world. This appeals, but then again, everyone knows what a "catastrophe" is. But the word for its opposite—for many good things happening at once—is a little known and disagreeable neologism, "benestrophe".

43.

We reflect upon the implications of the fact the U.S. does not produce enough vegetables to meet its own national dietary requirements. Adults should consume three cups of vegetables a day, but less than two cups are available per head. The majority of

available vegetables are tomatoes, potatoes and lettuce. Later, at *Shake Shack* on 18th: cheeseburger with lettuce, bacon and tomato, crinkle cut fries.

44.

A farmer, a wife and his daughter are featherbrains, textbook stupid. The daughter's boyfriend is the opposite, a paragon of practical logic. One night, the daughter looks up at the ceiling of the farmhouse's cellar, sees an axe stuck there. She imagines that, in her future, she has a son and the axe falls from the ceiling, onto the son's head and killing him. She cries. The daughter tells the mother about the axe, tells her father. They cry together. Then, they tell the daughter's boyfriend, who laughs and removes the axe from the ceiling. After that, the boyfriend goes out into the world, vowing to return and marry the daughter if he finds anyone more foolish than this family. To the delegates seated in the International Ballroom, the representative of the deep-pocketed charitable foundation relates this "the Story of the Sillies".

45.

Using gene splicing, we have been able to identify the differences between Neanderthal brains and our own. Neanderthal brains have forty different genes to *homo sapiens* and, by experimenting with Neanderthal brain organoids—clumps of engineered cells, commonly thought of a "brains on a dish"—researchers have identified what they believe to be the gene related to the human imagination. This has the potential to provide an explanation why there are no funny cave paintings.

46.

Futures studies can be applied to one's own life, through a technique called "Personal Futures". You identify your own life stage, the trends and likely future events that might affect you, and take steps in the present to prepare for the more predictable surprises in your future. A delegate relates her experience with Personal Futures. It was terrifying, she says.

47.

When we invent technologies, we understand what they do but we do not know what they mean. Silhouetted against a blank sky, a telegraph wire is populated with a row of bird-sized drones.

48.

The future belongs to those who give the next generation reason for hope. Said Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

49.

"It is a difficult time to be an optimistic futurist."

50.

I changed my life entirely when I was critically injured in a waterskiing accident. I changed my life entirely when I was found passed out on the carpet. I changed my life entirely when I was prosecuted for dogfighting. Nothing ages faster than yesterday's tomorrow. Nothing is harder to rationalise than yesterday's epiphany.

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ANNE BOYER, *GARMENTS AGAINST WOMEN* AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LYRIC ESSAY IN CONTEMPORARY CREATIVE WRITING

BOOK REVIEW

SEAN COLLETTI

Among the many subgenres of creative non-fiction—the most underrepresented and underexplored major genre of creative writing—the lyric essay has managed to find its way into print more and more over the last few decades. Unfortunately, this increase has occurred mostly in the United States. And perhaps even less fortunately, many of these books of lyric essays have been written by established novelists, who have earned enough goodwill (and sales) to take a short break from fiction. Ali Smith's *Artful*, Jonathan Franzen's *How to Be Alone* and Zadie Smith's *Changing My Mind* all confront the lyric essay in one form or another, but it is hard to imagine any of these books making it to print without the success of *The Accidental*, *The Corrections* and *White Teeth* respectively.

With so many small, independent publishing houses in America, it is easier to put out a book like Anne Boyer's *Garments Against Women*, written by an author who is primarily known as a poet, but who exemplifies why experimentation in form and genre-crossing are absolutely essential practices when it comes to to maintaining the health of creative writing.

The sixteen pieces that make up *Garments Against Women* are sometimes prose, sometimes poetry, and always deeply thoughtful. These pieces manage to achieve that thoughtfulness not through careful construction, but by inspiring the impression that they are totally improvisational. Boyer pins down a narrative voice that expresses itself in short bursts of thought, and follows these trains of thought without necessarily dwelling on how they are connected.

Without explicitly addressing the issue in the text, Boyer highlights how current technology affects how literature is both written and received. A piece like "At Least Two Types of People" has the look and feel of clickbait, and so much of the book is written in the kind of concise, digestible chunks that would make even the most easily distracted consumer of articles feel comfortable. But Boyer's use of language and construction of text is so intricate and specific that nothing in *Garments Against Women* makes for easy reading—it is an exceedingly difficult text, but this difficulty comes with the huge payoff of seeing a writer translate the disjointed thought processes and short attention of spans of the average person onto the page with genuine aesthetic beauty.

"*Ma Vie en Bling*: A Memoir" is the centrepiece in this regard. Billed as a memoir, (probably the most popular subgenre of creative non-fiction), it is a moving and lengthy

piece of prose in which an Anne Boyer is constructed who is hugely unsure about her surroundings. By the end of the piece, the constructed Anne doesn't even know what she is writing anymore:

> I am now finishing a book: it is called "the innocent question" or it is called "garments against women" or it is called "this champion: life." (83)

Throughout the mini-memoir, this uncertainty creates a kind of excitement in which every interaction—including ones with Anne Boyer's daughter, who refers to Anne Boyer *as* Anne Boyer, and makes observations that are beyond the linguistic capabilities of a five-year-old—and every realisation feels fresh and meaningful. In that sense, *Garments Against Women* capitalises on one of the traditional qualities of the short story, condensed here into something like micro-fiction, by creating epiphanies for its narrators.

At times, reading Boyer ceases to feel like reading, and feels more like listening to a voice in your head. In this way, "Twilight Revery" encapsulates the erratic way the mind works at night when it can't fall asleep, and moves from notion to notion, or else builds on ideas in ways that the fully conscious mind tends to filter into something more streamlined:

> Assume my greatest talent remains dreaming while still awake. I can talk through it. I'm being literal. You could lie in bed with me and hear for yourself. (52-53)

There is an immediacy to the voice that never seems judgmental despite being hyper-intelligent. Instead, the reader is invited to accompany the voice as it considers some part of a dialectic, or seeming contradiction, especially in the opening piece, "The Animal Model of Inescapable Shock", which is a terrifyingly poignant series of suggestions regarding how and why people find comfort in emotionally painful situations.

The most impressive quality of *Garments Against Women* is how it blends genres of writing together. Labeled a book of poetry by some publications, nailing the text down to one genre feels irresponsible. And this is precisely the kind of writing that authors like David Shields (*Reality Hunger*) have been calling for—the kind that recognises how contemporary fiction has been treading water, and is in desperate need of a new and invigorating aesthetic movement.

More books like *Garments Against Women* will be published, as more writers become skeptical of traditional plotting in fiction, and its ability to engage with contemporary reality. Hopefully, more readers will gravitate to writers like Boyer, who achieve the impossible level of connection between text and reader that makes the art of reading such a unique experience.

CREATING SPACE FOR UNINHIBITED VOICES: EMIRATES AIRLINE LITERATURE FESTIVAL- DUBAI FESTIVAL CITY, MARCH 1-13, 2016

NOTE

SELENA RATHWELL

The Emirates Airline Literature Festival, known as LitFest, is now in its eighth year and is heralded as the only festival of its kind within the Gulf Region. With its international reputation still developing, the festival came under public scrutiny in 2016 when British children's author Jonathon Emmet launched a boycott campaign titled "Think Twice". In *The Guardian*, Emmett argued for the boycott of the festival on three points: free speech, human rights, and rather incongruously, climate change. His quarrel lay specifically with the sponsorship: Emirates Airlines and patron Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and ruler of Dubai. Emmett's boycott is not without precedent. In 2009, British author Geraldine Bedell claimed her first novel, *The Gulf Between Us,* had been banned from launch at the Festival. She cited homosexual activity and governmental criticism as the reasons for the ban. In political sympathy, headliner Margaret Atwood pulled out from the festival in response. However, it soon emerged that Bedell's novel had not been banned at all, but rather dismissed as the first uneven work of an unknown author, and Atwood recanted her accusations. She appeared at the festival via video conference and publically praised Festival CEO Isobel Abulhoul for her transparent responses to Atwood's queries. Abdulhoul, working alongside Sheikh Mohammed, appears dedicated to ensuring free expression at the festival, while developing an international reputation for integrity.

Feminist authors Marjane Satrapi, Nawal El Saadawi, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and Rajaa al Sanea have spoken at the festival, providing legitimacy, but also evidence of the struggle of the festival to gain validity. It does not seem simply an attempt to appease dissenters: one intersectional feminist academic might be tokenism, but the sustained theme instead conveys a conscious decision on behalf of the organizer, owner, and by extension, the UAE. Guyanese-British poet Grace Nichols, Pakistani Imtiaz Dhaker and British Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy continued the trend in 2016. Also present were Arab feminist intellectuals. Dubai Women's Museum founder Rafia Ghubash spoke on a panel about the changing role of women in the Gulf, recanting accusations of the region's oppression of women. The names suggest the Emirates literature festival is curated to portray freedom of expression, which is discordant with the reputation of the country. Abdulhoul and Sheikh Mohammed select authors whose reputations negate accusations

made by dissenters such as Emmet.

Duffy's presence at the 2016 festival was indicative of the festival's attempts to provide a liberal space for expression and discussion. The UAE's policies towards homosexuality are heavily publicized - homosexual acts can incur the death penalty. In 2008, a visiting lesbian couple was detailed for one month for kissing on a beach. How then, can LitFest persuade LGBT writer and activist Duffy to attend the event and turn a blind eye to her sexually explicit, pro-LGBT rights and openly feminist work? Duffy, in response to the 2016 shootings at a gay nightclub in Orlando, USA, penned the poem "Gay Love", stating "God is Gay", perhaps the most controversial three word combination in the Arab world. LitFest is a calculated effort of Sheikh Mohammed's *wasta* (an Arabic term for influence/bribery). With money or prestige no rules apply, and many expatriate or high-ranking Emirati can attest this hypocrisy. While Emmett might cast aspersions on the patronage of the festival, Sheik Mohammed's involvement actually grants the festival immunity by his name and position: the inclusivity of the festival is a direct result of his *wasta*.

While the 2016 LitFest strived to create a microcosm of expression within a culture of oppression, there remained elements of jarring discordance as a result of the patronage. Rather than censorship, branding and capitalism flavoured the event unevenly. In the first inaugural Sir Maurice Flanagan Poetry *Diwan* (Flanagan being the former CEO of the airline), Duffy read a selection of her poetry with great wit and vigor while accompanied by 'court musician' John Sampson on a selection of medieval instruments. The event opened rather incongruously, as Duffy's feminist verses were framed with perfunctory Arabic speech delivered by an impressive character in traditional Islamic dress. The audience, who appeared to be mostly Dubai housewives and the odd teacher, were nonplussed by the occurrence, despite their probable incomprehension. Duffy, a seasoned performer, had no problem adapting to the eccentricities of her event. The venue of her performance also seemed dissonant. While most events took place in the well-heeled Intercontinental Hotel, Duffy read unceremoniously inside the NOVO theatre at Festival City Shopping Mall. After the performance, Duffy's poetry was for sale next to the concession stand, while the poet herself was available to sign autographs amidst the aroma of popcorn. Festival-goers could then have their photo taken with Emirates flight attendants and even don a veiled cap or pilot's hat. Moments like this proved the dependence of a noncompliant festival on the veneer of capitalism. In order for the festival to proceed, the event and the literature it promoted needed to be rebranded to fit the luxury image of Dubai, its insurgent voice rippling beneath the glaze of wealth leant by both Emirates Airline and Sheikh Mohammed.

Shiekh Mohammed has a reputation for moderate liberalism, which is furthered by his own direct involvement in the arts, both as a poet and a philanthropist. His

eponymous, non-profit, cultural centre uses the slogan 'Open Doors. Open Minds', evidencing his interest in freedom of expression and ideas. His decision to support the festival can be read as a recognition of literature's ability to insidiously challenge oppressive conventions and lead countries to change. His patronage, and deft appropriation of capitalist forms, allows the festival to continue in its uncensored, probably unprofitable state, building cultural capital and offering space for uninhibited voices.

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AT THE TEMPLE

SHORT STORY

SOM PANCHARLE THONGPANICH

I

Chaiwat Soonthorn had his first major accident when he was 25 years old. Everyone in his family had known something bad was going to happen. 25 is an age when bad things tended to happen: a road accident, severe illness, a lawsuit, a break-up, to name a few. Chaiwat's parents had tried to avert this fate by asking a monk to name him. The 'Ch' in his first name was meant to bring wealth and good fortune, and 'wat' was believed to prevent bad luck.

His parents came to the emergency room when Chaiwat was lying in a hospital bed with a broken rib and a mild concussion. The doctor was cute and when he opened the door to let Chaiwat's parents in, Chaiwat could not help looking at that tight butt.

'Are you all right, darling?' his mother touched the places where the bandages were. Her voice would have gone in one ear and out the other had she not poked at his ribs. He winced.

'I'm all right, mum. It was just an accident.'

'You should know better,' his father said. 'What with you being 25, the Benjapes age. You should have been more careful.'

'Don't be superstitious, dad. It was the truck driver's fault, not mine.'

'Listen to your father, Chai. We've all been through the Benjapes. Your aunt had dengue fever and nearly died. Your father almost drowned in a river. I was heartbroken from an eight-year-relationship before I met your father. Do you see what I mean?' His mother looked intensely at him.

'I'll be more careful. I promise.'

'That's not enough,' his father said. 'I've seen our fortune teller. She said worse things are yet to pass. Unless, that is, you give yourself to the Buddhist's sacred world and become a monk.'

'What? No way!'

'Your father's right. The fortune teller says you've picked up bad karma from your previous life, and it's affecting this life despite all the good you've done. The only thing that's powerful enough to relieve the burden of this karma is to become a monk. Think

of your cousin, Mech. He was a thin, sickly child until he became a Buddhist novice. Now he's healthy, happily married, and has two sons.

'I don't know.'

'We'll never stop worrying unless you do this,' said his mother. 'The Buddhist lent lasts only three months.' And on cue, his mother's ultimate weapon—her tears—started to well up in her eyes. 'Plenty of boys do a three-month ordination for the Vassa.[1] Even if you don't believe in the Benjapes, can't you just do it so that we don't have to constantly be worried about you?'

Chaiwat's father had the last word. 'Come on, son. You've just quit your third job. You don't have any grand plans for your life right now, do you? You know what? I'll even buy you a car after this. I've always hated that you ride a bike.'

Chaiwat liked the idea of independence from time to time, but he knew he was not strong enough to say no.

II

Without hesitation, Chaiwat's parents put him in the nearest temple. He was not sure whether they simply wished to get rid of him. It was three days before Vassa, and he was obliged to stay at the temple and learn the prayers and ritual steps before the ordination. It was a slow, peaceful life without distractions: just sleeping, eating, doing chores, meditating, and chanting dharma lines. At the end of the third day, he imagined himself living in that scene, and it didn't look so bad anymore.

On the day of his ordination, his head and eyebrows were shaved before he entered the ubosot.[2] He was given a new Pali name of Pra Mahatee which signified the beginning of a monk's life. A boy named Pong was assigned to him to be his assistant. Pong was one of the Dek Wat, the boys who lived at the temple and assisted the monks in return for food, somewhere to sleep, and sometimes education. Pong was fourteen years old, scrawny and shy, but quick enough and smart enough to help Pra Mahatee adjust to his new life. On his first day after ordination, Pong was first to wake in the morning. He helped Pra Mahatee dress, wrapping a six-foot-long piece of cloth around his body. The process was complicated, and he would have been at a loss doing it himself. When he was ready, Pong went to fetch the already polished steel bowl for Pra Mahatee and a giant plastic sack for himself. They joined a line of monks gathering in the courtyard, a line that wound its way slowly out of the temple and into the outside world. When the monks and Dek Wat returned to the temple with sacks full of food, fresh and

[1] In Thailand, where all Buddhist males customarily spend some time in a monastery, the Vassa is a favoured period for temporarily experiencing the life of a monk.

[2] The holiest prayer room, where ordinations take place.

dry, and bundles of incense sticks and flowers, they all had breakfast together. Pra Mahatee was surprised to see some of the monks mixed together the food from the morning alms round—sweet and savory—in a single bowl. The taste must have been awful, he thought to himself, but he learned later that that was the point: To be indifferent to the pleasure of eating food and to consider the natural state of food in the mouth in relation to the natural state of life. The profundity of this idea inspired Pra Mahatee, who endeavored to incorporate the philosophy into his own thinking and behavior.

It was too bad that the Buddhist ceremony of Vassa itself was so far removed from the calm atmosphere he had come to expect at the temple.

'We are going to get married. Could you find an auspicious date for our wedding day?'

'This is my newly-born baby. Would you mind naming him so he'll have a good life?'

'Please spray holy water on us.'

'Could you tell me tomorrow's winning lottery numbers?'

'Could you perform a ceremony to change my son's bad fortune?'

'These are good quality offerings for you. By the way, are there any sacred amulets for donors?'

So many challenging questions in a single day. The small suburban temple became a one-stop shop for all things sacred, where problems could be solved with prayers. He was never a great believer in supernatural things, and he didn't feel any different after he was ordained. Certainly, there was no magical power coursing through his veins. If holy abilities lay in the chanting of words, then everyone sprayed with blessings would have lived happily ever after. But still, a steady stream of people kept coming to the temple throughout the day. While he was anxious about the massive crowd, other monks seemed unperturbed. Some even appeared cheerful, saying it was good for business.

At the end of the day, his voice was raspy and his lips parched from chanting all day. The temple had been gifted with enough candles and fluorescent bulbs to stave off darkness for half a year. The donation money would be enough to build another pavilion and erect a new golden image of Buddha. The people left with the comforting feeling of having done good deeds which would bring wealth and fortune in the future. It was a win-win situation for everyone involved.

III

An inner conflict between what a monk was and what he appeared to be troubled Pra Mahatee, but his discomfort receded as he thought less of himself, and spent more of his

time observing others. After the morning alms round, Pong usually headed for the temple's school nearby. Pra Mahatee would see him again late in the afternoon, sweeping leaves in the courtyard. While other boys played football in the courtyard, Pra Mahatee would see Pong sitting on a bench at the foot of the stairs, reading books or doing homework, always alone. He pitied the boy, but it was not a monk's duty to get attached to people or things and certainly it was not for him to dwell on feelings or emotions. All he could do was to give the boy enough light chores to keep him busy and to take the boy with him wherever he went.

One morning, Pra Mahatee woke before dawn and, finding Pong absent, prepared himself. The boy had never been late before, so he checked the building where the Dek Wat slept. It was deserted except for Pong, lying on his mattress. Pong's hands were clenched around his belly, and he was moaning softly. Another boy followed Pra Mahatee inside, and told him that the other monks were waiting for him. Pra Mahatee asked him what had happened to Pong. The boy shrugged: 'Looks like food poisoning.'

It could be yesterday's food, Pra Mahatee thought. Leftovers from morning offerings were the main food source at the temple. Monks stopped eating after midday, and some of the food was passed on to the Dek Wat for dinner or supper. Curries made with coconut milk went bad quickly. He had once seen Pong make a meal out of curry oil—which he had spooned from the top of a spoilt curry—and boiled broken rice.

Pra Mahatee thought for a moment, then he told the boy to tell the other monks that he would not be joining them. The boy looked at him for a moment before he left. Pra Mahatee went to a wooden cabinet at the back of the room. He rummaged through plastic boxes until he found one with medicines. He took a spoon and a bottle filled with a thick, white liquid and walked back to Pong's bed. The boy thrashed about but Pra Mahatee held his chin firmly and put the spoonful of white liquid in his mouth before releasing his grip. Pong was still for a moment, but soon looked as though he was likely to throw up. Pra Mahatee rummaged through Pong's bedside cabinet to find a plastic bag, and found one next to a stack of papers that caught his eye for some reason. He took out the plastic bag and gave it to the boy. Pong heaved twice into the bag, uncurled himself, and spread his limbs out over the bed, exhausted. Before long, the rhythm of Pong's chest moving up and down suggested sleep, and so Pra Mahatee left him there. But not before he had picked up the papers he had spied in the boy's cabinet. It was a magazine showing pictures of naked men.

IV

Pra Mahatee's parents visited him two months after his ordination. After enquiring generally about his life at the temple, the conversation slowly turned to life outside.

'Only two months left. Have you thought about what to do after this?' his father asked.

'Not really. Being a monk means focusing on the present moment, rather than yesterday or tomorrow.'

'Well, maybe you should,' his mother said. 'Your father and I are getting older and it is time for us to have grandchildren.'

'How can you say that? It's a sin to think of women while I'm still a monk!'

'Just give it some thought, son,' said his father. 'You're our only son. It's not a sin if you don't have sexual thoughts. We just need to plan ahead, and look for a suitable woman to be our daughter-in-law.'

A son's highest responsibility was to obey his parents and take care of them, but he was beginning to suspect that he had let them take complete control over his life. He wasn't interested in dating women, let alone marrying them. Celibacy might be a way out, and no excuse was more perfect than that of monkhood. An image of Pong and his magazine popped into his head.

'I don't want to leave the monkhood. I think I might be a monk for life,' said Pra Mahatee.

They waited for a sign that he meant this as a joke. They found none, and panicked. Then they protested and argued. After a while, they retreated.

V

Life at the temple was more or less the same every day, but now there was tension, and the glances that Pong gave to Pra Mahatee when he thought the monk wasn't looking. The silence between them lasted for a week until one evening when Pra Mahatee caught Pong rummaging through his belongings. Pra Mahatee stood still and counted his breaths to calm himself. Pong was sat cross-legged in front of him. His eyes were downcast and his head was lowered—he was waiting for his judgement. Pra Mahatee walked into the bathroom, fetched a rolled-up magazine from under one of the ceiling tiles and dropped it in front of Pong. Pong's eyes widened but he remained silent.

'I found this in your cupboard,' Pra Mahatee said. 'Do you accept it is yours?'

'Yes,' Pong said, still avoiding any eye contact.

'Why do you have a magazine of naked men in your cupboard?' Pra Mahatee asked curtly.

Pong blushed and bit his lower lips but no words came out until Pra Mahatee asked again, 'Why do you have it?'

'Because I like men.'

'Does anyone else know?'

'I don't think so,' Pong said. 'They tease me sometimes because I don't like playing football with them, but I don't think they know.'

'I won't tell the abbot about this but you have to promise one thing.'

'What is that?'

'Keep your interest in men to yourself.'

Pong looked up at Pra Mahatee. He could see defiance in Pong's eyes and he knew that whatever happened, Pong would never change. He was who he was, but he was also Pra Mahatee's responsibility.

'You should leave now,' Pra Mahatee said quietly. Pong stood up to leave, his eyes catching first on the magazine then on Pra Mahatee's face. Pra Mahatee shook his head.

The next day Pra Mahatee went to the temple's abbot and asked for a new Dek Wat. He told the abbot that it was because of personal reasons and refused to say more. The abbot finally agreed and sent Pong to serve another monk named Pra Paribut who was renowned for his strict rules and harsh punishment. Jod, Pra Mahatee's new boy, was fat and lazy, and needed to be told what to do twice before the task was done. He heard from Jod that Pong's life was harder now because he was not fast or thorough enough for Pra Paribut, and from time to time, others could see red marks on Pong's calves as a result of his incompetence.

Pra Mahatee felt helpless.

VI

The three-month period of Pra Mahatee's ordination was coming to an end. It was his last week of monkhood, but he had not decided if he wanted to stay or not. When the abbot called him for a meeting that afternoon, he thought it was something to do with the upcoming ceremony. When Pra Mahatee stepped inside the abbot's room, he was surprised to see Pong and Jod there too.

'We are here because an allegation was made against you, Pra Mahatee,' the abbot said when they were all seated.

'I haven't broken any rules,' Pra Mahatee said confidently.

'The allegation requires me to investigate your sexuality.' The abbot held his breath before he asked, 'Are you a homosexual?'

'No.'

'Are you sure? I have evidence.'

'Any evidence would be false.'

The abbot pulled Pong's magazine from his drawer and put it in front of him. 'Jod found this in your room,' the abbot said then turned to speak to Jod. 'In the toilet, you say?'

Jod nodded.

'It's not mine,' Pra Mahatee said. He was careful not to look at Pong.

'This is your last chance to confess. Why do you insist on lying even when the evidence and the witness point out the truth so clearly? If it's not yours, then whose is it?'

Why indeed, Pra Mahatee asked himself. Why was he protecting a gay boy? A boy who no longer was his responsibility. Perhaps it was guilt, a way to make amends. Perhaps it was about standing up and protecting someone he cared about. Whether it was for the right or wrong reasons, he did not know, but he stood his ground.

'I can only say that it is not mine.' Pra Mahatee emphasised each word. Then he kept his silence, but his eyes wandered to Pong, who hurriedly composed himself and looked down.

The abbot turned to Pong and said, 'You were under his care before. Do you know anything about this?'

Pra Mahatee thought he could sense a whirlwind of thoughts and emotions roiling around in Pong's head. It seemed like a long time before Pong looked up, but when he did, Pra Mahatee saw a smirk. He said, 'It's his magazine. I found out his secret, that he was gay, so he sent me away.'

'Liar! How could you do this? I…' Words sputtered out of Pra Mahatee's mouth, but he was interrupted by the abbot.

'Enough. I gave you a chance to confess but you refused, so I have no choice. You will be defrocked tomorrow morning and you will leave the temple immediately afterwards.'

'But…'

'Leave!' the abbot said curtly. Pra Mahatee stood and left, all the while fighting back tears.

VII

Pra Mahatee left the temple the next day. He became Chaiwat Soonthorn again as soon as he stepped out of the temple. Chaiwat's father kept his word and bought him a sports car. Six months later, Chaiwat married a woman of his parents' choosing. Her family and financial backgrounds were flawless, and both families benefited from the union. He saw the bride-to-be once before the date was set and she looked fine. A slender, petite frame and long black hair reminded him of an expensive china doll. She was pretty enough to be taken to social events and his mother assured him that her cooking skills were exceptional. He knew she would make a perfect wife for any man.

On the morning of his wedding day, his parents insisted that he and the bride offer food to monks in front of his house to bring good fortune. When everything was prepared, the four of them waited.

A train of monks arrived, the abbot and Pong among them. The monks stopped and waited for Chaiwat's family to put food bags in their alms bowls. When it was Chaiwat's turn, his parents urged him to hold his bride's hands while putting the food in the monk's bowl so that their love would last through this life and the next. He blushed as he did so. The abbot glanced at him and Pong bit his lower lips. After the food was offered, Chaiwat and his family put their hands together on their chests and bowed their heads for the monks' blessing.

Pong was the last to leave, the Abbot just before him. The abbot's expression was calm. Chaiwat smiled as if to reassure him that there were no hard feelings. As Pong followed, Chaiwat tried to catch a glimpse of his face to see how he felt, but Pong kept his eyes to the ground and walked stiffly away. He was thinner than ever and dark circles under his eyes were visible.

His parents and bride went back into the house, taking the food trays with them. The train of monks moved slowly up the tarmacked street. A thin morning light was shining on their burnt orange robes. He could feel that the scene was being stamped into his mind. He would describe his experience to his children and grandchildren as serene and pious, and his voice would be calm and reassuring, yet overlaid with a longing for the life he could have lived.

THE BOLSHOI BALLET PERFORMS *THE TAMING OF THE SHREW*

NOTE

THEA BUCKLEY

In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shakespeare's warring couple never get a proper love scene. Petruchio demands "Kiss me, Kate" at strategic intervals, and Katharina responds variously: mutely, as an enforced fiancée (II.i.317); placatingly, as a newlywed still "ashamed to kiss" in the "midst of the street" (V.i.145, 143); or submissively, as a wife publicly declaring her hand "ready" to place beneath her husband's foot in "duty" (V.ii.178-179). One can get the impression that Shakespeare's battle of the sexes is neither comic nor romantic. Yet Jean-Christophe Maillot's production for the Bolshoi ballet is a potent rebuke to any preconceptions that this lead couple's partnership inherently invites an unequal characterisation and ungentle treatment.

The Bolshoi *Shrew* had debuted in 2014 but was one of several balletic Shakespeares in town to commemorate the quatercentenary of the playwright's legacy, which it extended by reworking his plot to present a more equal partnership of the sexes. The largely Russian audience surrounding me in the Royal Opera House held their collective breath, as the ballerinas dominated at the start. Sassy and ethereal, they invited us to enter consciously into a world of imagination. To frame the story we got not a drunk Christopher Sly but a vampish housekeeper in Yanina Parienka, a new character who sashayed through the still-closed plush curtains in heels and black feathers. As she preened before us and put the orchestra through their paces, it was clear we were about to be seduced by the combined magic of Shakespeare, Shostakovitch, and a night at the ballet.

Still, I was unprepared for the tenderness with which Maillot's production recalibrated what reviewer Sarah Crompton termed *Shrew*'s "queasy sexual politics" (n. pag.). The ballet format provided dizzying potential for the swift evolution of relationships. At the outset of the first half, the play's young heroines appeared free in their persons and environs, which alternated between monochrome to lush, vibrant reds, blues and greens. Demure Bianca (Nina Kaptsova) and her tempestuous elder sister Katharina (Kristina Kretova) swished around Ernest Pignon-Ernest's moveable set of a double staircase and columns, effortlessly alternating costumes and suitors. Their *pas de troix* was replete with physical comedy, high kicks and slapstick, yet remained uneasy in their harmony. Katharina's dissatisfaction was apparent until the appearance of her counterpart; Denis Savin's swashbuckling Petruchio, brash and tender, matched her

intensity in a dance-off with surprising chemistry.

In reworking *Shrew* to foreground the passionate duet between the leads, a dance both earthy and symbolic, Maillot excised much of the play's recognisable plot. Instead, in between the leads' instant attraction and its slow burn toward inevitable consummation, two embellished interludes stood out. Firstly, the infamous end bet faded away, replaced by a first-half incident that developed after Katharina struck Petruchio. Rather than threatening to cuff her back (II.i.218), here Petruchio was visibly hurt; as he pulled his bride towards him, the onstage crowd collectively turned its back, condoning the inevitable chastisement of a wife by her husband's fist. With Petruchio's subsequent refusal to punish Katharina, the scene was particularly shocking in its implied rejection of both historic and current patriarchal norms.

The second highlight of the Bolshoi *Shrew* was the following exhilarating wedding night duet, which was less delicate waltz than scorching tango. This Petruchio tamed his Katharina by seduction rather than starvation, in an invented scene which managed to retain a very Shakespearean blend of romance and comedy due to the insertion of Grumio (Georgy Gusev), played as a hapless page caught up in the unfolding action. Originally sent to the bedroom to rouse an exhausted Katharina, in order for her to spy a clinically disinterested Petruchio casually lounging with his back to her in the corner, Grumio became trapped by the door. His increasing horror was deeply comical in contrast to the scene's organic sensuality, as the bride slowly explored her powers of seduction, Petruchio's studied indifference melted, and the couple discovered each other's rhythm. At the height of the steamy duet, as the newlyweds collapsed into bed, intertwined in choreographed ecstasy, Grumio threw a sheet over them and fled, only to bring the house down when he returned to sneak a peek underneath it.

Thus, Maillot's directorial interpolations and excisions skewed Shakespeare's *Shrew* along a different bias, serving to enhance our appreciation of the politics of harmony and equality that underlay this production, rather than to showcase the play's misogyny. Perhaps the ballet, as an art that takes pains to place the heroine centre stage, is conducive to themes of female empowerment. Yet ballet's beauty still lies in the continuous ebb and flow of the solo dancer's return to synchrony, emblematised in its *pas de deux*. Maillot's original 'Katharina', ballerina Ekaterina Krysanova, describes the Bolshoi *Shrew* as a 'story of unbelievable attraction, a story of the strongest love, when two beings are on the same wavelength' (*YouTube*). Likewise, her co-star Vladislav Lantratov describes his Petruchio as undergoing his own shrewish reformation, from one who is 'utterly vulgar, with complete disregard for everyone' to one so 'completely in love […], he just opens up to her' *(YouTube)*. Thus Petruchio and Katharina's mutual evolution, rather than her submission, became the focus of Maillot's production and the cynosure of both onstage and offstage eyes.

A note on its sexual politics: this *Shrew*'s advocacy for equality is arguably as appropriate to its own host culture as to those others that made up its breathless international audience. Contemporary Russia's gender ratio is unusually skewed in favour of the female, with 86.8 men per 100 women (*FactTank*). Furthermore, at number 50 its Gender Inequality Index tops the list of countries with High Human Development (UNDP, 2015). Yet Russia's percentage of women in parliament at 14.5% is lower than the developing country average of 20.2%, and even the highest world average is only 26.5%. In other words, translated into the politics of decision-making, women worldwide still submit to the laws and decisions of the male majority; we have not yet achieved a *pas de deux* of equal power.

Altogether, it was impossible to remain unmoved by the Bolshoi *Shrew*'s moment of triumphant union, in an oddly apt transformation from misogynistic bet to voyeuristic duet, and by the production's statement that the taming of self and the force of love are the only required ingredients to earn a kiss from Kate. More of this bewitchery, please.

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"CLANDESTINE PRESENCE": THE CHILD DETECTIVE'S APPROACH TO URBAN SPACE IN CATHERINE O'FLYNN'S *WHAT WAS LOST*

ARTICLE

HOLLY PRESCOTT

Catherine O'Flynn's widely-acclaimed debut novel, *What Was Lost* (2007), explores the tensions between new and old within the landscape of the author's home city of Birmingham. The novel tells the story of Kate Meaney, a conscientious ten-year-old who envisions herself as a detective investigating what she imagines to be the "criminal characters" of her neighbourhood's new shopping centre: "Green Oaks" (O'Flynn, 4). In 1984, Kate's mysterious disappearance leads to a second layer of detection in which local man Adrian—Kate's unlikely best friend—is wrongly detained for her abduction. Almost twenty years after Kate goes missing, Green Oaks's security guard Kurt and Adrian's sister Lisa, an employee at the mall's music superstore, launch an amateur endeavour to clear Adrian's name and uncover the truth behind Kate's vanishing.

In an interview with Rosy Barnes, O'Flynn describes how her debut novel explores not only "the loss of a child," but also "the loss of a landscape", suggesting a close relationship between the fiction of Kate's disappearance and death, and the material decay of the novel's post-industrial Midlands cityscape (Barnes). This paper will therefore examine how Kate's portrayal as a child detective informs this relationship. Indeed, as Lee Horsley describes in her seminal text on twentieth-century crime fiction (2005), scholarship has long associated "the impenetrability and disorder" of the urban landscape with the similarly disordered and "disturbed criminal mind", to which the detective brings order and resolution (28-9). Nevertheless, this paper will instead argue that O'Flynn's novel inverts this traditional association, with Kate's playful and often transgressive detective practices rather exposing the excessive ordering, regulation and surveillance of urban space as a culprit in her demise. To demonstrate this, Kate's detective practices will be analysed through the lens of Tim Edensor's eminent scholarship on contemporary ruins, which views abandoned industrial spaces like those that Kate loves as offering access to subversive and playful spatial appropriations so often prohibited within the increasingly regulated spaces of twenty-first-century UK cities. Indeed, the pervasiveness of surveillance throughout *What Was Lost* is already a central preoccupation of much existing critical commentary on the novel: Nicole Falkenhayner describes how the characters of *What Was Lost* "are overpowered by the agency of … the video camera, and a sense of being constantly supervised", (13), whilst Mike Nellis (2011) admits that "there is a great deal in *What Was Lost* about the desolating experience of being managed,

manipulated and watched" (194). Missing from these analyses, however, is an exploration of how such surveillance colludes with the destruction of the industrial Birmingham landscape to render Kate, and her transgressive uses of urban space, unintelligible and illicit. This article therefore seeks to address this omission, challenging Nellis's conclusion that surveillance and regulation within the world of *What Was Lost* have "no dramatic human consequences" (195).

Kate Meaney is, first and foremost, a child detective. Across numerous examples of contemporary British and American fiction, the trope of the child detective has been used to explore identity formation, where the search for identity is seen as commensurate with an attempt to come to terms with an ever-more disordered world (Gilbert, 242). Take the case of Oskar Schell, the young narrator of American novelist Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005). In the wake of his father's death at the World Trade Centre on 9/11, nine-year-old Oskar becomes consumed with discovering the origins of a mysterious key which he finds hidden in his father's closet. Oskar thus scours New York on a detective quest, one which not only attempts to keep his father alive, but which also serves as an attempt to narrativize and make sense of the confounding landscape of the metropolis which claimed his father's life. In Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time* (2003), child protagonist Christopher, who lives with Asperger's Syndrome, begins the novel with a detective quest to solve the mystery of a dead dog that ultimately leads him on a journey to reveal the truth about his unsettled home life and his mother's death.

Critics of the genre explain this association in more detail. Ruth Gilbert argues that "detective fiction [is] a literary genre that offers solutions as well as crimes, resolution as well as uncertainty, [that] brings order to … the fundamentally disordered world" (242). Detection, therefore, is perceived as a means through which confounded young protagonists piece together seemingly disparate cues from their respective worlds, allowing them to "negotiate a path through their painful and uncertain adolescent experiences" (242). Similarly, Christopher Routledge argues that the mysteries investigated by child detectives are often "more to do with the mystery of their identity and their place in the world than with who committed the crime" (77). In both Gilbert's and Routledge's accounts, the young protagonist's practices of detection are read as strategies of making sense of the world. Through these strategies, young and often eccentric protagonists are able to identify with the people, events and landscapes that surround them and grow into self-awareness and self-knowledge.

Early on in *What Was Lost* Kate also adheres to this pattern, using detection and crime narrative to create order and purpose in an otherwise chaotic world. For example, as for Oskar in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close,* detection becomes a sense-making coping mechanism for Kate when she loses her father to a sudden stroke, a time during

which "she occupied her mind with lists, surveillance, reports, projects", and her beloved "*How to Be a Detective*" book becomes her bible (O'Flynn, 31). In claiming Green Oaks as her primary territory for investigation, Kate also expresses her desire to carve out an identity for herself whilst renouncing the assumptions imposed upon her by others: in Green Oaks, Kate feels as if "[s]he wasn't the quiet girl from class. She wasn't the girl with no mom or dad. She was a detective, an invisible operative gliding through the malls, seeing things no one else noticed" (45). Just as Gilbert and Routledge describe, Kate appears to employ detection as a means of imposing order within the disorder and disruption of losing her father, as well as a method of establishing an identity for herself that defies the judgement of others.

Nevertheless, the "place in the world" (Routledge, 77) to which Kate's quest leads her is far removed from that reached by Foer's and Haddon's protagonists and from the "resolution" that Gilbert identifies as central to the detective fiction narrative (242). In the former, Oskar discovers that instead of being a clue left for him by his dead father, the mysterious key was simply left by a previous owner in a vase that his father had bought from a house sale two years prior to his death. Oskar's detective quest thus fails "to reconnect [him] with the father he has lost" (Vanderwees, 183), but nevertheless reunites him with his long-lost paternal grandfather, a survivor of the Dresden Air Raid in World War II who abandoned his wife whilst pregnant with Oskar's father. In doing so, Oskar finds a place in the world alongside his grandparents, united in their identities as "three characters in different stages of trying to negotiate some sort of peace with non-negotiable tragedies" (Uytterschout, 187). In Haddon's novel the link between detection and protagonist Christopher's place in the world is more explicit, with his detective quest instilling in him the confidence to progress to an independent life at University: "I know I can do this", he asserts, "because I went to London on my own and because I solved the mystery of Who Killed Wellington" (Haddon, 221).

In *What Was Lost*, however, Kate's identity does not so much resolve as it dissolves. By the end of the novel, Kate is nothing but a ghost—a "voice in the static" (O'Flynn, 69)—immaterial and intangible. In contrast to Oskar and Christopher, Kate's death suggests that she no longer has "a place in the world." Instead of leading her to a sense of belonging, meaning or closure, Kate's detective practices instead lead to her demise. Therefore, the argument proposed here is that as the deindustrialized landscape of Kate's childhood disappears, so are the practices of detection that she learnt within these spaces made clandestine, as the "secret places" and "silent industrial playgrounds" of her childhood make way "for the new shopping centre opening a few hundred yards away" (O'Flynn, 106). Kate thus inverts this traditional pattern of the child detective narrative leading the young protagonist into a firmer sense of belonging, precisely because

Kate symbolises a set of spatial practices that simply have no place in the rigorously managed and scrutinized spaces of the twenty-first-century city.

From the very start of *What Was Lost,* O'Flynn is quick to emphasise how Kate's distinctive operation within the mall-space of Green Oaks distinguishes her from the majority of the mall's consumer-visitors. For instance, the close attention that Kate pays to her surroundings is contrasted with the apparent lifelessness and somnambulant gait of shoppers:

> [T]he blank faces of the people gliding in and out of the banks. She watched people draw out hundreds of pounds as if in a daze. . . . Their glassiness was part of a wider unreal feeling in the centre. No one appeared to have a purpose. . . . She thought she might be the only living thing in Green Oaks (16).

What distinguishes Kate's navigation of urban space from that of Green Oaks' hurried shoppers even further is the way in which her practices of detection rely fundamentally upon patience: her detective missions are characterised by long periods of wandering, waiting and lingering which typify her operation within Birmingham's urban space throughout the novel. For instance, as Kate's friend's sister Lisa recalls one of the few times she met Kate as a child, she pays particular homage to Kate's dedication to watching and waiting. When Lisa finds Kate loitering on the street and scribbling into a notebook, Kate explains, "I'm watching Mrs Leek's maisonette over the road. She's gone on holiday and I'm keeping an eye out for suspicious characters trying to case the joint" (86). When Lisa asks how long Kate has been standing and watching the property, Kate replies "[n]ot long. Maybe an hour and a half. Today, anyway" (87).

Indeed, this propensity towards waiting and lingering represents an approach to urban space which cultural geographer Tim Edensor sees as almost exclusively accessible within derelict places and industrial ruins, the aesthetics of which he has written on extensively.[3] He eloquently describes the ways in which, in the absence of surveillance and clearly defined pathways, ruins encourage "improvisational" modes of movement; in the ruin, "there are no temporal restrictions that determine how long one should stay in any location, no curbs on loitering or lingering, and no conventions that prevent slow

[3] Publications include "Waste Matter - The Debris of Industrial Ruins and the Disordering of the Material World." *Journal of Material Culture* 10.3 (2005): 311-332. Print; "The Ghosts of Industrial Ruins: Ordering and Disordering Memory in Excessive Space." *Environment and Planning D Society and Space* 23.6 (2005): 829-849. Print; *Industrial Ruins: Spaces, Aesthetics and Materiality.* Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2005. Print; "Sensing the Ruin." The Senses and Society 2.2 (2007): 217-232. Print; "Walking Through Ruins." *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot.* Eds. Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008. 123-142. Print.

movement or stillness" (*Industrial Ruins,* 87). For Edensor, such modes of spatio-temporal experience are subversive and powerful due to their contrast with those available in the "fast world outside," and the more directional and linear modes of experience which characterise the production line of the working factory or the orderliness of institutionalized space (87). As security guard Kurt describes in *What Was Lost,* Birmingham's industrial ruins were therefore the perfect place to spend "slow, silent afternoons" when playing truant from school (O'Flynn, 104).

Precisely as Edensor describes, Kate learns her way around the Birmingham landscape through trips which she and her father once took around the disused and marginal corners of the city: "trips to cemeteries, gas works, factories, forgotten parts of the city" (O'Flynn, 27). In doing so, she learns precisely the practices of loitering or lingering that Edensor emphasises. Distinct from the "quick and fluid" movement of shoppers through Green Oaks (88), Kate's experiences within "forgotten parts of the city" (27) including industrial ruins, foster within her the spatial practices upon which her methods of detection rely. Rather than operating according to principles of mastery or speed, Kate's methods are instead based upon the importance of stillness: upon waiting for events to take shape rather than heading in pursuit of fixed, empirical answers to clearly defined criminal cases.

The more derelict spaces are destroyed, therefore, the scarcer the opportunity becomes for the inhabitants of O'Flynn's Birmingham to learn and experience such practices of loitering and lingering. These modes of spatial practice upon which Kate's detection relies are even further discouraged by the pervasiveness of CCTV and the increasingly co-ordinated surveillance of urban space felt so profoundly throughout *What Was Lost*. Further investigating the kinds of spatio-temporal experiences made possible within industrial ruins, Edensor notes that "the activities, routes and numbers of city pedestrians are increasingly subject to surveillance by CCTV cameras, which extend across ever-larger areas of urban space" (*Walking Through Ruins* 124). This increased blanket surveillance, Edensor describes, has led to the normalisation of walking "at moderate pace" and "in a linear fashion" through urban space: just like Green Oaks' semi-somnambulant shoppers (125). One effect of such normalisation therefore becomes an increasing suspicion of those who fail to adhere to such normative modes of urban walking; those who consequently become "subject to scrutiny," and, should they "engage in 'unsociable' activity" (in which category Edensor includes "loitering"), "may be subject to intervention from police or security guards" (127). O'Flynn explicitly notes that Green Oaks' security guards are responsible for removing any visitors who disrupt the normative flow of bodies through the mall space. One example of such a character is "Blind Dave," a visually impaired man who wanders Green Oaks colliding with any obstacle in his path (O'Flynn, 116). Fundamentally, it is the responsibility of the security

guards "to prohibit any other 'clandestine presence' within the centre's borders" (173). Kate herself has been precisely such a presence having "spent a night at Green Oaks" by hiding in a Wendy House; once again, using her patience and stillness, she had "waited there until the shop workers went home and the muzak was turned off" to keep watch over the shops and banks throughout the night (17). Under enhanced surveillance and scrutiny therefore, Kate's juvenile detection becomes loitering behaviour worthy of punishment and mistrust.

The link between Kate's death and the demolition of deindustrialized derelict space in favour of sanitized spaces like the Green Oaks mall is confirmed by the revelation of security guard Gavin as the perpetrator of Kate's death. Gavin is the epitome of the excessive surveillance and ordering of urban space that seeks to erase clandestine presences like Kate and her non-linear, explorative approach to city space. Gavin persistently bores his colleagues with "monologues" of facts and figures about Green Oaks's history (188). Unlike Kate who wanders the mall waiting for events to materialize before her, and simultaneously unlike his colleague Kurt who is bewildered and deceived by the mall's surveillance network, Gavin is devoted to accounting for, mapping and mastering the mall space. For Gavin, Green Oaks is far more than a mere workplace: it is an obsession, his "one abiding fascination" (140). In an attempt to order, rationalise and control the mall's labyrinthine space, Gavin "seemed to see himself as curator of the centre—tending its history, dusting its artefacts," and persistently claiming to know "all" Green Oaks' "secrets" (141).

Gavin therefore professes a knowledge of Green Oaks that is contingent on facts, statistics and historical data. He consistently reduces the human actualization of the mall-space to sets of figures, as he ponders how "'497,000 shoppers visited in the week before Christmas'" and how "'there could be 350 shoppers in the nineteen passenger lifts at any one time'" (140). While Kate is able to apply what she has learnt amongst Birmingham's industrial ruins to her approach to the new urban space of the mall, Gavin shows no such flexibility. Demonstrating no appreciation for the uncanny powers of the abandoned and the derelict, Gavin is instead consumed with fervour for the "total lifestyle concept" of the ever increasing mall, whose developing "phases" continue to swallow up the defunct factories amongst which Kate and her father played and explored (189). His obsession with mapping the mall and with quantifying the movements of its visitors works to eradicate any situation in which Green Oaks might contradict or confound his desires to master and control it, or which might compromise his sense that "'it felt as if the place was built for me'" (239). Kate's detection therefore demonstrates a set of spatial practices becoming ever more stifled by the increasing standardisation and blanket surveillance of urban space that Green Oaks and Gavin epitomise. Slippery, elusive and able to deceive the gaze of surveillance that rests over Green Oaks with her secret night spent at the mall,

Kate thus inevitably becomes, for Gavin, a "clandestine presence" who must be removed from his mall-kingdom (173).

Edensor's commentary on the aesthetics of industrial ruins once again explains how Kate necessarily falls victim to Gavin and his masterful spatial practices. Edensor describes how, in walking through industrial ruins, "decisions about which directions to follow are taken according to intuition and whim rather than governed by the coercion of material structuring, surveillance and internalized walking conventions" ("Walking through Ruins," 127). For Kate therefore, it is precisely such an intuitive approach, highlighted by her wariness of Gavin's foul play, which leads her out in pursuit of her killer. Curious to test her intuition that Gavin is in fact "in security guard disguise" and is trying to "break in from the back" of the mall (O'Flynn, 240), Kate follows him through the shopping centre's service passages. In doing so, she unwittingly submits to Gavin's power-games. As a security guard, Gavin is used to occupying the subject position of the watcher; under Kate's gaze, however, he experiences a perverse pleasure at becoming the watched. "'No-one ever watched me . . . It seemed like my power over her grew gradually'" confesses Gavin during a police interview, continuing to explain how he then used this "power" to draw Kate out of the mall and into the industrial wasteland marked out as the site of Green Oaks' next developmental "phase" (236). Following him to her death, Kate is led by Gavin down a "narrow shaft" where she loses her footing and falls to her fate into a "sub-basement of the old factory" upon which Green Oaks is built (238).

Kate's death thus embeds her forever in the forgotten landscape of the industrial Midlands that proved so formative to the temporally-unrestricted approach to Birmingham's city-space upon which her practices of detection were based. Lee Horsley (2005) summarises how literary detectives—especially those of the Modernist period—have been widely read as figures who attempt to order city-space, transforming "indeterminacy . . . into a determinate meaning . . . punishing the criminal for his creation of unintelligibility" (24). This is, however, yet another traditional pattern of the detective narrative that O'Flynn's novel inverts. In *What Was Lost,* it is Gavin the perpetrator whose approach to the mall-space of Green Oaks represents a desire to turn the messiness of the human actualisation of space into the 'determinate meanings' of maps, plans and sets of statistics. It is subsequently Kate whose approach to city-space is seen to grow increasingly 'unintelligible', as the forgotten, abandoned spaces that she explored as a young child give way to new developments, and the derelict landscape which educated her in the practices of pause and reflection is slowly bulldozed into oblivion. Above, we discussed Routledge's contention that child detective fiction is typically "more to do with the mystery of [the child's] identity and their place in the world than with who committed the crime" (77); in *What Was Lost* however, Gavin's identity as the perpetrator of Kate's

death is crucial as it dramatizes the eradication of a playful, improvisational approach to space personified by the child detective at the hands of an excessive desire to order and monitor the human navigation and appropriation of urban space.

Kate's fall to her death therefore symbolises how the disappearance of the deindustrialized Midlands landscape also spells the death and loss of Kate's approach to urban space nurtured by her explorations of precisely such a landscape. O'Flynn's novel is therefore an elegy, reminding us that the demolition of a landscape results not only in material or cultural loss, but also in the subsequent loss of a distinctive set of spatial practices. Instead of celebrating the resolution of order to the "disordered worlds" (Gilbert, 242) of criminality and/or adolescence that commentators like Horsley, Routledge and Gilbert describe as central to (child) detective fiction, *What Was Lost* rather mourns the loss of a different "disordered world": namely, the disordered aesthetic of a ruined landscape that fosters the creative and subversive spatial practices through which Kate attempts to reinvent herself as a child detective.

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DANIEL O'HARA, *VIRGINIA WOOLF AND THE MODERN SUBLIME*

BOOK REVIEW

BRIANNA J. GRANTHAM

As a casual reader of Virginia Woolf, former English professor, and current PhD candidate in Creative Writing (and therefore inevitable conduit for the sublime in my own work), *Virginia Woolf and the Modern Sublime* was an appropriate book for me to read and review as I awaited my own Viva. Daniel O'Hara's short, but dense, exploration of Woolf's use of the sublime in her works from the 1920s through the early 1930s is thoughtfully broken down into text-specific chapters, lending coherence to an otherwise complicated topic. O'Hara's clear passion as an educator is evident in his preface, which seeks to prepare the reader for the journey ahead. The book is not for the faint of heart, and even the most attentive reader and devotee of Woolf may find themselves retracing their steps through O'Hara's looping, complicated prose, which mirrors, in many ways, Woolf's own style and voice.

The "sublime" is a nuanced concept for anyone unfamiliar with the term (and likely many who are)—a challenge O'Hara acknowledges by offering up a clear and baseline understanding of what he deems to be the "modern sublime" in Woolf's work in the Coda that closes out the book: "Coda: 'Images of Voice' and the Art of the Sublime". I frame this review using the Coda with O'Hara's blessing: in the final paragraph of the preface, he encourages the reader to read the final section as and when they deem necessary. I began to read chronologically, but found after finishing the first chapter that the Coda needed my attention (or rather that I needed it); O'Hara here lays out the theory of the modern sublime that feeds into his thinking throughout *Virginia Woolf*. To demonstrate this theoretical lens, O'Hara sets Whitman's "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life" (1860) and Shelley's "The Triumph of Life" (1822) beside a selection from Woolf's *Between the Acts* (1941). The result, or at least O'Hara's intent (it is up to the reader to follow and comprehend O'Hara's painstaking, but complex, demonstration), is to show the reader how "each author condenses the voices of the past into the impalpable ground for their own expression of vision, which becomes available for critical gaze of the future." O'Hara explores the sublime as it refers to the "echoes of great literature" that appear in an author's work—involuntary, psychologically fraught, and powerful in their impact on the reader.

O'Hara takes us through a general introduction to the modern sublime in Woolf before highlighting careful selections of its occurrence in *Jacob's Room* (1922), *Mrs.*

Dalloway (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *On Being Ill* (1926), *The Waves* (1931), and *A Room of One's Own* (1929). But this book is more than a collection of academic papers. O'Hara's intimate acquaintance with Woolf's writing ironically mimics a kind of sublimity in and of itself, as he liberally refers to theorists like Harold Bloom and Longinus, poets like Whitman, analysts like Freud, and Woolf's successors like Alan Ginsberg. While the prose is blighted by occasional typographical errors, I was so fascinated by the sheer magnitude and breadth of O'Hara's analysis and writing that I found myself very forgiving. The permutation of the sublime presented by O'Hara is entrancing and recognizable: any writer who claims not to diffuse in their work the influence of the authors they have read is either lying or oblivious.

Throughout the book, O'Hara demonstrates how and where Woolf's work is influenced by the modern sublime via what would have been, for her, an immediate history (such as the Great War), the classical sublime (such as the Greeks in *Jacob's Room*), and even notions of the romantic sublime (which O'Hara ties into Kant, Coleridge, Wordsworth and Shelley). If ever I had lost my reverence for Woolf, she who championed "a room of one's own" for women writers such as myself, O'Hara thoroughly succeeds in reigniting it, gleefully and with kerosene.

Although I have never taught Woolf, I have taught many of the classics, poets, and (some) theorists O'Hara mentions effortlessly. His fluency, not only in Woolf, but also in the overlapping tangle of literature and theory, is impressive. I finished O'Hara's ode with an acute desire to read every one of Woolf's works anew, as well as to further digest the numerous theorists, authors, and allusions O'Hara uses throughout. I can say with confidence that I will use O'Hara's Bibliography as a reading list—a rare commendation.

Ultimately, although O'Hara may leave the reader exhausted and overwhelmed, there are two things that can be said of this work.

The first comes in the form of a remedy:

Treat each chapter of O'Hara's book as something of a standalone companion to its corresponding Woolfian work. Of course, to truly appreciate O'Hara's discourse, I'd also recommend keeping the stack of works to which he refers within arm's reach as you read (especially for the chapters on *The Waves* or *Jacob's Room*).

The second comes in the form of a defense:

If *Virginia Woolf and the Modern Sublime* exhausts, it does so because, stylistically, it echoes O'Hara's self-confessed enthusiasm for Woolf's works: the beauty of this book lies in the way it embodies the nature of the sublime O'Hara so eloquently revisits throughout. To misquote John Donne, no piece of literature is an island entire unto itself. It is this marriage of form and content that is *Virginia Woolf and the Modern Sublime's* appeal.

POETRY
AND
ARTWORK

RHIZOSTOMA PULMO

BETHANY WOOLMAN

I thought it was another plastic bag breaded in the shingle as I approached. There's always an acrid smell of seaweed and rot from down under the pier, so the appearance of yet another dead thing goes easily unnoticed. Still, it is nevertheless more like a plastic bag than it is or ever was a living creature. A primeval body beached out of time.

The thing on the sand has no brain, so I guess in that sense it's kind of all brain. An entire wad of brain, so to speak. But I know some of these things are actually multiple brains. A Portuguese Man O' War for instance is not a singular creature at all, but not quite a colony of independent organisms either, built up entirely of tiny little zooids called siphonophores that are so specialised they can only survive as a singular entity. So that is the choice. Suffer teamwork or suffer death.

I sit on my heels before the plastic bag. This is less impressive. Its actual name is "Dustpan lid Jellyfish" which I feel is a bit harsh.

I scrape the caked wet sand off a nearby Razor Shell, long and iridescent purple, pressing the edge to my thumb pad to wince at the imprint it leaves. I look out at the waves for a moment. Then, I take it to the bulbous head of the dead creature.

It's firmer than I thought. Though long dead, the body still tries to protect itself like it hasn't quite got the memo yet. The surface tension soundlessly breaks and the shell slides in through the body as though in relief. It glides through till I feel the resistance of the sodden sand beneath.

I release it from my grip, allowing it to stand erect in the corpse.

I lift an open-palmed hand above my head, directly above the shell.

A group of jellyfish is called a smack.

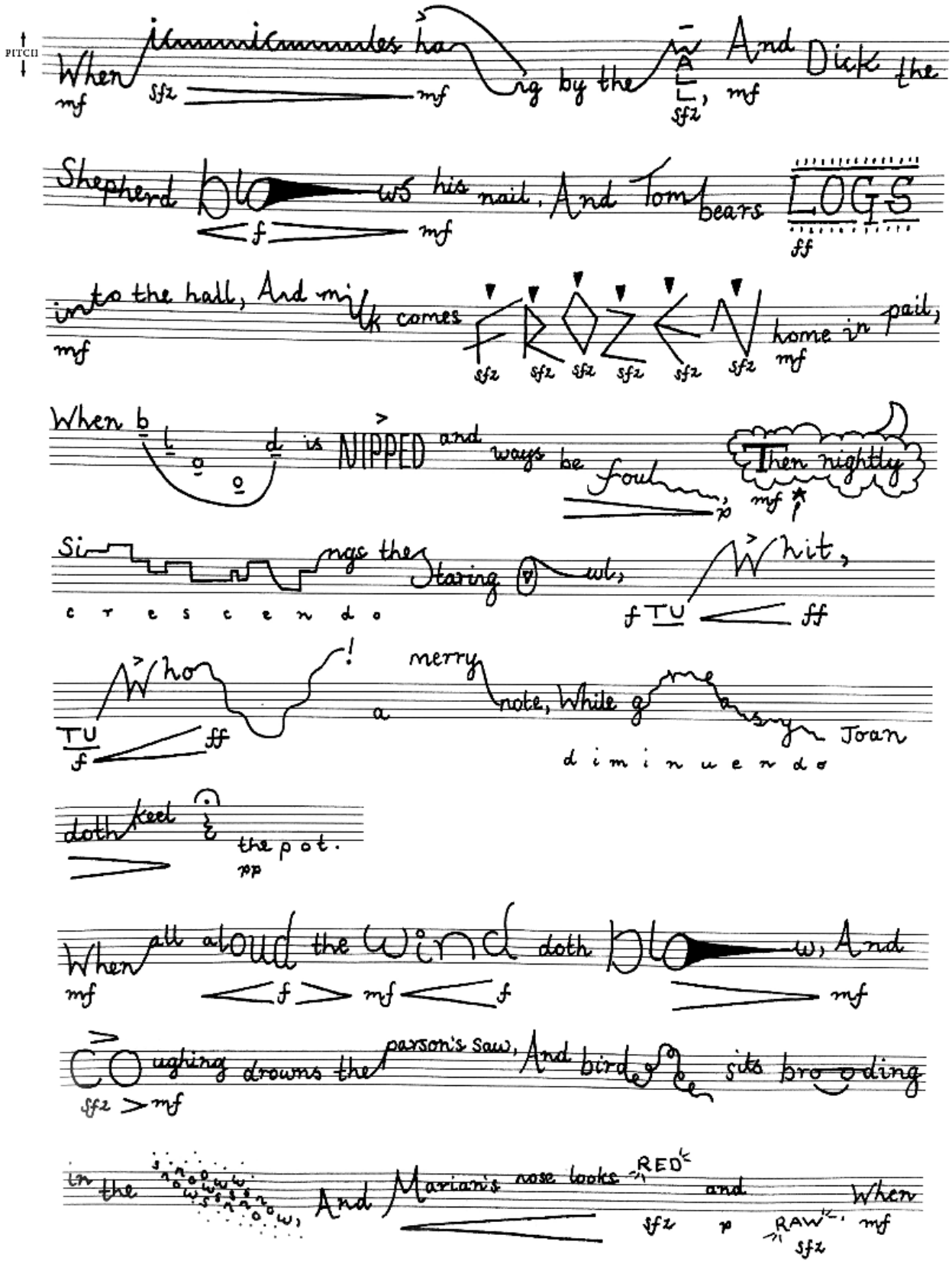
WHEN ICICLES HANG BY THE WALL

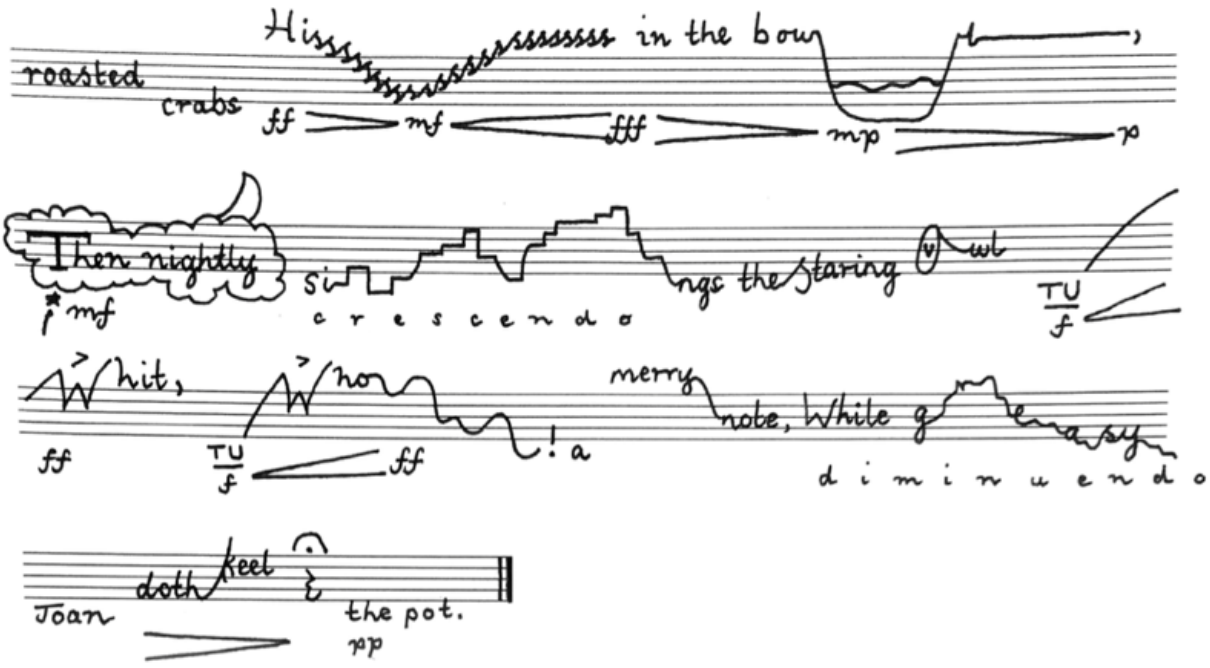
For solo voice

From 'Love's Labour's Lost' - Act V Scene ii

words:
Shakespeare (1564-1616)

composer:
Daniel Fardon





When icicles hang by the wall,
And Dick the shepherd blows his nail,
And Tom bears logs into the hall,
And milk comes frozen home in pail,
When blood is nipped and ways be foul,
Then nightly sings the staring owl,
Tu-whit, tu-who! a merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

When all aloud the wind doth blow,
And coughing drowns the parson's saw,
And bird sits brooding in the snow,
And Marian's nose looks red and raw,
When roasted crabs hiss in the bowl,
Then nightly sings the staring owl,
Tu-whit, tu-who! a merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

~ from 'Love's Labour's Lost' - Act V scene ii
William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

PERFORMANCE NOTES

Score to be freely interpreted

pp - *pianissimo* (very soft)
p - *piano* (soft)
mp - *mezzo-piano* (moderately soft)
mf - *mezzo-forte* (moderately loud)
f - *forte* (loud)
ff - *fortissimo* (very loud)
fff - *fortississimo* (very very loud)
sfz - *sforzando* (forced/strong/sudden)


- getting louder


- getting quieter

c r e s c e n d o - slowly getting louder

d i m i n u e n d o - slowly getting quieter

- *accent/marcato* (marked/with emphasis)
- *tenuto* (held/sustained/with weight)
- *staccatissimo* (very short/detached)
- *fermata* (long pause)
- *rest* (short break)

LIBERER

TOM BURNS

GARDEN STATE IN EFFORT SHAPE

RICHARD O'BRIEN

The flick

Imagine something
almost isn't there – notice
the air around it.

The float

Now trail through the air
like smoke, or like a typecast
Natalie Portman.

The dab

'This line feels wrong,' you
say as Natalie. Now put
your finger on it.

The glide

Let all five fingers
be a landing plane. Zach Braff:
his numbed propulsion.

The slash

Numb people sometimes
break down unaccountably,
like that stupid latch.

The wring

Latch onto nothing.
Your muscles tense. The critics
will eat you alive.

The punch

Alive and in love
will knock you clean off your bike:
that's being modern.

The press

Being is a scream,
but really it's Natalie
when Zach isn't there.

ROSETTA

LILY BLACKSELL

Skidding on a magnolia petal
today was a kind of rehearsal
for saying goodbye to you.
I bit my tongue and put my hand
to my heart like a Victorian, gasping.
I imagine it will feel similar,
like my stomach in an elevator.
I say elevator now, by the way.
The best way to be fluent in a language
is to talk it all the livelong time–
easier said than done, we're the only speakers,
plugged in different rooms at a party.
What we could muster yesterday
would have looked better on a postcard.

DAVID FOSTER WALLACE: A FELLOW OF INFINITE JEST

NOTE

KYLE WOODEND

In his celebrated 1,079 page novel set at a tennis academy and addiction recovery house, David Foster Wallace borrows a phrase from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* for the title, *Infinite Jest*. The allusion is grounded in the vital plot device also named "Infinite Jest"—a necromantic film that engrosses the viewer to the point of catatonia and eventually death. The filmmaker is the character James O. Incandenza, who sought to produce a film so radically entertaining that it would affectively tear his son Hal from anhedonia, a sarcastic and apathetic state of being that characterized, for Wallace, American culture at the time. As it becomes clear very early on in *Infinite Jest*, James is dead for the majority of the plot, appearing as a ghost late in the novel, but persistently referenced with regard to his position as an absentee father, founder of the tennis academy, and avant-garde filmmaker. As Marshall Boswell points out, James' position resembles that of King Hamlet in that both characters make short appearances as ghosts and, further, that they both serve as absent paternal figures (169). James is paternal in the literal sense, but he also functions as the stand-in patriarch of the post-modern artistic tradition, a tradition which Wallace attempts to "kill off" (Boswell 168-9).

So what, in his chosen antecedents, does Wallace desire to kill? The author elucidates his position on the apathetic state of American culture at around the early 1990s; for him, the period is saturated in an obsessive self-reflection ("Interview" 134). Although he variably designates this reflective mode as sarcasm, irony, and parody, he does not reject the use of these devices outright. Instead, he questions any function of critique that fails to offer a new model for thought ("Interview" 144-5). Not only does Wallace feel this to be a problem in popular culture, but also in post-modern literature. When the crank-turners, as Wallace repeatedly calls them, take over from the true innovators, the aim becomes merely to promulgate a certain stylistic function. On the other hand, Wallace's proper post-modern antecedents—Barth, Coover, Burroughs, Nabokov, and Pynchon; in other words, "patriarchs for patricide"—utilise these sarcastic, parodic, and ironic strategies for aims outside the given style, be it for cultural or political aims ("Interview" 146). In view of this problem, he laments that the following generation lacks firm objectives and that the very strategies that once enabled literary and cultural breakthroughs have become interminable, reproducing "the mere form of renegade avant-gardism" ("Interview" 131).

In *Infinite Jest*, the character James is the quintessential avant-garde artist, directing

films such as "The Joke," a meta-film that wryly warns the audience in an advertisement not to watch it and then delivers on this warning—a shot of the audience watching itself watch the screen—cleverly playing on the audience's thirst for irony, but still ultimately delivering nothing more than a closed circuit (*Infinite Jest* 397-8). Unmistakably, this operates in much the same way as Wallace's cranks, in that they deliver redundant forms without a viable aim, therefore lacking substance. In the sense that the style of James's films is the epitome of this hyper-reflective post-modernism, it seems that he resembles not only the "patriarch for patricide," but also plays the role of the joker. Catherine Nichols points this out, calling James the "infinite jester" of the novel (11). In view of his connection to Yorick, the allusion to the graveyard scene in *Hamlet* is twice made explicit: once near the beginning and once toward the end of *Infinite Jest*; Hal shares a dream with the novel's other protagonist, Don Gately, whereby the two dig up James's head (16-17; 934). Of course, the graveyard dream recalls the grave scene from *Hamlet*, where the titular character discovers that the skull uncovered by the gravediggers is that of his childhood jester Yorick, whom he describes as "a fellow of infinite jest" (5.1.191-2).

As Indira Ghose suggests, the 'infinite' in this line is enclosed within Hamlet's recollection of the jester, so the notion of infinity is reduced to the confines of a single character's memory and is recalled only upon his chance encounter with the skull; the infinite is juxtaposed with the image of the empty skull he holds up to the audience, so the infinite as a concept is exposed as "a huge joke" (1015). Aside from James's "The Joke," his film "Infinite Jest" itself functions as a jest: the overt impossibility of a film engaging a viewer to the point to death, the hyperbolic mother-son theme parodying psychoanalytic theory, and, perhaps most poignantly, the glaring absence of the infinite. In Hal's dream, he digs up his father's head in order to find, as it is elsewhere inferred, the master copy of the film. However, as the reader and Hal are aware, James's head was destroyed, thus the film no longer exists. This absence recalls the gaping emptiness of the jester's skull as Hamlet holds it up to the audience. In both cases, the infinite itself becomes the joke, in the sense that the yawning absence belies the immutable nature of infinity. Likewise, Wallace's infinite is merely an infinitely repeating form, a turning-crank incessantly churning out stylistic models that offer nothing new, having lost their greater function.

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IT'S A KIND OF MAGIC: THE TRICKS OF INTERACTIVE FICTION

ARTICLE

LYNDA CLARK

Toss a coin. Slap it against the back of your hand and hold it there. While it is there, that disc of metal, slowly warming against your skin, the result is indeterminate. It could be a heads or tails, you cannot know until you look.

In his 2008 TV special *The System*, illusionist Derren Brown performs a trick in which he flips a coin and achieves ten consecutive heads. This astonishing feat conjures various possibilities in the mind of the viewer. Is he palming the coin somehow, changing unwanted tails to heads with sleight of hand? Does he switch out the coin as soon as the trick has begun, substituting it for a double-headed fake? Is he using camera trickery, making multiple attempts look like a single, unedited shot? The multiplicity of possible solutions, and the consideration of said possible solutions, contributes to the viewer's enjoyment. Like Reader Response theorist Norman Holland, I take the view that "literature is an experience and, further, an experience not discontinuous with other experiences". (qtd. in Iser 39) Texts in general, and interactive fictions in particular have various parallels with this coin-tossing trick, in that the multitude of virtual outcomes they suggest are actually illusory (cf. Newman NP; Ensslin 81), while the reality is magical in its simplicity. For the purposes of this essay, I use a broad definition of interactive fiction which includes any story in which the reader alters the course of, or is left with the impression of having altered the course of, the story through their interaction with the text. This includes, but is not limited to hypertexts, parser games (text games in which the player types commands to progress), videogames and other choice-based stories. By drawing out these parallels, I wish to suggest why readers might imagine interactive fiction to have more interactivity than it actually does; how writers of interactive fiction might imbue their work with this 'magic'; and how they might encourage their reader-players to experience a sense of having been enthralled, rather than duped.

Holland's fellow Reader Response theorist Wolfgang Iser would probably have conceded that Brown's trick contained a degree of 'indeterminacy', due to the variety of possible solutions suggested above. According to Iser, moments of indeterminacy prompt readers to imagine, for example, a character's motivation, rather than being explicitly told what it is. For Iser, it is this call to action that fosters textual engagement and reader satisfaction (48-50; See also Pope 83 for how this relates specifically to interactive fiction).

Psychologist Victor Nell agrees, suggesting "our participation in [a story's] unfolding may render our enjoyment even keener" (58).

That coin under your hand? Its orientation is not completely indeterminate. Unless you are using a trick coin, or have fluffed this up already and dropped it, sending it skittering under the edge of the sofa with the dust and the spiders, it can only be heads or tails. But, like Schrödinger's famous cat, it exists in a state of flux until you look at it. Look at it now.

Heads.

Toss it again.

Heads.

And again.

Heads.

On and on until you have your ten heads in a row.

Incredible.

How was it done?

Interactive fiction and magic tricks are alike in that their ambiguity is often tied to their structure and therefore may decrease with successive viewings. In other words, to understand their workings is to see through the illusion of multifarious choice. For a highly literary and overdetermined text—Iser gives the example of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (50)—the multiplicity of possible readings is a permanent feature. Successive readings are more likely to uncover further nuances that invite further possible interpretations, rather than allowing the reader to come to a conclusion comfortably. For the magic trick or the interactive fiction, meaning-making is tied up in structure and if that structure is laid bare, the audience becomes aware that their level of involvement was misplaced—there were far fewer possibilities than they might have imagined (in the case of the magic trick, usually only a single possibility.)

The magic trick has the distinct advantage that its structure may only be laid bare if either the magician (or someone else) chooses to offer an explanation of how the trick was performed, or if the observer becomes sufficiently adept at magical techniques themselves to correctly deduce how the effect was achieved. In interactive fiction, merely replaying the text has the potential to reveal the truth of the choices offered, illuminating them as a set number of navigable routes, or superficial edits rather than the endless branching or multitude of textual effects the reader may have previously imagined.

If we return to Derren Brown's magic trick, the real solution is probably one we had not imagined. Brown reveals that he really did toss the coin and achieve ten consecutive heads. However, it took him thousands of attempts to do so and the nine hours of unsuccessful coin tossing was edited down to a dazzling thirty seconds of footage. Rather than the array of possible techniques we might have imagined, Brown used far simpler, more reliable, but less glamorous tools: perseverance and time.

Our first interactive fiction equivalent of this trick is Liza Daley and Emily Short's *First Draft of the Revolution* (2012). *First Draft* invites the reader-player to collaborate with two prolific letter writers, Juliette and her husband, Henri. The reader-player assists Henri and Juliette in the drafting process of their letters to one another, determining which details to include and which to leave out. Should they be forthright with one another, or attempt to conceal information? When their partner displeases them, should they adopt an admonishing or conciliatory tone? An initial playthrough may leave the reader feeling that they have experienced a high degree of agency, "the power to effect change" (Adams 29), since they can opt to add or rephrase passages, or delete them. Notes pinned to the editable sections give indications as to how Henri and Juliette feel about these changes and why they might be making them. For example, in the first letter, when writing of a "new acquaintance" Juliette may clarify that he is a friar, or "let [Henri] be jealous", omitting this vital detail (Daly & Short NP). As the story unfolds the reader likely begins to wonder how differently things may have turned out had they made different choices. Would failure to explain the friar's identity have sent Henri into an envious rage?

However, if I reveal the information hidden under my palm like that coin, your perspective shifts. Emily Short's editorial explains that the reader has little to no effect on the story's outcome. "By helping to revise their letters, the reader exposes who the characters are", Short explains. "She doesn't define or change them. Juliette, Henri, and the others are meant to have consistent personalities, and there's nothing the reader can do to alter this fact" (Daly & Short NP). For the reader who experiences the story in a single sitting, without replaying, the effect is as dazzling as Brown's coin trick. From their perspective, they have collaborated in writing the story, affecting the lives of the characters and ultimately, the outcome. Yet a single replay reveals that although a reader-player may have felt they had a high degree of textual and narrative manipulation, the reality is that they were making superficial changes only—the overall 'shape' of the story went unchanged. The degree of interpretation still available has now narrowed substantially. The reader-player cannot send the letter until a minimum number of edits have been made, ensuring the letter always conveys certain key plot points. While it is common for story-games to ensure particular narrative beats are met regardless of player intervention (cf. Taylor-Laird NP; Kabo Ashwell NP), and, in fact, James Pope argues that this is the most engaging way of writing interactive texts (82-83), to do so blatantly and providing little to no impetus for replay is less usual.

Assuming that replayability is a desirable quality (whether it actually is is a discussion for another time) then how can writers of interactive fiction assure replayability? More importantly, how can they ensure that their story is still satisfying the second time around? Again, the answer lies in Derren Brown's trickery, or the 'real magic' he employs, if you will. This is the hidden third option, after (or before, depending on your perspective) time

and perseverance. The 'real magic' comes via the viewer's imagination. The coin flip trick is arguably no less admirable once its secret is revealed, and the viewer's imagination is one reason for this. The viewer's imagination is far more varied and expansive than the reality; as such, the solution, although simple, is unexpected. Therefore, the viewer maintains the sensation already established by the initial trick (surprise) albeit for different reasons. Secondly, the trick is technically achievable. There is nothing to stop the viewer recreating it if they had the patience and inclination. They have been misled by omission of the extra attempts, rather than truly cheated (as they would have been if this was a pure camera trick). As Brown himself notes, viewers tend to collaborate in exaggeration of how impressive the trick is, as this helps to exonerate them of any foolishness in being tricked (Brown 36-7). This goes some way towards explaining the disappointment experienced during a re-read of an interactive fiction such as *First Draft*—the player convinces themselves of a greater degree of agency, because this means their interaction with the text has meaning—they are not merely obeying it, clicking on changes until the system allows them to continue. Of course, a second play through reveals that this is exactly what is happening, thereby increasing their sense of having been duped—the text provides little in the way of structural or narrative ambiguity. This is not to say that a reread would not be enjoyable for some reader-players—they may enjoy reading again solely for the story without the implied responsibility of making the 'right' choices, or simply to discover what it was about the text that had them so convinced they were affecting it in the first place.

In a miniature version of Brown's trick, another toss of the coin, another slap of the hand to hide the result, I have performed a similar act of omission with the quote I provided from Nell earlier: "our participation in [a story's] unfolding may render our enjoyment even keener" (58). The beginning of this quote reads "our pleasure at a story a friend is telling for the fourth time is certainly different from the pleasure we felt the first time we heard it, but not necessarily less" (Nell 58). Why leave this part out first time around? Well, at that point it would have appeared to run counter to my argument. I was suggesting that ambiguity was an important factor in audience engagement, and that subsequent experiences of the same text or trick declined in ambiguity and therefore the potential for engagement. However, now I am acknowledging that the ambiguity may be replaced with wonderment of other kinds, as in Brown's trick. As Iser says, "effect and response arise from a dialectical relationship between showing and concealing" (Iser 45). Such "showing and concealing" is used to achieve a response not only in the magic trick and the fictional text, but also in academic contexts such as this one. The quotes we choose, the details we foreground and omit to support our argument, all are selected with the goal of eliciting a particular response in our readers. In interactive fiction, this relationship between showing and concealing is illustrated by J Y Yang's *Before the Storm Hits* (2016).

Before the Storm is as upfront about its narrative mechanics as *First Draft*, but in a different way. There are five scenes in the story, links to which are displayed down the left-hand side of the screen. However, the reader-player has only three gamehours to play through in a single sitting, and therefore may only select a maximum of three scenes, although they may do so in any order. Each scene is fairly open-ended, its meaning altered according to where it is placed in the sequence. Some phrases are conditional, triggered only when a certain path through the text has been chosen, to aid textual coherence.

The story centres on a character preparing to leave their planet prior to an apocalyptic event. An initial playthrough could give the reader-player the impression that little is amiss. If the reader-player packs their bags, calls their partner, Camry, and then heads to the launch station, they are left with a sense of foreboding that Cam may or may not show up to the launch, but little else. However, replays reveal that Camry's child, Alex, has stolen the travel tickets. Little may change in the ending scene, but in subsequent replays, even if re-choosing the same 'bags/phone call/launch station' route, the meaning is changed. The reader-player now has many more possibilities to consider. There is no mention of the tickets at all in this version of the story, so does the protagonist actually have them, or has Alex stolen them in this version too? Perhaps the protagonist is merely unaware the tickets are not where they left them. Extra uncertainty is added to Camry's non-appearance. Even if Alex does not have the tickets, the reader-player now knows Camry has a child they will be leaving behind, presumably to an unpleasant fate. Will they turn up at all with this relationship at stake? The protagonist's closing assertion that "[e]verything's going to work out" (Yang NP) now seems less like an attempt to calm their nerves before an uncertain journey and more like an exercise in self-deception. *Before the Storm*, then, derives its ambiguity not only from its structure, which can be configured in several ways, but also from its textual content. The text itself is ambiguous, meaning that although the workings of the text may be understood in a couple of replays, its meaning remains open to interpretation. In other words, it is more textually ambiguous than it is structurally ambiguous.

Secondly, like Brown's trick, enjoyment may be derived not only from the experience of the text itself, but from awareness of the cleverness of its construction. Leaving aside the fact that the text allows for the protagonist to behave illogically (eg. heading to the station, then calling their partner to check they are coming, then packing their things, a sequence of events unlikely actually to take place), the text exhibits multi-directional coherence and context-specific changes to particular sentences. As in *First Draft*, key details remain unchanged, for example, any visit to Alex will always include the description of going "back to the old house, that diseased shack we used to live in when I first met Camry, right before Alex went to college" (Yang NP). Similarly, this scene always plays out with the protagonist shooting Alex following an altercation over the tickets. If the reader-player

visits Alex early in the story, the scene ends with the line "[w]hat am I supposed to tell Cam?" suggesting a sense of guilt and regret despite their protestation that "[Alex] had it coming". However, if the reader-player has already spoken to Camry, they finish the scene with the line: "[g]uess I know now why Cam was so upset". This changes the tone of the previous sentence, giving the "[t]hey had it coming" a sense of finality and significantly altering the personality of the protagonist in the eyes of the reader-player. The protagonist who worries "[w]hat am I supposed to tell Cam?" is one who acted on the spur of the moment. We can believe that when they say "[i]t was reflex" they mean there was no premeditation involved. The protagonist who merely says: "guess I know now why Cam was so upset" is unrepentant, and the interpretation of "reflex" now becomes 'default'. To kill is their default action when angered, and Cam knows that when they discover Alex's theft, there can only be one outcome. The knowledge of limitation of choice emerges less through the uncovering of the game's structural mechanics and more through character development of the protagonist. It relies less on trickery and more on 'real magic'.

Part of the joy of Brown's coin trick is its reliance on engineering coincidence through perseverance. The idea that a coin could coincidentally land on heads ten times in a row seems ridiculous. Perhaps this is the reason many of us would discount this as a possibility when considering how the trick had been done. Perhaps I am imposing a particular perspective on you just by saying that. If you turn back to the possible techniques I suggested at the beginning, this was not among them. I trimmed the footage, hid those thousands of unwanted coin tosses. Brown observes: "[o]ur innate and important capacity to look for patterns makes us terrible at thinking in terms of coincidence or randomness" (Brown 293). How on earth could writers of interactive fiction employ coincidence or randomness? You may ask. And, like Derren Brown sharing the footage of the coin persistently breaking the run of heads with errant tails, I answer: Just by being aware of its existence. "Sometimes the answer to 'Wow, what are the chances of that?' is 'Really not so extraordinary'" (Brown 278).

Technically speaking, interactive fiction in general requires a degree of what game studies scholar Joshua Tanenbaum calls "bounded agency", the "unusual blend of freedom and constraint… [which results in] unique narrative pleasure" (Tanenbaum 55). However, parser games in particular embody the "bounded agency" concept. In other words, the player has the freedom to enter whatever text they want, and, depending on the robustness of the lexicon the writer has created in the parser, a proportion of their entries will yield results. The matching of the reader's idiosyncratic entries with outcomes the creator has designed for them is coincidental, but it is an engineered coincidence, just as the player's sense of agency is engineered. Although the reader-player, upon finishing, may feel as though the game's creator was reading their mind, like the participant in a magic trick, they

are conveniently forgetting all the entries that were returned as unintelligible by the system, thereby limiting their agency.

Sam Barlow's *Aisle* (1999) provides an example of bounded agency in a parser game. *Aisle* begins with a single short opening scene repeated in every playthrough and reproduced in full below:

> Late Thursday night. You've had a hard day and the last thing you need is this: shopping. Luckily, the place is pretty empty and you're progressing rapidly.
>
> On to the next aisle.
>
> **Interesting... fresh Gnocchi--you haven't had any of that since... Rome.**
>
> The aisle stretches to the north, and back to the south. The shelves on either side of you block your view of the rest of the supermarket, with only the brightly coloured aisle markers visible.
>
> You have stopped your trolley next to the pasta section, bright plastic bags full of pale skin-tone shapes.
>
> There is a brunette woman a few metres ahead, filling her trolley with sauces.
>
> (Barlow(a) NP, original emphasis)

The player may enter a single instruction which results in one of over a hundred endings (Barlow(b) NP). It requires a little familiarity with parser game commands, but it also plays with the conventions of such commands. For example, typing 'inventory', a common parser command used to allow reader-players to check what the player-character is carrying, results in the expected listing of items, but also conveys a perhaps unexpected note of self-reflexivity, as the character scoops up his things with a "furtive glance" (Barlow(a) NP) indicating a degree of self-consciousness and self-awareness often absent in videogame characters.

Yet, as one player notes (Smith NP), *Aisle* also accounts for less usual inputs, some of which may arise out of frustration (e.g. 'hit brunette') or puerile curiosity (e.g. 'remove clothes') or attempts to navigate the textual environment (e.g. 'climb shelves'). And if the reader-player takes the time to stumble across several of these 'coincidences', they may find connections between the scenes which hint at a larger world beyond that conveyed in two short scenes. Commanding the player-character to check his inventory turns up, amongst other things, "a photo of Clare". Climbing the shelves evokes a memory of time spent with

Clare at the Trevi Fountain, and indicates that she and the protagonist are no longer together. However, the reader-player may now enter 'call Clare' to find that she's just around the corner and returns "pecking you on the lips". 'Thinking about Clare' returns bittersweet memories, while 'thinking about work' prompts a reminder that Clare is waiting at home.

The fact that both narrative and exploratory inputs are accounted for may create a sense of boundless freedom, and yet *Aisle's* text entry is in many ways as limited as *Before the Storm's* recombination of options. The reader-player may be able to think of a great many more commands than the creator has allowed for. Thinking about Johnathan or Michelle, who are revealed as the protagonist's workmates, returns only: "[y]ou can't remember that". Similarly, while 'kiss woman' results in a surprise for the brunette shopping for sauce, 'kiss Clare' prompts the response: "[y]ou can't see Clare". The text is both structurally ambiguous, in that without undertaking an exhaustive number of playthroughs or consulting an online guide, the reader-player cannot be sure that they have found all the endings (indeed, there is little in the text to imply that they should—each story fragment ends with a variation of the words: "[t]he end of a story, but not the only story…" indicating that continuation is optional, but not required—an ending has been achieved, others are additional, not definitive. For some reader-players this openness may paradoxically prove too limiting, and the frustration associated with multiple unrecognised commands, or uncertainty as to how and whether to proceed may result in abandoning the game.

However, *Aisle* is also textually ambiguous. There are three main "possible worlds" (cf. Jordan 328-332; Eco 66-67) that exist within *Aisle*, one in which Clare is alive and living with the protagonist, one in which Clare is alive but estranged from the protagonist, and one in which Clare has died in an accident. Some of the endings are ambiguous enough that they could fit into any of these "worlds" and it is left up to the reader-player to decide if and how they do. For those reader-players who are invested in the joint endeavour of meaning creation, all these possibilities offer up opportunities to conspire willingly in their own deception, believing the parser (or its creator) to have read their mind, rather than imagining themselves to be manipulated by the constraints placed upon them.

Seeing interactive fiction as a kind of magic is to acknowledge that "magic isn't about fakes and switches and coins dropping into your lap. It's about entering into a relationship with a person whereby you can lead him, economically and deftly, to experience an event as magical" (Brown 34). Reframing interactive fiction in this way encourages writers to rethink their creative practice in terms of the experience they are giving their reader-players rather than the writing techniques they are employing, or the game mechanics they are using. "There is no book", as Victor Nell says, highlighting the true magic of the reading experience (Nell 226).

Interactive texts that can encourage readers to experience them rather than to merely read or navigate them are going to be the most successful. There is no single way to do this, as the examples given have shown. It can be achieved through a multiplicity of endings as in *Aisle*, or of recombinations as in *Before the Storm*, or through complete and utter illusion as in *First Draft*. In *First Draft* the reader is encouraged to think about and participate in the drafting process, to consider who the people are on the other side of all those letters. In *Before the Storm* the reader becomes the omniscient narrator, repositioning the characters as they choose, but unable to fully control them. In *Aisle* the reader's own inventiveness drives the outcomes. It is up to them whether each short story ends tragically, comically or in the most outlandish manner imaginable. In other words, what is common between all three pieces is that they encourage the reader's self-perception as active participant, even if that's all part of the trick. The possibility of what could be is more important than what actually is. The reader is the one doing the real magic.

The coin that was under your palm, is it still there? Are you sure? Lift your hand.

There is no coin. There never was. There always will be.

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ERIN SULLIVAN, *BEYOND MELANCHOLY: SADNESS AND SELFHOOD IN RENAISSANCE ENGLAND*

BOOK REVIEW

CHARLES GREEN

Modern readers may be pleased to know of the strong endorsement wine receives in many Renaissance discourses on the passions, noting, among other things, its 'particular virtue to expel cares'. Other remedies include getting to bed early, having a bath, spending time with friends and avoiding stress. Clearly, such cure-alls have their modern equivalents in present-day nutrition and self-help literature, click-baiting newspaper columns, online diagnosis threads and puritanical 'clean living' Instagram accounts. But parallels between Renaissance and modern habits of thought run further onto more profound territory too, reflecting fundamental ways in which mental and spiritual and bodily health have long been seen as relational, both to each other, and to our deep sense of ourselves—our 'selfhood'.

That said, a modern sufferer of melancholy might pause before attempting the kind of 'evacuative' treatment or 'physical exorcism' suggested by John Hall, a Stratford-upon-Avon physician of the early seventeenth century. On more than one occasion, Hall also prescribed bloodletting specifically from the veins next to the anus. For the fashionable Renaissance courtier, melancholy was both a trendy social affectation and a symptom of a seriously dangerous preponderance of black bile over the three other constitutional 'humours' (blood, phlegm and yellow bile) with which, in Galenic humoral theory, it should normally be balanced. Treatments for this iconic form of sadness were therefore as frequently digestive and scatological as they were mental.

Erin Sullivan's remarkably wide-ranging new book achieves a level of scholarly balance that would secure the approval of any discerning Renaissance physician. In it, she sifts a large and diverse range of historical sources to offer colour and nuance to many 'emotionologies' (conventions) of sadness, recent and contemporary, and their relationships with differing and dominant conceptions of self, body, mind and soul. These sources, amply drawn from the 'literary' (plays and poetry) and 'non-literary' (medical treatises, physicians' casebooks, moral philosophical texts, paintings, sermons and Protestant devotional literature, to name a few), are marshalled so as to complicate recent criticism's turn to emotion in almost every way imaginable. Depending on who you were and how you looked at it, Sullivan shows, Renaissance sadness could be both physically dangerous and part of a healthy lifestyle; bodily or spiritually manifested; a result of fundamental, autonomous consciousness and exterior cultural structures

('ontological' and 'technological', in modern, post-Greenblattian frameworks); and borne of animal passion as well as wilful, intellective agency.

As is probably clear from the above paraphrase, it was around origins and causes that, the book demonstrates, conceptions of this highly protean emotion were most frequently arranged. But these were hugely diverse, and even single works—such, most notably, as Robert Burton's sprawling *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621)—would sketch and re-sketch them with relative freedom. It is these inconsistencies that are most pursued by Sullivan, interested particularly in what happened when the necessarily subjective, lived experience of sadness did *not* map neatly onto any dominant conceptual model, but instead went 'off-script'. Such experiences, she argues, required the individual to do some 'emotive improvisation', adopting sadness as a profoundly and 'unusually fertile space for the exploration and authorization of the emotive self'. Here the book's wealth of dramatic and literary source materials (largely, but not only, Shakespearean) is put to good use, teasing out how characters like Antonio, Hamlet, Jaques, Faustus and Philologus tinkered and innovated with prevalent emotionologies of sadness, both responding to and authoring the precepts, behaviours, archetypes and identities that comprised them.

Philologus, easily the least known of these, is particularly interesting, and encompasses many of the interests of the book's latter chapters. In seeking to broaden scholarly attention 'beyond' melancholy and into the wider categories of sadness that contained it, these are almost entirely concerned with the theological and dramatic contexts of the so-called godly of seventeenth-century England—a group whose frank acceptance of Calvinist predestination necessitated both a heightened sensitivity to sorrow and highly trained forms of 'emotive improvisation' to interpret it in theologically applicable ways. It also led to the proliferation, in England, of such explosive, sensational stories as that of Francis Spira, the Italian lawyer who abjured a life-long conviction of election on his deathbed. Featuring an introduction by none other than John Calvin himself, the 1550 Latin account of Spira's death 'circulated across Protestant Europe with remarkable speed and thoroughness', finding its way into English translations and discourses on the signs of election, *ars moriendi* and the uses and dangers of godly sorrow. The character of Philologus appears in Nathaniel Woodes's 1581 dramatisation of the Spira story—from *The Conflict of Conscience*—and was published, fascinatingly, with two alternative endings in that same year. In one, Philologus accepts his place among the elect, having found in godly sorrow a suitably penitential state for Christian death; in the other, he does not.

Such examples show how, in the Renaissance, just like now, there was 'no one way to read and judge a person's experience of passionate feeling'. With mental health finally receiving the popular and political attention it deserves, perhaps the time has come to

further enrich present understandings of sadness, and how it too has its uses as well as its dangers.

MANIFESTO FOR VULNERABILITY

NOTE

CLAUDIA JAZZ HALEY

The following is the script for a manifesto to be performed live, as Vivienne Westwood performed "Active Resistance to Propaganda Manifesto" at the Serpentine Gallery in 2008. Manifestos are often presented as public declarations of aims and policy for political or artistic purposes. A convergence of different realities, this manifesto sees the voices of five women navigate one narrative. Three are fictional, one (The Girl) is auto-ethnographic. Together with the Narrator, these voices offer psychological, social, and global perspectives on vulnerability.

Chorus: **Vulnerability is THE COURAGE NOT TO CONTROL**

Alice: Letting go of the fixed point that anchors us.
Eve: Why are we not allowed near that tree? To taste the unknown? Bite that apple!
Alice: Follow that white rabbit.
Pandora: Open the box.
Narrator: You walk with keys in your fist. Willing to discard shoes, split the skirt and run. Run if possible. Fight if you need to.
It's knowing you are not in control, not yet out of control. We are humans, not Gods.

Chorus: **Vulnerability is TO BE SEEN AND MADE ACCOUNTABLE**

Pandora: Created by the gods, I was to deliver punishments. Curious; I am accountable for opening the box. But I created neither the box, nor the reason for your punishments.
Eve: Finally, I am something other than your rib. I received the worst of it. You could have said no.
Narrator: Entering a stranger's home. Hope for a new beginning.
Offering your home to a stranger, hopefully. Create that new beginning.

The Girl: Aged 15, standing up, saying: "Sorry. I don't understand". Explaining the equation in the same way doesn't help. I am not alone (yet I am alone). Please describe it differently. I want to understand!

Narrator: It's transitioning, shifting. You found courage to act, stand up, speak out, demand accountability. Others too are vulnerable and scared, open to inspiration?
Publicly admitting, terrified, that something is wrong.

Chorus: Vulnerability is OPENNESS OF EMOTION AND SELF

Alice: Lakes of tears. Seas, oceans.

Pandora: Fall madly, deeply in love despite poverty, despair, disease, and eventual death.

Eve: Become self-aware. Become open to learning—knowledge.

Narrator: Shame. A tightrope walk between self-awareness and guilt.
Claiming your identity, your positionality, your cause, putting yourself in danger.
Upon your sleeve, your heart; to be broken, or worse—Ignored.

The Girl: Aged 20 saying "I Love You" instead of "Thank you". Crying when angry. Laughing during sex.

Narrator: Ideas to be laid bare and picked apart, scrutinized, criticised.
A state of exposure. Raw, fleshy and penetrable. Naked to the elements. Impressionable and bruisable.

Chorus: Vulnerability is THE NEED TO ACT

Eve: Not just temptation. More than desire, more than want. A need to know, to understand.

Alice: There was a need to survive.

Pandora: There was a need beyond me.

Narrator: Placing that flower in the end of the gun. Laying in front of the tank. A clown arrested. Lovers kiss in public. Wearing heels, a burqa, trousers.

The Girl: Aged 8, seeing the giving of a gift. A paper diamond ring. DIY Christmas. The need to celebrate.

Narrator: For survival, for existing, for being.

Chorus: Vulnerability is BEING DEPENDANT AND CONNECTED

Eve: Adam, without you I wouldn't exist. I need you. You need me. We are one.

Alice: Without me Wonderland would not exist. Perhaps without Wonderland I would not exist. What is real and what is not doesn't matter, what matters is that we are connected.

Narrator: It's needing wider pavements and slopes for wheelchairs. Visits from meals on wheels—not just for the food. Hugs from absent parents.
Without bees who will pollinate our flowers and crops? Not equipped for that. Without trees who will convert the carbon dioxide from 7 billion people into oxygen? Don't have the infrastructure for that. Without icecaps how will we all fit on dry land? Not enough space for that.
It's realising the fleeting concept of home. More than bricks and mortar. Refugees cross borders, bricks and mortar cry out.
It's not knowing how you will survive but knowing you must.

The Girl: Aged 4, or 5. Lost Teddy. Goes to bed, refuses to sleep. Who will protect her from her nightmares?

Narrator: Depending on others, and the elements—benefits, pavements, parents, lovers, trees, teddies. Air and dreams.

Chorus: Vulnerability is BEING AWARE OF IT AND ACCEPTING IT.

The Girl: Aged 28, the Girl claims her weakness, not for the first time. Her art, her world view, her health—damaged. Many white rabbits leading to different apples, variations on knowledge and supposed truths, none an answer to the problem. Seeking another box. Stepping outside Kafka's world. Using the straight jacket logic, she argues her cause. Presenting a paper on the ethics of watching theatre and artistic nudity. She performed. Popped her burlesque performance cherry. 'Out of Practice'[4]. No punishing Hand of God. She stood there, delivering conviction. Fuchsia sequinned nipple pasties. Lacy knickers. Seamed stockings. Heels. Nervous. Exposed, physically and mentally, laying bare her brain, her heart, her body.
An act of rebellion, an act of sacrifice.

The Girl let go.

[4] A conference that took place at the University of Birmingham, on 8th June 2016. Its stated aim was to showcase practice-led research

She made eye contact, opened a dialogue. Finally seen and made accountable for her actions. Reclaiming her courage, her dependency, and her agency. Accepting her vulnerability.

Narrator: To live is to seek knowledge, to learn, to adapt, to connect, to breathe, to exist.
The act of living is dangerous.
Awareness is uncomfortable and shameful. Put it in a box, bury it in a warren, or plant it out of bounds. According to myths, religions, and stories, Woman reveals defencelessness for all.

Eve: See it, in ourselves and in others.

Pandora: Learn from it, live with it.

Alice: And create something better from truly knowing what it is.

Chorus: To be vulnerable.

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TOM WHITE is a PhD candidate at the University of Birmingham. The aim of his thesis is to develop a means by which various strands of metaphor theory can be drawn together into an extended narrative, creative and critical elements sitting alongside each other and interweaving in a discursive way, drawing out the multifaceted relationship between the phenomenon of metaphor and the ways in which we experience and come to know the world. As such, he is interested in the notion of writing as research, in how playing around with language can yield new knowledge.

ED CORLESS is currently an English Literature and Creative Writing PhD student at the University of Birmingham. Both his thesis and creative work as a whole examine the indistinct boundary between fact and fiction, and he hopes to become a professional writer once his thesis is complete. He regularly enters short story competitions in preparation for this goal.

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NOTES

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CLAUDIA JAZZ HALEY is a theatre director, performer and practitioner. She has worked with clowning, puppetry, carnival and participatory theatre as well as educational historic stage combat performance. Currently Claudia is studying practice as research for a PhD at Sheffield Hallam University, having gained BA (Hons) at Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance and MA from the University of Sheffield. She has a keen interest in female entertainers and performers who challenge societal gender constraints in live popular entertainment. Claudia is now turning her attention to contemporary burlesque.

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KYLE WOODEND is currently undertaking an MA by research at the University of Birmingham. The project concerns the notion of desire in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* in view of the works of Jacques Lacan and Gilles Deleuze. His larger interests are the intersections between psychoanalysis and continental philosophy with special regard to this juncture within literary and film studies. On the practical front, Kyle has been a language instructor since graduating from the University of Windsor in 2008. Since 2011, he has taught English at Cha Medical University in South Korea, holding a management position in the Department of Practical English since 2013.

TOM BURNS is a traditional artist currently studying towards an MA in Fine Art at the Birmingham School of Art, and his practice at present focuses on news events of the 1990s, positioning famous stories and photographs in a new pictoral space. Tom's style has developed in a more painterly manner, and now intends to demystify the art and the artistic process, leaving areas unfinished and showing the painting's construction. The project also includes the individual palettes as a corresponding piece of work. Alongside studying Tom has an adult art class that runs weekly, which gives him the opportunity to develop a different approach to teaching than the normal classroom based system. Over November and December of last year, Tom worked with the Lichfield Garrick theatre producing works for their annual pantomime, as well as images for the New Old Friends "anti-panto" production, Crimes Against Christmas. Tom lives in the picturesque cathedral city of Lichfield, Staffordshire, with his partner and house rabbit.

RICHARD O'BRIEN is working on a practice-led PhD in Shakespeare and the development of verse drama at the University of Birmingham, funded by the Midlands3Cities consortium. His poems have appeared in pamphlets including The Emmores (Emma Press, 2014) and anthologies and magazines such as Oxford Poetry and The Salt Book of Younger Poets (2011). His academic research interests include fictional depictions of Shakespeare and especially Shakespeare's contemporaries, with a focus on Ben Jonson and Christopher Marlowe; incidental uses of Shakespeare and literary reference in general in popular music and pop culture; depictions of class in post-war British literature and music, and contemporary poetry.

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BETHANY WOOLMAN is a postgraduate student of the University of Birmingham studying Creative Writing. While she's mainly interested in writing prose poetry and narrative poems, she also writes a lot more young adult fiction than she'd like to admit. She one day hopes to lecture in Creative Writing. She likes jellyfish

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TOM WHITE AND ED CORLESS

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