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'Inferno Plastic'

by **Oscar Vinter**

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Editorial

As new editors, joining in the midst of the largest pandemic that we have seen in our lifetime, we knew that *Ad Alta: The Birmingham Journal of Literature* needed to adapt accordingly. We are delighted to have taken over as editors and have taken the opportunity to embrace the situation we have found ourselves in. As such, this year's journal is published online only rather than in print. We hope that next year we will be able to publish in both formats once again, although we also recognise that a digital-only format is also more environmentally friendly and strongly believe that it is important for academia to recognise this. There is a transition, expedited due to Covid-19, towards more virtual conferences and so we perhaps may find ourselves embracing this new medium for the journal. With this in mind, we have also taken the opportunity to relaunch our online presence with a new website and larger social media presence. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the University of Birmingham's IT Support team, but particularly Oscar Mealia for designing both the website and the front cover of the journal. Huge thanks must also go to Emma Thompson, our Publicity Editor, for her astounding work this year on our social media platforms. Through her hard work and dedication, she has greatly raised the profile of the journal.

The pandemic has brought so much disruption to our lives, including being able to pursue and obtain research materials. We have therefore been heartened by the calibre of research and creative writing we have received this year. It has been inspiring to read the work that the postgraduate community has still been able to produce.

This volume of Ad Alta: The Birmingham Journal of Literature will share a wide variety of work, ranging from poetry and short stories to articles on using sexuality as a means to exert dominance, and Sherlock Holmes adaptations. We hope that you enjoy reading them as much as we have.

Finally, we would like to say thank you to our editorial team for 2020/2021, who have worked tirelessly throughout a very difficult year, whilst adapting to online working, battling Covid, and overcoming personal loss, to produce such a wonderful, eclectic, volume of Ad Alta.

Laura and Sarah
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Disrupting the Death Star:

Applying feminist and queer theories to the development of subversive masculinities

> "Help me Obi-Wan Kenobi, you're my only hope" – Princess Leia, in Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope (1977).

> 'Patriarchy is defended diffusely. There is support for change from equally large numbers of men, but it is an uphill battle to articulate that support. That is the political context with which new gender-equality initiatives have to deal' – Connell (2005a., p.1817).

In this paper I consider how we might conceptualize a politics of subversive masculinities for the purpose of disrupting the Death Star: my chosen metaphor for global systems of oppression, namely, the forces of capitalism, heteronormativity, patriarchy and white supremacy. I am interested in feminist and queer theories that have been or can be used to further develop masculinity studies into something politically useful to 'subordinated' men, women and non-binary folk. I define 'politically useful' as acting to suppress violence (physical, psychological, economic, institutional, ecological) against marginalised groups, but also as acting unambiguously to enable our freedom to 'be' our authentic selves. I define 'subversive' as seeking to disrupt patriarchal power structures in which traditional conceptualisations of masculinity are complicit in maintaining. I advocate that intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) is a useful theory for underpinning subversive masculinities, that seriality (Young, 1994) is a useful method for connecting disparate groups of men to the political cause, and for allyship as a useful praxis for men seeking to subvert and disrupt systems of oppression. Referring to Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1979) and Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), I ask how men hoping to disrupt the Death Star either from the inside or by lurking at its margins might keep themselves honest in that endeavor. To disrupt an oppressive system is not so simple as stealing the plans, disabling the tractor beam, and firing on its weak spot until it explodes as the Rebels do in A New Hope. We instead need to initiate a global rebellion that is focused on re-shaping the world in which we live without blowing it up and re-building it.

I. What is Masculinity?

The critical study of masculinity is indebted to feminist writers and theory (Alsop, 2002, p.131), as well as to gay writers' 'pioneering' analyses of sexuality (Edwards, 2005), and to queer theory for generating a site of contestation over what masculinity 'means', who 'does' it (Halberstamm, 1998), and how it functions as an aspect within systems of power (Edelman, 2004). Most contemporary contributions to masculinity and men's studies concern themselves with understanding (and problematising) masculinity and view gender hierarchies as social constructs deployed within social systems (Alsop, 2002, p.136). Carrigan et al. argued that 'the question of sexual power' must also be 'pursued inside the sex categories' (1985, p.552) between them. They recognise the need to consider power relations (and oppression) as both layered and complex and introduce the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which is developed further by one of the authors, Connell, in her later work *Gender and Power* (1987; 1991).

Connell defines 'hegemony' as 'a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organisation of private life and cultural processes' (1991, p.297). This ascendancy is 'embedded' in social systems, for example religious doctrine and wage structures and is achieved not via 'total dominance', but rather via the subordination of other types of masculinity within a cultural system (p.297). Hegemonic masculinity describes what sustains the power of powerful men rather than the specific behaviours of individual powerful men, and it also describes 'what large numbers of men are motivated to support' and assumes that 'most men benefit from the subordination of women' (p.299). In a later work, Connell (2005a.) describes conceptions of 'multiple masculinities', again recognising the importance of intersecting identities in analyses of oppression, for example being man and being Black and/or working-class and/or gay, whilst also cautioning against 'oversimplification' (2005a., p.76). She describes four forms: hegemony, complicity, subordination and marginalisation. 'Hegemony' represents 'the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy' (p.77). 'Complicity' describes the 'patriarchal dividend' from which most men benefit in relation to hegemonic masculinity (p.79). 'Subordination', refers to the subordination of homosexual men relative to heterosexual men, which is one of the cornerstones of hegemonic masculinity (p.78). In *Gender and Power*, Connell asserted that the 'most important feature of contemporary hegemonic masculinity is

that it is heterosexual' (1991, p.300). The development of a field of critical masculinity studies coincided with the emergence of the AIDS pandemic in the 1980s, a period characterised by what Anderson (2008) refers to as a culture of 'homohysteria', and with it a social backlash against gay men. In his work examining cultural responses to gay men in relation to the crisis, Bersani explains that the violence gay men experienced in the 1980s demonstrates in itself 'a certain agreement about what sex should be', and implicitly, what it shouldn't be (1987, p.221). That said, Edwards acknowledges that 'gay men remain men' who receive the 'privileges and benefits that maleness bestows on them' (2005, p.65) and therefore gay men are at once complicit in the patriarchal system and oppressed by it. Similarly, 'marginalised' masculinities, for Connell, consider matters of social justice (2005a., p.82), and she takes the example of the Black male experience in the United States, historically as subjects of chattel slavery and more contemporarily of working-class poverty and unemployment structurally engineered by white supremacy (2005a, p.80). Connell argues that Black masculinity 'has commonly been pictured as a sexual and social threat in dominant white cultures', and that this 'gender ideology has fuelled harsh policing and political racism' in traditionally white-led societies around the world (2005b., p.197).

There is, then, no reliable typology of masculinities per se. Rather, hegemonic masculinity is a useful basis upon which to consider the systemic organisation of gender hierarchy. The concept has received criticism and calls for re-evaluation. Beasley argues that it is 'used to stand in for a singular monolithic masculinity' and suggests that a 'more nuanced understanding of privileged legitimating conceptions of manhood' is necessary (2008, p.86). She agrees, however, that the term can be a useful political mechanism for describing the way in which different masculinities bond together in a hierarchical order (2008, p.100). I agree with Wetherell and Edley here, who argue that the concept of hegemonic masculinity is sufficiently flexible to allow a plurality of masculine identities to be studied and that it is 'deeply attentive to the problematic of gender power' (1999, p.336). In their re-evaluation of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, Connell & Messerschmidt acknowledge that 'the conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity should explicitly acknowledge the possibility of democratizing gender relations, of abolishing power differentials' (2005, p.853).

A need to politicise and call men to action in the service of disrupting social inequality has also been highlighted in a number of contributions to the field. Gardiner (2005, p.36) argues that 'men and

masculinity play a crucial role in feminist theory' and argues for viewing gender 'within a logic of intersectionality' (p.42). Holter (2005) argues that men need to consider gender discrimination as a structural inequality and also highlights that inequality runs 'across the gender division' into other categories of social identity (2005, p.26). Flood (2005) considers the motivations and values underpinning men's anti-sexism work and makes. Masculinity studies, therefore, has a useful role to play in inciting men to disrupt systems of oppression, and can create avenues for subversion and resistance among men that can disrupt social inequality, it is to this resistance that I now turn.

II. forming the Rebel Alliance: Theory, Method and Praxis

There are an increasing number of theoretical blueprints for subversive masculinities. Halberstamm (1998) argues for the need to ignore traditional, male, presentations of masculinity and begin from a place of observing female masculinity and 'turning a blind eye to conventional masculinities and refusing to engage (1998, p.9). For her, the 'tomboy, the masculine woman, and the racialised masculine subject…all contribute to a mounting cultural indifference to the masculinity of white males' (1998, p.41) and through these female masculinities it is possible to create 'multiple sites for becoming and being (1998, p.21). Brown and Ismail (2019) provide an excellent critical basis from which men can engage with feminist theories in their lives. Both men work in engaging young men specifically on anti-violence projects and provide an example of 'mapping feminist theories' into their praxis (2019, p.26) and they assert the importance of 'recognising the interconnectedness of oppressions through multi-dimensional frameworks' (p.29). 'Critical masculinity studies' posits a number of questions for masculinity scholars, including 'how are men located in postfeminist culture, and how do these locations differ by virtue of race, class, sexuality and age' (O'Neill, 2015, p.24)? To that end, intersectionality provides a valuable theoretical grounding for men seeking to disrupt systems of oppression.

Theory: intersectionality

Crenshaw (1989) argues 'that Black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse' on the basis that their particular experiences of do not 'accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender' (1989, p.140). This interaction is an 'intersection' of two oppressions – that is, being Black and being woman. Without losing sight of the fact that Crenshaw's intention was to give voice to the experiences of Black women (Williams, 2013, p.164), the principles of intersectionality are applicable when examining how oppressions are layered and experienced by different groups, in this case, men. Black men have different social experiences to white men in Western societies, gay men may have different social experiences to heterosexual men, Black gay men may men have different social experiences than white gay men (Ramazanoglu 1992, p.347). All of them have different social experiences to women.

There are conceptual limitations with intersectionality, Butler speaks in *Gender Trouble* of the 'embarrassed etcetera' (2002, p.218) which looms before those of us who strategically utilise identity categories as the terms of reference for disrupting social inequality, what Spivak refers to as 'strategic essentialism' (1985). I argue it is better to acknowledge the embarrassed etcetera and hold onto it while attempting to overturn an identified oppression than it is to do nothing. As Williams argues, 'the term Intersectionality designates a critical perspective that rejects single-axis approaches to identity' (2013, p.165), as such we could centre the experience of a gay, elderly, visually impaired man living alone on an inner-city council estate without a private pension and discuss the ways in which he is socially disadvantaged using intersectionality as a frame of reference. We could also demonstrate that whatever structural inequalities he is met with, his experience is not the same as that of a Black man or a white woman, he encounters oppression and receives dividends in different ways. We could attempt to order and categorise an exhaustive compendium of experiences if we wished to.

For Puar (2012), to engage effectively in radical political action, it is better to think of 'assemblages' than of intersectionality. Assemblages de-privilege the human body as a discrete organic thing' (2012, p.57) and 'encompass not only ongoing attempts to destabilise identities and grids, but also the forces that continue to mandate and enforce them' (p.63). I do not think we must choose

intersectionality or assemblage as our theory. Instead men can engage with calls to strategic essentialism inherent in an intersectional approach, acknowledging its grounding in categories of identity for the sake of disrupting oppression/s, and we can accept its limitations. What is important, whatever name men choose to use to theorise for subversive political action, is the centring 'dynamics of silencing and erasure' (Williams, 2013, p. 167), and seeking 'some basis for unifying activity' (Crenshaw, 1989, p.167).

Method: Seriality

Nicholson (1994) problematises instances 'where feminist theory makes generalisations across large sweeps of history' and their assumptions of 'common perspectives' on the meaning of male and female bodies (1994, p.95). She argues instead for identifying 'common criteria defining what it means to be a woman' for 'political purposes', enabling them to 'differentiate enemy from ally' (p.100). She articulates feminist politics 'as the coming together of those who want to work around the needs of women' and where the meaning of the term 'woman' is not necessarily universally agreed upon (p.102). The coalition, in this sense, is quite a loose one. In the previous edition of the same journal, Young (1994) argues that the social collective of women as actors in a common political cause might be best described as a 'series'. For her, seriality solves an essentialist problem of attempting to categorise women under a set of common attributes and instead thinking about women as a social collective without implying a common identity (1994, p.714). As is the case that, without a loose coalition or collective of woman 'it is not possible to conceptualise oppression as a systematic, structured, institutional process (p.718), so it is the case that we cannot imagine male resistance to patriarchy without imagining a common pro-feminism among men.

As I have discussed, there is not one masculinity just as there is not one feminism (or femininity), rather there are groups coalescing around specific interests among women (Young 1994, p.737) and different bases and values from which men engage with the act of disrupting systemic oppression. Subversive masculinity, then, might itself be thought of as a series, its organising feature being first to engage diverse men in the act of suppressing violence towards marginalised groups (a 'first level' engagement), and then to enable marginalised people to walk in the world authentically (a 'second level' engagement in the series). In principle, there is no requirement for subversive men to define under a common set of attributes or a common identity beyond committing to those two stated goals. The concept of seriality might enable social justice groups to more effectively engage a diverse range of men for the purposes of disrupting diverse inequalities, and participation in the series in this way is 'allyship'.

Praxis: Allyship

I am not speaking here of 'performative' allyship, defined by Kalina (2020) as 'someone from a nonmarginalized group professing support and solidarity with a marginalised group, but in a way that is not helpful' and which is motivated by social or cultural reward (2020, p.478). I am speaking of deep

introspection, personal discomfort, hard work, focus and a determination to centre marginalised voices by nonmarginalized voices. I am speaking of 'active allyship', an ongoing process which 'requires feedback, reflection, and constant willingness to learn and grow' (Becker, 2017, p.28). Carlson et al. (2020) explore the most common recurring themes in academic and activist allyship literature and seek to apply these as principles for male activism in gender equality work and anti-violence activity. From a study of forty sources, they identify eight core themes to conceptualise what allyship means and what it does (see table 1 below).

Table 1.

Eight Core themes in allyship literature
Constant action of the 'everyday ally'
Prioritizing a structural analysis of oppression and privilege
Non-self-absorbed and accountable self-reflection
Amplify marginalised voices
Welcome criticism and be accountable
Listen, shut up and read
Ally is not a self-adhesive label
Allyship: unlikely or undesirable

Source: adapted from Carlson et al. (2020)

These themes identify a consensus in allyship literature on the importance of continuous action, the need to focus on structural inequality and centring lived experiences, and self-reflection. Whilst there may be legitimate questions as to how far and often allies are active rather than performative – and questions over whether we can move past the idea that men have 'too much to lose' by challenging patriarchy (Pease, 2002, p.166) – it is difficult to argue against the blueprint for focused, centred and dynamic action that a conceptualization such as this provides. If we approach activism from a place of understanding intersecting forms of oppression, accept individual membership of a loose federation (series) committed to disrupting social inequality, and enact a personal and collective practice of active allyship, perhaps we can give speed to the process of de-activating the Death Star, and reconfigure it.

III. Disrupting the Death Star is a constant struggle

The final theme noted by Carlson et al., asking if allyship is unlikely or undesirable, is an important one. Rather than seeing this question as pessimistic, we should treat it as a helpful poststructuralist imperative guiding our practice and urging caution. Brown and Ismail (2019) provide a set of questions seeking to use feminist theory for the purpose of subversive political action and active allyship. These questions ask us to consider: the 'purpose' of an initiative, the 'perspective' informing the initiative, the 'opportunity'

for 'systemic transformation', the 'intersection' with other social identities and the 'limitations' of the approach. What of the limitations?

In their review of texts on allyship, Carlson et al. identify that 'some content…profoundly called into question the degree to which structures of privilege can be remotely subverted, to which solidarity across identity is truly possible' (2020, p.894). Nevertheless, some of these sources also cautiously acknowledge allyship's usefulness as long as it is 'a process with no finite arrival point' (p.894). Subversive masculinity helps to break down what Butler calls 'regulatory fictions of sex and gender', making them 'contested sites of meaning' and creating 'the possibility of a disruption' (2002, p.42). In his *History of Sexuality* (1979), Foucault defines power as a 'multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate' and as 'the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens or reverses them' (1979, p.92). In order to disrupt and reconfigure the discursive forces of power, ever more men must take up genuine, active allyship to tip the balance. Butler's *Gender Trouble* profoundly problematises the very premise of gender and sexuality categories and exposes the constructedness of systems of power. She is inherently suspicious of identity politics and cautions us of the risks of marginalizing voices when we attempt to categorise and collectivise social groups for the purposes of political action (2002, p.218). This caution is important in keeping us honest by forcing us to address the constructedness of identity categories, but it should not foreclose urgent political action seeking to suppress violence against marginalised groups. Instead, it reminds us that disrupting inequality is a constant struggle and allyship a continuous, reflective, listening process. We should not forget, however, that political action also often has to engage via the same established terms of reference that Butler seeks to problematise, in the hope that it might disrupt them.

Conclusion

I have provided a brief overview of the developments in masculinity studies and examined how feminist and queer theories are already being utilised by men for the purposes of subversive, disruptive political action. I have suggested existing works that provide a grounding theory, an organising method and a set of principles for praxis for men engaging with the politics of disrupting oppressive systems and structural inequality. I have argued that men must follow the lead of poststructuralist feminism in being continuously prepared to centre oppressed voices and re-structure their approach if (when) it becomes clear that marginalised voices are being silenced or oppressed anew by political action designed initially with good intentions to liberate. It is clear that further work is needed to explore the potential for a radical politics of subversion within which a large proportion of men can operate with the aim of suppressing violence and enabling marginalised people to walk in the world authentically and safely. This work should keep in mind the questions that Brown and Ismail (2019) ask us to consider, but above all it should centre experiences lived at the margins that are created by the monolithic global systems of oppression, and it should leave enough space for the voices it will doubtless exclude in the process to enter and speak.

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Sailing on Kraus and Nelson's Pages to the New World Beyond Capitalist Disciplinarity: The Conceptual Boat and Performative Writing as 'Failures' in Contemporary Literature

Introduction

In the age of the pandemic, most exhibitions cannot be held in physical venues and the presentations of art face challenges. In consequences, exhibitors take on online formats to deliver artists' works, for example, Rabindranath A. Bhose showcases his work Trunc. (2020) as part of the Edinburgh Art Festival in the form of book with drawing and text, which demonstrates that the display of conceptual art is no longer limited to the ephemeral ones which were installed "in remote locations" (Ismail-Epps, 2016, p.258) as he adapts to the Covid-19 situation. However, the conceptual practice of presenting art in the form of book is nothing new and can be traced back to the 1960s. Seth Siegelaub, the pioneer of conceptual art, first demonstrated the idea of the book as an exhibition in *Xerox Book* (1968). In *Xerox*, Siegelaub curates pages of original artwork printed by a Xerox photocopier, which was a relatively new technology in the 60s. Siegelaub's use of printing technology is a "a successful example of a democratic multiple" (Montero, 2013, p.33) as he presents the book as an exhibition and guarantees affordable wide circulations outside of traditional art market. In this sense, conceptual art is about ideas that could take on any form, therefore, viewers' encounters with artists' ideas can occur via the page.

Siegelaub's concept of the book as exhibition blurs the boundaries between literature and the visual arts. Postmodern writers such as Kurt Vonnegut and Ishmael Reed experiment with the juxtaposition between the visual arts and text to create tension within the Subject, which disrupts the narratives with illustrations to mock the unreality of the capitalist world. However, since the Internet and digital texts became ubiquitous in the 1990s, the interdisciplinary approach to text has no longer been seen as disruptions. As we accept the changeability of the digital society, the approach fits the relational model as in David Foster Wallace's form of simultaneous interviews in *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (1999): "K: 'What does today's woman want […] E: 'I agree'" (1999, p.192). The decade thus saw the emergence of a new form of creative writing that is "fostered by the art world" and emerges as "performance writing embedded within interdisciplinary artistic practices" (Adams, 2014, pp. 218-226).

Deriving from Siegelaub's idea of the book as a form of conceptual art and Foucault's theory of disciplinarity, I argue that Chris Kraus' *Aliens and Anorexia* (2000) and Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts* (2015) function as performative writing as their forms draw on the idea of the conceptual representation

of boats through alluding to the tales of Noah's Ark and Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece respectively. Through comparing the two primary texts, this paper aims to illustrate how performative writing transcends the limitations of conceptual installation art under the capitalist global market and emerges as contemporary literature to function as a carrier of ideas and 'failures' to break down disciplinarity by adopting techniques from the "failed avant-garde" (Burgin, 1988, p.386) of conceptual art.

The Book as the Boat: The Carrier of Theory and Philosophy

As Ursula K. Le Guin interprets Elizabeth Fisher's Carrier Bag Theory of human evolution, it is a human thing to put something you want into a bag or a basket and store it in an area that contains "what is sacred" (1996, p.152). If we consider 'bagging something' as a human instinct, the first cultural device was also a recipient as theorisers argue that "the earliest cultural inventions must have been a container to hold gathered products and some kind of a sling or net carrier" (Fisher, 1980, p.150). Bringing this Carrier Bag Theory into literary studies, Le Guin claims that the "fitting shape of the novel might be that of a sack, a bag. A book holds words. Words hold things. They bear meanings" (1996, p.153). Considering Le Guin's idea along with Siegelaub's conceptual practice of presenting books as art, books are bags of ideas.

Since conceptual writing involves the application of theoretical frameworks to the book, Kraus and Nelson add an additional conceptual and meta-layer to their 'carrier bags' by alluding to Noah's ark and Jason's Argo respectively. Just like a bag, a boat carries things and even lives. Boats often play a significant role in mythologies and religious texts, for example, Noah's ark is a "kind of boat" or a "vast floating building" (Damisch, 2016, p.10) that protects the 'chosen ones' of various species of animals from the Flood and Jason's Argo that carries the Greek hero and fifties argonauts across the Black Sea to retrieve the Golden Fleece (Colavito, 2014). In Aliens, Kraus alludes to Noah's ark as she parallels her creative progress of writing and filming Gravity & Grace (1996) with Paul Thek's philosophical working of wax replicas of animal and human meat and boat ruins at the "age Christ lived to be" (2000, p. 69) and the inconceivability of the Artist's Co-Op's installation Ark/Pyramid (2000, pp. 69-98). For Nelson, the title of the book The Argonauts itself is allusive to Jason's Argo. However, Nelson's boat carries not Jason but her life, theories and writing processes as she constantly juxtaposes the names of theoretical writers with her thoughts on their works such as "Sedgwick […] it is sometimes the most paranoid-tending people who are able to, and need to, develop and disseminate the richest reparative practices" (2000, p. 122) with orthographical plays. In this sense, writing becomes "itself, becomes its own means and ends, recovering to itself the force of action" (Pollock, 1998, p. 75) and functions as performance to the readers. This section, through highlight their use of the boat as a concept, illustrates that Kraus and Nelson's books are both conceptual books that contain theories as conceptual artists stress the idea over its material execution and present their theoretical frameworks and creative processes to the audience.

The use of boats as carriers of theory and philosophy is nothing new to the practices of conceptual art. Ilya and Emilia Kabakov's installation art The Ship of Tolerance (2005) is a form of public

conceptual art that conveys "a message of tolerance and hope" as its sails are stitched together from "we-are-the-worldish paintings" and writing (Schjeldahl, 2013, p. 88) by children of various ethnicities, religions and social backgrounds. The physical construction of the wooden ship allows it to literally sail across the sea and presents itself in different countries from 2005 to 2019. Unlike The Ship of Tolerance, Ian Hamilton Finlay's Sailing Dinghy (1996) concerns itself less with the 'physical function' of the boat as he illustrates the idea of mental voyages: Finlay installs a boat he sailed on alongside his short poem on the wall. Finlay's boat carries not just ideas but also his personal experiences, so his boat is physically static but mobile on a psychological level owing to Finlay's writing and sea journeys. According to Craig Dworkin, conceptual writing or art writing refers both to "literary writing that could function comfortably as conceptual art" and "the use of text as conceptual art practices" (2010, p. xxiii). Therefore, the two works both consist of certain processes of conceptual writing through the concept of 'sailing' to evoke mental journeys to an unknown immaterial world or memories beyond the capitalist framework.

Performative writing, however, transcends from the systemic presentation of installation arts while drawing on the mental voyages embodied in installation art. Kraus in particular attacks the inability of installation to break away from the capitalist framework:

"Installation art implies a system. It's a machine, a thinking-process: objects and their associative links externalized. Is there a difference then, between the kinds of systems made by one or many minds? Jennifer Stockholder's acclaimed YourSkinInThisWeatherBourneEyeThreads&SwollenPerfume (Dia, 1995) is a complex, highly fractured set of poetic-intellectual digressions and yet the objects ultimately fold back into themselves. However fractures, the installation is a single system." (2000, p. 83)

Kraus' argument on the installation as a single system and attachment to capitalist associations can be applied especially to Kabakov's The Ship of Tolerance. The materiality of the wooden boat allows it to sail, however, it is also confined to various 'national borders' of the sea as the administrative procedures involved to gain permissions to sail across borders are fundamentally political. Thus, installation art is unable to transcend beyond the disciplinary society as its systemetic structure is under the power of 'discipline' "comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures" (Foucault, 1995, p. 215). On the other hand, as Siegelaub notes, print is the perfect medium for the display of conceptual art: "[…] when art concerns itself with things not germane to physical presence, its intrinsic value is not altered by its presentation in printed media. The use of […] books […] acts as primary information for the exhibition, as opposed to secondary information about art in magazines, catalogues, etc." (1967, pp. 202). Therefore, Kraus' use of the form of book as art does not only spare her from the capitalist operation model and high costs of producing installation art but also makes her work more engaged with the exchange of ideas and more accessible to the global audience with cheaper costs of circulation.

Following her attack on installation art, Kraus' perception of the Ark/Pyramid installation mounted by the Artist's Co-Op as "impossible to systemize" (2000, pp. 82-3) parallels her conceptual practice of creating the book as a Noah's Ark beyond capitalist comprehension and systemization. As Kraus writes, Ann Wilson's boat (that is part of the project) "awaits entry through a drawbridge to an enormous pyramid built on raked-up tiers of sand" with a sense of "Artaudian cruelty achieved by gentleness, a body without organs, a waking dream" (83), which coincides with Kraus' own attempt to manifest "an existence that overrode its representation" in artistic practices like Koos and Buchmiller do. Kraus' film Gravity's creative process owes its debt to the inconceivable conceptual practice of Ark/Pyramid, which inevitably leads to its failure because it is "less a story than a parable" (2000, p. 116). Reflecting on her creative production, she questions if movies can start with images with reference to Flaubert's statement of himself writing "the entire novel Sentimental Education to evoke the color of a windowsill's peeling paint" (2000, p. 42). Her dwelling on the colour is allusive to the creation of Aliens as she begins the narrative with a picture from Gravity. Interesting, her movie starts also with an image of flowers following William Burrough's quote: "Big Picture involves escape from the planet by a chosen few, The jumping-off place is Wellington, New Zealand" (1996, 00:05-00:12) accompanied by clock-ticking sounds. Her stress on the evocation of something abstract and waiting parallels the 'awaiting state' of Wilson's boat and its metaphysical play of featuring human actors as spectators (2000, p. 83), which alludes to the boarding of the chosen ones on Noah's ark. Her ironic 'replica' of her failed conceptual practice in Aliens dismantles the "logics of success and failure" and stands "in contrast to the grim scenarios of success that depend upon trying and trying again" in a Foucaldian sense (Halberstam, 2011, p.3) as she waits for the 'chosen ones' to board her boat of theories and create meanings.

Compared to Kraus' allusions to installed boats and Noah's Ark by commenting on artworks and her own film, Nelson's 'theoretical boat' is more visible considering the title of the book, her orthography and appropriation of Gertrude Stein's automatic writing. Near the beginning of the book, Nelson quotes Barthes describing how the subject who utters the phrase "I love you" is like "the Argonaut renewing his ship during its voyage without changing its name" (2015, p. 5). The renewing effect of uttering the same phrase over and over again resembles Stein's automatic writing as in "Sacred Emily" (1913) as she writes "rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" (1913, p. 178) since "ideas recur, although the idea may be the same, we see them in different relationships" (Miller, 1984, p. 13). However, although Nelson draws on Stein's modernist technique, she rejects the idea of making the self by separating one's inner consciousness from the outer world. On the other hand, her book is an Argo that looks into her relationship with Harry as the phrase "I love you" signifies a conversation with someone else. The idea of one's inseparability from others constantly pops up in contemporary literature as writers appropriate modernist techniques to examine the relationship between the Self and the society. Just as Sidonie Smith notes, there is no coherent self before the moment of acting in the world (108-9). Therefore, like Jason's Argo, Nelson's 'boat' contains not only herself but also others including Harry as she includes his voice: "at a certain point i woke up… i leapt to her…" next to his name "Harry" in the margin (2015, p. 131) as she does

with her commentaries on theories to establish the relationships with others as part of the self.

The portrayal of multiple voices in contemporary literature mainly derives from Deleuze and Guattari's theory of minor literature as contemporary writers reject interpretation to decode a dominant social code (1983, p. 13). Nelson further elaborates on her rejection of the binary division between the Self and the Other as she comments on Deleuze and Parnet's theories again with their names "Gilles Deleuze/ Claire Parnet" in the margin: "You must learn to tolerate an instance beyond the Two, precisely at the moment of attempting to represent a partnership – a nuptial, even. Nuptials are the opposite of a couple. There are no longer binary machines: question-answer, masculine-feminine, man-animal, etc. This could be what a conversation is – simply the outline of a becoming" (2015, p. 7). Her use of orthography is 'anti-hermeneutic' as she defies the proper academic style of citations and even parallels Harry's 'non-academic' name with well-known theorists. This 'failure' to comply with academic writing formats to discuss theories allows her to escape from "intellectual visionaries" that conform to "the dictates of the discipline" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 7). Nelson's performance of 'failures' through orthography and appropriation of Stein's automatic writing parallel her failure to stick to gender norms during her 'queer pregnancy' as she quotes Butler: "Performativity has to do with repetition, very often with the repetition of oppressive and painful gender norms to force them to resignify" alongside his name in the margin (2015, p. 15). The conceptual performativity of her orthography as a boat turns her writing "inside out, writing turns again only to discover the pleasure and power of turning, of making not sense or meaning per se but making writing perform" (Pollock, 1998, p. 75) and questions the binary divisions advocated by the disciplinarity embedded in the capitalist narrative.

The technique of narrating multiple voices is employed in contemporary literature writing not just on a interpersonal level but also on a national scale. For example, in Sour Heart (2017), Jenny Zhang code-switches between English and Chinese characters (2018, p. 77) when narrating the horror of the 'red soldiers' in the Cultural Revolution to indicate a sense of untranslatability between cultures and thus deterritorialises to allow minorities to remain minorities (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p.14). However, while contemporary writers draw on Kafka's notion of minor literature to plug every individual matter into the political (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p.17), they avoid hegemonizing the minor by emphasising the existences of individuals as in Zhang's form of 'separate' short stories and Charlotte Swenson's bolded and fragmented inner thoughts in Jennifer Egan's *Look At Me* (2001). In this sense, although Egan and Zhang's works might not be as 'conceptual' as *Aliens* and *Argonauts*, they all make use of the form of book and the form of the novel on a metafictional level to react against the "glimmer of a collective or communitarian utopianism in an idealized image" (Crosthwaite, 2019, p. 17) of the financial markets.

Navigating the Boats of Vulnerability

Extending from the above idea of the representation of female subjectivity in the wider public

discourse, Kraus and Nelson's touch on the vulnerability of female and queer artists and writers is another stretch from their conceptual framework as they employ what Kraus calls the "Lonely Girl Phenomenology" in *I Love Dick* (1997) to expose their 'female boats' of vulnerability to the larger sea of public discourse by illustrating their 'failures' to be 'tough.' In Dick, Kraus asks: "Why is female vulnerability still only acceptable when it's neuroticized and personal; when it feeds back on itself? Why do people still not get it when we handle vulnerability like philosophy, at some remove?" (1997, pp. 207-8). Through framing female vulnerability as a conceptual idea and talking about anorexia and queer pregnancy, Kraus and Nelson make their books the sites of self-expression and capricious boats of sadness to break down the binary division between the personal and the public.

Nelson throws light on the ambiguous membrane between the female body and the public as she thinks about how "a baby literally makes space where there wasn't space before" (2015, p. 103) and the "pizza-dough-like flesh hanging down in fold where there used to be a pregnant tautness" (2015, p. 109). Her metaphor of the Argonauts refers not just to Jason's Argo but also argonaut octopuses that rise to the water's surface to inhale 'public' air and envelope themselves with the air in their shells, which parallels the "capriciousness of growing a baby" (2015, p. 103) within her body as Iggy eventually enters the public discourse when Nelson gives birth to him. Argonauts then is a conceptual boat/octopus that contains both the public and the self as Nelson 'exposes' her experience with the readers in the framework of theoretical or philosophical thinking to disturb "normative sexual assumptions and practices" (2015, p. 111) and thus makes her 'capriciousness' a conceptual boat that carries both the intimate and the public discourses.

For Kraus, her 'boat' of sadness is like Wilson's boat, waiting "to be filled by what happens next," its "interaction with the audience […] Because the only way of viewing" the boat "is an actor" (2000, p. 84). She refers to emotion as "the global flow of capital" with reference to Warren's theory of sadness as a cottage industry and Dick's idea of the universe operating "according to the laws of phylogenic memory; i.e., each person carries in their body an entire memory of the species" (1997, pp. 134-5). Her book of sadness inspired by her failures in the creative industry is thus an account of the ruthlessness of the capitalist market. The book is private before the readers interact with her narrative and make her sadness public. Kraus and Nelson's conceptual practice of exposing the female vulnerability to the public is, therefore, a means to become self through making conversations with the world as Audrey Wollen extends from the "Lonely Girl Phenomenology" to state that "the sadness of girls should be witnessed and rehistoricized as an act of resistance, of political protest" (Fournier, 2018, p. 649) in the Sad Girl Theory. In this sense, they refuse to submit to "the techniques by which man has subjected himself to the rational discipline of the applied human sciences" (O'Neill, 1986, 43) and thus the capitalist rationality.

Flying Boats: Running Away From the Capitalist World

Heroes often embark on their new journeys by sailing to the sea, which leads them to discover a new land or a new vision of the world. In Genesis, God destroys all flesh because "the world is full of violence" (Gen 6.13) and Noah leads his family and animals to witness a 'purified' world; as for Jason and the argonauts, they set to leave for a sacred grove in Colchis to retrieve the Golden Fleece. Kraus and Nelson's boats do not only sail away from the known Capitalist discourse but also defy gravity to seek a greater vision of the world. Kraus' Noah's ark can 'fly' as implicated in the title of her book: *Aliens and Anorexia* and Gravity's vision of Sananda's spaceship (2000, p. 255) and Nelson's allusive title *The Argonauts* implies her Argo being called up into the sky "where it became the constellation of that name" (Colavito, 2014, p. 19) like Jason's Argo.

Drawing on the notion of the new world embedded in sea journeys, the sci-fi concept of spaceships or anti-gravitational journeys has been a recurring motif in installation and performance art that metaphorically opposes the capitalist gravity. *Platform*: (2020) utilises Le Guin's sci-fi plot of people leaving the capitalist state on Urras for an anarchist moon in *The Dispossessed* (1974) as an inspiration. The idea of weight and its three aspects of "grounding, groundlessness and inertia" (Benmakhlouf, 2020, p. 2) is not only important to artist-choreographer Mark Bleakley's participating conceptual short film *Giving Weight* (2020) but also to contemporary conceptual writing in response to the Foucauldian modern power of disciplinarity that "deploys normalization, routines, convention, tradition, and regularity" (Halberstam, 2013, pp. 7-8). *Giving Weight*, like print, is easily circulated through the distribution of media and less confined to the physical setting of installation art as Bleakley is able to 'float' his characters in the air to create an anti-gravitational force with computer-mediated post-production. Installation art like Takis' Radar (1960), Gong (1978) and Electro-Magnetic Music (1966), on the other hand, have to occupy a large area at Tate Modern to install large metallic objects to create the visual effect of 'hovering' in space and the musical vibrations of 'cosmic echoes.'

Both *Aliens* and *Argonauts* end with a glimpse of hope to 'fly away' as Kraus and Nelson talk about their failures through drawing on the concept of flying boats. The last part of *Aliens* is a retelling of Kraus' failed film *Gravity*, which features Sananda's believers waiting for the promised spaceship as the Flood comes (2000, p. 230) and Grace heads to New York and fails to "make an explicit feminist critique the way most" of her contemporaries do (2000, p. 253). Grace's inability to please the curators metafictionally parallels Kraus' own failure in the film industry. Kraus visualises a way to escape from the highly disciplined art market as Grace sees "a blinding disc of whiteness moving towards her from behind the sky" and is prepared to leave the world (2000, p. 255). Illustrating the same sense of failure, Nelson asks: "But who am I kidding? This book may already be doing wrong" as she questions her own parentship (2015, p. 140) in a queer family. However, like Kraus, she shows us a vision of transcending the postmodern pessimistic logic of nothingness as she questions if there is "really such a thing as nothing, nothingness?" (2015, p. 143), which echoes her notion of the Argo "insisting on retaining, a

sense of the fugitive" (2015, p. 29) that allows her to 'sail' away from the disciplinary correctness signalled by 'seriousness.' Both Kraus and Nelson explore the worlds conjured by losers and failures (Halberstam, 2013, pp. 6-7) through their experimenting conceptual practices of presenting metafictional books that touch on certain aspects of their life as flying boats.

Conclusion

Drawing from the discussion on *Aliens* and *Argonauts* above, we can identify the trend of conceptual and performative writing in contemporary literature as female writers present their 'failures,' whether in everyday life as people or in the global art market as artists, to "investigate the place of the writer within global networks of aesthetic and economic valuation" (Stephens, 2015, p. 155) and move beyond the limitations of installation art. Kraus and Nelson's conceptual art does not only transcend the capitalist framework of installation art but also mock commodity fetishism in literary cultures. As female contemporary writers sail across the dangerous sea of capitalism, we are invited to join their experimental and performative journeys to explore the 'moon of indiscipline.' There is no way for us to define the constantly changing form of conceptual writing practice as we live in the age of flux, but we will always be sure that the anti-gravitational force exists and transforms in contemporary literature.

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Examining black women's sexuality and resistance: heteroerotic demonstrations of gender inequality in Francophone African literature

From the period of independence in the 1960s to the present day, Francophone literature has continued to engage with various aspects of the society including gender inequality, which has occupied a prominent position in Francophone Studies over the last thirty years (Bryson, 2008). Considering that this article engages with black women's sexuality as an aspect of gender inequality, it is important to understand first the concepts of sexuality and black female sexuality. According to WHO:

> Sexuality encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy, and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, practices, roles, and relationships. […] Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors. (2006)

While this definition offers a pluralistic understanding of sexuality, Trimiko et al (2015) on the other hand offering a general perspective of black female sexuality notes that it refers to the diverse ways black women perceive, experience, and represent sexuality. However, discussing black women's sexuality as represented in Francophone African society and literature – especially in Calixthe Beyala's Femme noire…femme nue (FNFN), Ferdinand Kosh's Adam et plusieurs Eves (APE), and William Sassine's Mémoire d'une peau (MP), the research focuses on 3 key aspects of sexuality: sexual desire, activity, and behavior.

Examining these 3 aspects in these texts, we specifically consider intimate and heteroerotic relationships, explore how black African women responding to masculine sexuality and dominance, resort to expressive sexuality to demonstrate rebellion and establish equality as liberated women. Employing theories that emphasize gender equality and women's liberation in African society, this paper draws on Gayatri Spivak's feminist ideas in Can the Subaltern speak? (1988), and black feminist theory. Alluding to black women, this research refers to women of African origin living within the continent, especially those in West Africa as well, as women of black African heritage living in the Caribbean as we shall see later on. To understand our stance in this article, we briefly examine the representation of women in West African Francophone literature.

Women and sexuality in Francophone African Literature

Sexuality and gender equality featuring prominently in Francophone Studies, researchers, and experts inliterary and gender studies such as Coly (2019), Fletcher (2015), Couti (2009), Hitchcott (2000), Cazenave (2000), Okeke (2000) have continued to offer diverse perspectives on the subject. Whilst their views and approaches may differ, we safely state that they unanimously suggest the existence of biased narratives surrounding the person of the black African woman, who according to Fonchingong (2006), is

made marginal to the plot of the fiction, depicted as inferior, weak, mute, and restrained with only a few emerging as powerful and credible protagonists. Considering the impact culture and tradition on this bias, Chilembwe and Dokotala (2018) stress that 'the feminine character is often the victims of cultural and traditional practices, favored by the patriarchal system, whereas the masculine characters on the other hand seem to be more influential and stronger'. This submission is foregrounded in some literary works of authors like Mbia, Beti, Ba and Kourouma. However, other writers like Mabanckou, Kouassi, Beyala and Feki have committed to examining both the marginalization of women and the challenges they encounter as they overcome societal prejudices including those linked to sexuality.

Discussing sexuality in African culture, Feki (2020) describes it as a taboo as '[...] it is forbidden to think or familiarize with eroticism'. Similarly, Beyala (2003) notes in FNFN that 'as for sex, I live in a land where it is not named, […] like it does not exist, it is like an absence […]' hence, it is never discussed. Elaborating on this aspect of silence, Ikanga (2012) accentuates that:

> discussing sexuality is a practice that is highly prohibited and often considered as a violation of societal norms. Anyone who dares to freely manifest their sexual feelings, or openly displays their sexuality is scornfully looked upon and made a subject of discussion. […] Worse still when it is a woman. She is seen as a prostitute.[i]

From Ikanga's perspective we understand that although African society generally disapproves of discussions on sexuality or eroticism, it particularly frowns upon women who engage in them, as they are thought to be violating societal norms, indecent, and wayward. Note that a black woman discussing her sexuality involves expressing her sexual desires to a man, initiating intercourse, as well as admitting affection to a man she admires, all which fall under the key aspects sexuality we earlier mentioned on page 2. Given that the society restricts women's sexuality, it means that these gestures and behaviors are therefore by default assigned to men and as such, are deemed to be more appropriate when displayed by them. This biased ideology is largely acceptable in certain patriarchal societies and cultures in Africa because these 'patriarchal cultures typically stigmatize female sexuality as inferior, therefore often underwriting the denial of social, legal, and human rights to women' (Diabate, 2011). Note that a patriarchal society 'promotes male privilege by being male dominated, male identified and male centered. It is also organized around an obsession with control and involves as one of its aspects the oppression of women.' (Johnson, 1997).

However, in the wake of feminism and increased discourses on sexuality, writers have dared to 'speak openly, brazenly of what, usually [remained] reserved, kept secret, hidden, that is, forbidden to say, or what is not to be said between people in public'. (N'da, 2011). Examples of such include: Mudimbe's Le Bel Immonde (1979), Sassine's Mémoire d'une peau (1998), Keita's Rebelle (2000), Kourouma's Allah n'est pas obligé (2000), Beyala's Femme noire…femme nue (2003), Kosh's Adam et plusieurs Eves (2011), Mabanckou's Petit Piment (2015), Feki's Noces de Jasmin (2020) and Mujila's La Danse du Vilain (2020), all capturing various themes on sexuality, some of which shall be highlighted in the subsequent sections.

Masculine sexuality and dominance in Francophone African literature

The study of masculine sexuality, and domineering heteroerotic relationship highlighted in Sassine's Mémoire d'une peau (MP) and Kosh's Adam et plusieurs Eves (AP) strongly aligns with the traits of patriarchy earlier described by Johnson. In this patriarchal and androcentric society, there exist various levels of marginalization of women. Pérez (2009), drawing from Plumwood's (1996) model of gender and the Other, highlights amongst others:

> Radical exclusion of women: Where Men are represented as radically separated from and superior to women.
> Denial of women: Where women are represented as inessential, […] Their work and contributions are disregarded or devalued, […] systematically downgraded or ignored.
> Instrumentalism of women: Where women are deprived of any independent agency. […] become a means or a resource that men can make use of to satisfy their own needs and interests. They are only valued for the usefulness men can find in them and not in their own right.

With respect to gender inequality, women in African society fall into one or all of the categories above. This stance is justified in our analysis of sexuality in Sassine's MP, we see a reflection active instrumentalism. Examining the masculine sexuality of Milo Kan, the principal character, we notice that his outright sexual obsession, dominance, and instrumentalization of women is a means to satisfy his own needs and interests, as well as a technique to compensate for the dissatisfaction he feels within himself because his albinism which he feels affects his confidence as a man. This explains why Milo asserts that 'we are poor, we have just this piece of flesh in between our thighs'. (43) Considering his self-dissatisfaction, we understand that this piece of flesh further helps to define his strength and asserts his identity (Assani 2017). The themes of sexuality and dominance in Kosh's APE are visible in Freddy's narration: 'I took charge [...] Viviane, carried away by the fun became passionate and told me that she wanted to make love to me immediately. I refused and told her that man is made to stay on top [...] he has the right of superiority' (27). Presenting another scenario, we consider Freddy's narration here: 'one day, taking her from behind, I abruptly removed my pipette and asked her to invent a romantic posture, a kind of position that should make me relax.[…], it gave me the freedom to go far […] to explore the very depth (106).' The experiences highlighted above: Freddy's rejection of Viviane's advances, and the emphasis on his command and control of the pleasure derived from their intercourse, exposes the aspect of patriarchy in heteroerotic relationships. Similarly, in Beyala's FNFN Irene is rebuked by Ousmane when she attempts to express her attraction and sexual desire towards him, he declares that only a man has the right to initiate any sexual act (21).

These extracts illustrate the rejection of black women's sexuality, the deniability of women's right to choose, or simply to dare to act as equal to a man. With these limitations, the man's sexual needs are prioritized at the detriment of the woman. This reveals why intercourse may be carried out with indifference regarding the woman's pleasure and satisfaction, as illustrated by Freddy's act: 'this stimulation accompanied by gestures I wanted, like the piston movements in the steam engines, regardless of her will, made me ejaculate in synchronic manner.' (65). These examples summarized in instrumentalism, equally highlight the

context of subalternity expressed through masculine dominance, which restricts expressions of women's sexuality. Beyond the perspectives explored, one might argue that dominance associated with masculine sexuality is an aspect that defines certain types of erotic activities, such as bondage or disciplinary games. Nonetheless, this does not invalidate the existence of sexual inequality which we have emphasized in the course of our research. Further considering the effects of dominance and inequality associated with black women's sexuality, I articulate that since social and political affairs in patriarchal societies are inherently gendered, such inequality crucially affects the perception of the woman and her ability to participate actively in social and political change as her rights are perpetually denied, and her abilities constantly undermined. Based on these factors, we strongly consider black feminine sexuality to be as important as other aspects of inequality experienced by women, and this firmly justifies the fundamental need for the deconstruction of the patriarchy – especially regarding sexuality, as we shall see in the next section.

Feminist revolutionary tools: Eroticism and sexuality

Examining the quest for gender and sexual equality thus far, our research recommends expressive black female sexuality as a critical revolutionary approach towards achieving this goal. This key aspect illustrated in this section represents of the many problems of social injustice that black feminism seeks to tackle. It is precisely to this end that Collins (2000) regards black feminism as a social justice project and stresses the importance of building coalitions as a central factor to advancing that project. Building coalition in this situation refers to involving men and emphasizing the need to work together to achieve equality. Expounding on the role of black feminism in this regard Simien (2008) asserts that it benefits the black community by challenging patriarchy as an institutionalized oppressive structure and advocating the building of coalitions. […] making conscious efforts to avoid attacking individual black men in order to work with them to further the cause of equality and justice for women. This stresses the importance of revolt as it refutes all levels of male dominance in the phallocratic society especially as it facilitates instrumentalization and denial, as seen in the works of Sassine and Kosh.

Thus, expressive sexuality becomes a huge step towards women emancipation and liberation especially in heteroerotic relationship. This explains why Beyala using Irene, the principal character in FNFN, demonstrates the deviation from the restrictive norms that determine black women's sexuality. Irene starts off by declaring her ambition to unravel the mysteries surrounding sexuality: 'I want to know how women manage to get pregnant, because there are words that don't exist in our country' (11). Irene's declaration implies that even though the words exist they are considered nonexistent due to the societies stance on sexuality especially regarding women. hence they have little or no access to expressive privilege. Thus, Irene's declaration is a direct application of Spivak's liberatory model for the subaltern which

emphasizes the importance of the marginalized to speak up for themselves, for there is no better voice to describe their situation than theirs. Elaborating on Spivak's model of revolt, Benedict Binebai (2015) states that:

> the subalterns are marginalized people who have no voice and who find it hard to speak. Thus, when the subaltern speaks, he/she no longer remains a subaltern. […] They are subjects who should speak for themselves. They should be inventors and masters of their own voices. It is only when the subaltern speaks for themselves that they can cease to be subaltern subjects.

By speaking up, Irene demonstrates that she is no longer a subaltern and by rejecting patriarchy, she gains freedom that permits her to express and explore her sexuality. Articulating this action, Coste (2020) proposes a reading of FMFN as a 're-appropriation of sensuality by women, where eroticism and sexuality become a feminine weapon against a misogynistic society. The […] erotic scenes permit […] Irene, the main character, to seize power over a society dominated by men' (3). The validity of this proposition is demonstrated below as she takes charge of feelings either by making herself a subject of her sexuality or by sharing equal consent and pleasure that comes with the exploration sexuality with a man. By offering equal consent and pleasure, she demonstrates the goals of black feminist theory which emphasizes collectivity and equality as lustrated in her narration below:

> I slide his pants along his thighs, exposing the animal veracity of his nature. […] And when I pull it down, my tongue wraps around his plantain in a broad circular motion, […] His mouth foams with incomprehensible words. (21).

From the above quotation, we deduce that by making herself a subject of her sexuality and attaining heteroerotic equality with her lover Ousmane, he equally enjoys the moment. Nonetheless, demonstrating the conflicts that occur in attempting to undo patriarchy, we note that Ousmane soon feels robbed of his supremacy; he feels the shift in the pre-established hierarchy, and resorts to insulting and manhandling her in order to re-establish the hierarchy and prove his superiority, as Irene narrates: 'he throws me on the ground, tears me apart, penetrates me fiercely […] In the violence he delivers, he thinks he is undermining my sexual supremacy. He wants to regain his lost masculinity. Only the male has the right to initiate the act of love making' (ibid).' Analysing Ousmane's resistance, the author suggests that trying to gain dominance in heteroerotic relationship is irrelevant because such relations aim at satisfying the pleasure of both parties thus, demonstrations of superiority are inconsequential. Further illustrating the dismantling of patriarchal pillars suppressing black women's sexuality, Beyala (1987) presents us with another example in the character of Ateba in the novel C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée. Following Beyala's narration, Ateba, just like Irene, goes on to explore sexuality by initiating and satisfying her sexual desires as any man would; and this time, with the cooperation of Gon, the male character:

> She drags Combi's son Gon, […], into the thicket. She lowers his pants […] She takes the little sex in her hands. She's squeezing it. It swells. It lengthens. She's raises her dress. She

invites Gon to climb. […] (55)

Gon's cooperation in this instance, unlike Ousmane, further demonstrates the benefits of gender equality as it ensures the sexual serenity and wellbeing of both genders.

We recognise that just like African societies, the study of sexuality in Caribbean has been a taboo, off-limits for scholarly research due to cultural attitudes of the regions, and other factors. (Sharpe and Pinto 2006). This explains the rigid ordering in Caribbean societies that prioritizes male pleasure and control (Marshall 2011). However, Jones (2006) argues that 'recent Caribbean historiography has acknowledged the significance of gender in shaping the experiences of […] black women'. Thus, even though female 'sexual beliefs and conducts are restricted by religion, popular culture, and language to satisfy men, women are negotiating their needs for non-oppressive relationships' (Marshall 2011). This explains why, analysing issues of gender, dominance, and female sexuality, Maryse Condé in Moi Tituba, sorcière noire de Salem, presents an image of a liberated black woman in the character of Tituba, who, demonstrates sexual revolution by being able to fearlessly exert her sexuality. We note that Tituba, having met with John l'Indien, whom she admires, is the first to explore the possibility of seeing each other again as she asks: 'Will I see you again?'(29).' Examining Tituba's action, Tchomba (2012) notes 'that whereas customarily, it is the man who would have made advances, here we have of a woman who freely expresses her inclination without waiting for the man to make the move. Tituba's act above, like that of Irene and Ateba in Beyala's novels, all prove that women are beginning to dismantle the hierarchy that exists with regards to sexuality. By becoming more expressive, they attain equality as well as intimate and sexual rights just like men. This demonstrates the unwillingness of the woman to abandon herself to, the fate of instrumentalization that has been predetermined for her as presented in Sassine's MP and Kosh's APE.

Conclusion

Discussing black women's sexuality and heteroerotic desires as revolutionary tools in establishing equality at an intimate level, this paper has established that eroticism, and limitless rights to the expression of sexuality as held by the masculine gender, are also key components of the female existence. Thus, while prominent questions of gender equality are vigorously tackled in religious, social, political, and other public spaces, this paper suggests that the same attention and energy should be directed to existing questions on gender inequality in private and intimate spaces such as eroticism and expressive sexuality. This can be achieved by consciously departing from traditional androcentric and phallocratic societal practices, which encourage masculine supremacy, women's oppression, and domination while permanently limiting women's expressivity especially as it concerns sexual desires.

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We Are Afraid

Inspired by Jennifer L. Knox

> The worst thing you could find in a forest when you are all alone
>
> Is not a fox, or bear, or wild boar,
>
> But someone who looks just like you.

We are afraid of clever poems.

We are afraid of misplaced commas in every email

Because we're supposed to be better than that. We are afraid

Of flung diapers and gaggles of gangly teens whispering Paki. We are afraid

Of choking on the pins we poke into our heads. We are afraid

Of being forgotten. It's why we write, why we bother.

We are afraid of our own tongues,

How they erase our identities and histories

And are the reason our grandmother cries

At night, in her single bed, with us on the other end of the line

Telling her it's ok in her enemy's tongue. We are afraid

Of our unborn children killing us multiple times over

With their hedonistic hooliganism, propensity to promote road rage,

And their large bulbous heads that we are supposed to push out of –

We are afraid, too, of those mini deaths

Where they give us that look that says rot in Hell

You good for nothing piece of flesh

We have grown tired of leeching on.

We are afraid of every breaking news

Each one is more evidence that we are living in a hybrid Truman Show rip-off/

Soap opera/ dystopia/ comedy/ low-budget horror with strong political undertones.

We are a people of fear. We are afraid

Of the day our children are not afraid.

When they become too comfortable –

Living on this borrowed land on borrowed time –

Is when they will come for them.

<center>~</center>

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"My mind […] rebels at stagnation": the relationship between work and addiction in Sherlock Holmes adaptations

In the Holmes canon, and every meaningful adaptation that followed, there is a strong relationship between work and narcotics. Work itself is a major theme of Doyle's original stories, with Clare Clarke stating that 'connections between labour, value and morality are repeatedly addressed in these stories with clients, criminals and Holmes himself anxiously interacting with issues of work ethics, payment and labour capital' (Clarke 2011, p. 77). The link between work and narcotics was established with the publication of *The Sign of Four*, when Holmes offers the following treatise on his addiction:

> "My mind," he said, "rebels at stagnation. Give me problems, give me work, […] and I am in my own proper atmosphere. I can dispense then with artificial stimulants. But I abhor the dull routine of existence. I crave for mental exaltation." (Doyle 2001, p. 6)

As time has progressed, and depictions of the detective have been updated, his relationship to his drugs of choice has been altered to fit their new context. From *Sherlock*'s minimisation of the theme to *Elementary*'s depiction of a man in the midst of recovery, to House M.D.'s use of a rehabilitation facility as a season opener, every long-form adaptation of the character deals with his addiction in unique ways. Furthermore, each of these versions of Holmes has their own relationship between drugs and work, signifying their difference from their origins. This essay shall deconstruct the differing depictions of this relationship, arguing that modern adaptations typically differ from Arthur Conan Doyle's vision for the character due to their duty to modern audiences, and a need to seek depth from a character in the era of antiheroes.

Over the course of this article, I shall be cross-referencing several works that interact with Arthur Conan Doyle's original texts. Sherlock and Elementary are both straightforward TV adaptations of the original stories, though the latter takes a more abstract approach in contrast to Sherlock's direct adaptations of the tales. House M.D. is an even more speculative adaptation, with the main remnants of the original stories being the relationship between Doctors House and Wilson, with their names being a play upon Holmes and Watson (Wittler, 2005). This essay will argue that another major aspect of the original stories at work in House M.D. is House's addiction, and its affect upon work.

There is one important note to make before progressing with my arguments: that of Holmes' wealth and status in society, and how it affects his addiction. In the case of *Sherlock* and *Elementary*, as well as the original stories, wealth enables the detective to work at Scotland Yard (or the NYPD in the case of Elementary) with no reimbursement, which a poorer character would not be able to justify. Charles

Rzepka argues that Edgar Allan Poe's detective Dupin, who he believes to be a prominent figure in the development of Holmes, is an 'aristocratic atavism living outside the workaday world', and he maintains a way of life that 'only someone with no need to work for a living could pursue' (2005, pp. 76-77). Though Rzekpa is referring to a different character, these statements epitomise Holmes' privilege in all versions of the story, as his wealth and status allow him to only take on the cases he finds intriguing. This is echoed in the character of House (*House M.D.*), who is entitled to only accept cases that interest him due to his status as head of the diagnostics department, leading to a 'case of the week' format (Lewis 2020). Work is reframed within every Holmes story, be it a direct adaptation or a looser inspiration, so that work is no longer a necessity of life, required to facilitate one's drug habit. Work has instead become fuel for Holmes' brain, the stimulant that he mimics with narcotics when lacking a case. Proof of this comes in an episode of *House M.D.* in which House asks Dr. Cuddy to give him a second shot of morphine after solving a case, prompting this exchange:

> Cuddy: When did the pain start coming back?
>
> House: A few hours ago.
>
> Cuddy: About an hour after you solved the case.
>
> House: If I wanted to be psychoanalyzed I'd get Wilson to give me the shot.
>
> […] Cuddy: It was saline, I gave you a placebo. ('Skin Deep', 2006, 41:00)

Here, the show demonstrates that House's opioid addiction is psychological in nature, later confirmed by a series of episodes in which he stays in a rehabilitation facility, as drugs can be replaced with the euphoria of solving a mystery. Therefore, the relationship between work and narcotics in a Holmes story is complicated by the character's status in society, as he is able to transcend the concerns of the working classes and see work as a pastime.

When comparing various versions of Holmes, one major difference can be found in the ways that Holmes' drugs of choice have been adapted, and the stigmas with which they are associated. In Doyle's stories, Holmes uses both morphine and cocaine, with the latter being particularly stigmatised (Doyle 2001, p. 5). In the decades prior to Conan Doyle's detective stories, cocaine was praised for its medicinal properties, with the author himself having been known to experiment with it (Keep and Randall 1999, 209). However, by the advent of Holmes, the medical community had shifted in their views of the drug, with Dr. Albrecht Erlenmeyer, a former proponent of it, labelling cocaine as 'the third scourge of mankind' (Berridge and Edwards 1981, p.222). Watson himself judges Holmes' choice of narcotic, stating that 'your brain may, as you say, be roused and excited, but it is a pathological and morbid process' (Doyle 2001, p. 5). In this diagnosis, Watson's phrasing paints a bleak picture of Holmes' addiction, with 'pathological' hinting at Freudian psychoanalysis, and 'morbid' connoting death at the hands of his habit. The same can be said of the drugs which the Holmeses of *Sherlock* and *Elementary* use, with the former taking a cocktail of Class A drugs including cocaine during the 2015 Christmas special ('The Abominable

Bride', 2016), and the latter having formerly used heroin. While their social stigmas differ – the former being typically associated with the rich and famous (McVeigh 2015), and the latter with the lower classes, with many welfare programs excluding benefits from heroin addicts (Maher 2001, 40) – both drugs are illegal, and frowned upon by the organisations with which the detectives work. Therefore, these shows carry the negative associations of Holmes' addiction across to their adaptations, with the detective hiding his stigmatised habit from his colleagues for at least part of the runtime of their series.

House M.D. paints a slight contrast, with the titular character frequently taking the opioid Vicodin (the brand name for a combination of Hydrocodone and Paracetamol). With this adaptative choice, the writers offer a more nuanced version of their Holmes' addiction, placing him within the context of America's opioid crisis. Between 1999 and 2017, 'the death rate from [opioid] drug overdoses more than tripled' (DeWeerdt 2019), with *House M.D.*'s seasons being both made and set from 2004 to 2012. While the wider context of America's crisis is not overtly acknowledged within the show, as it has been more commonly looked upon retrospectively in the 2010s, it is clear from both other characters' disapproval of his habit, and his eventual recovery, that this is a problem which House must overcome. His addiction began not as an alternative to work, but as pain relief from an unhealed injury, but for all his claims that the pills are necessary to 'manage [his] pain', he is eventually able to go without them after some time in a rehabilitation facility. This paints an alternative picture of the story, as Vicodin has clearly transitioned from being a medical necessity to a crutch, as it were. As previously mentioned, Dr. Cuddy is able to simulate the effects of morphine, another opioid, with the thrill of solving a case, meaning that not only has Vicodin ceased to be medically necessary, but it has become the addiction we see in Doyle's original stories. Therefore, the later seasons of House M.D. align with the canon, concurring with the 'counterposing of cocaine and [Holmes'] career' (Wiltse 1998, 114) that can be seen in other adaptations.

Another element of Doyle's novels that is carried through to most adaptations is the serial nature of the stories and how it affects Holmes' addiction. Wiltse explains this link, comparing Doyle's struggle with writing serial stories - which eventually lead to his attempted murder of Holmes for a 'sense of an ending' (Doyle 1993, p. 95) - with the detective's 'struggle with the gaps between cases' (Wiltse 1998, 112). This can be transposed to the theme of work through the notion that the work is not constant, it ebbs and flows, leaving the writer and detective alike both struggling in the time between stories. In *The Sign of Four*, Holmes describes this struggle directly, in his comment that 'My mind [...] rebels at stagnation' (Doyle 2001, p.6), a speech which has influenced the portrayal of Holmes in the century since. The book begins and ends with Holmes taking a dose of cocaine due to a lack of cases, and Charles Rzepka argues this suggests that 'the Morstan case and the pharmaceutical stimulant are for Holmes fundamentally interchangeable methods of overcoming boredom' (Rzepka 2005, p. 135). Though Sherlock barely addresses addiction across the course of the show, the 2015 Christmas special directly ties it to this scene in *The Sign of Four* through Sherlock's drug-induced hallucination of an 'alternative' past ('The Abominable Bride', 2015, 01:52). Throughout the course of the episode, Sherlock flits back and forth between the

twenty-first century present and an imagined Victorian past. One such instance occurs after being confronted about his present-day 'overdose', falling back into his hallucination as he hears John ask, from off-screen, 'Morphine or cocaine?', a direct quote from *The Sign of Four* ('The Abominable Bride', 1:03:45). Once the detective has fully returned into his hallucinations, John angrily raves 'Never on a case. You promised me. Never on a case' (1:04:57), returning to the binary opposition between drugs and work. Holmes may partake in narcotics on the weekend, but never when assigned to a case, as Watson believes it infringes on his judgement. He also overtly calls Sherlock a 'drug addict', something that only ever occurs within this episode, thus making it not canon in the show's timeline due to its 'alternative' nature. Overall, Sherlock as a show does not seem to particularly care about the theme of addiction. In the transition from pilot to finalised show, Sherlock's comment that he has not done drugs 'in a while' is altered into indignation at the thought, with the rebuttal that he is wearing a nicotine patch, implying that his opium addiction has been transformed into a cigarette problem (Sullivan 2015). Therefore, while 'The Abominable Bride' makes some allusions to the relationship between narcotics and work, it does so in a way that allows the writers to never address it again, while providing 'fan service' by quoting Doyle (de la Ville and Durup 2009, pp. 45–47). This fundamentally misunderstands the character of Holmes, as his temperament is tied up in his addiction, as are the motives behind his work. He does not seek work in order to save the world, or to help people, but to chase the high that drugs provide. Thus, the writers of Sherlock display a fundamental misunderstanding of the character they are writing, revealing that their adaptation is one of empty signifiers with none of the original substance.

Elementary takes the theme of seriality a step further, with Miller's Holmes constantly calling attention to the on-going nature of his addiction throughout the show. In 'A Giant Gun, Filled With Drugs', Sherlock states that 'the road to recovery [...] is as treacherous as it is tedious' (2013, 42:05), and he delivers the following monologue on 'maintaining [his] sobriety' later in the show:

> It's repetitive. And it's relentless. And above all, it's tedious. When I left rehab, I, I accepted your influence. I committed to my recovery. And now, two years in, I find myself asking, is this it? My sobriety is simply a grind. It's just this leaky faucet which requires constant maintenance. And in return offers only not to drip. ('The Eternity Injection, 2015, 35:02).

Mary McNamara argues that *Elementary* 'may be the best portrait of recovery on television' through its 'reminder that the drama of recovery is its lack of drama' (McNamara 2014), and this can be seen in Sherlock's boredom in the rehabilitation process. There is no spectacle, no dramatic flair, one simply stays abstinent. Sherlock often remarks that work allows him to keep busy, helping him to maintain his sobriety, in a twist on the theme of work and narcotics. Like his literary predecessors, he previously used drugs to fill the void of work, so he requires work in order to remain sober, and fears relapse without it. The cop procedural genre which *Elementary* mimics furthers this theme, as Sherlock works for the NYPD alongside taking private clients. If he were to rely purely on the latter, as his predecessors have done, he would lack the amount of work required for his sobriety. The police procedural is a genre predicated on

seriality, with episodes rarely being linked in theme, acting as standalone plots, a fact which links *Elementary* to Doyle's short stories, which were published serially in The Strand (Willis 1998).

While Miller's Holmes spends the show's seven seasons recovering from his habit, his formerly drug-addled self can be glimpsed in flashbacks and through the recollections of characters from his past. What we find in these depictions is that, for as much as work and narcotics have become linked for this Holmes through his recovery, they also overlapped during his use of heroin, in a way that links him to the Holmes of Sherlock. In 'The Abominable Bride', Sherlock claims that he uses drugs to 'alleviate boredom and occasionally heighten [his] thought processes' (2015, 1:02:32), a fact which also seems to have been the case in Elementary. In the episode 'A Giant Gun, Filled With Drugs', Sherlock's former drug dealer Rhys seeks his help, offering him a hit as he believes that it will heighten his senses:

> Do you remember the Tinsdale case? [...] I remember I brought you a little cocaine, watched you shoot up. Like, within a minute, you had the whole thing sussed [...] no one was any the wiser. Except you, of course. Remember? It's time, huh? For Emily. ('A Giant Gun, Filled With Drugs', 2013, 32:05)

Rhys clearly believes that drugs used to improve the detective's deductive logic, a fact near-confirmed when Sherlock later explains the trajectory of his addiction to Joan, stating that he had used drugs as 'something to do when I was bored or in need of a boost during a particularly challenging investigation' ('M.', 2013, 21:30). However, within the episode Sherlock outwardly refutes Rhys' claims, stating that 'drugs are a hindrance […], not a help' ('A Giant Gun, Filled With Drugs', 2013, 18:09): while he believed, as an addict, that they enhanced his abilities, he now knows that they held him back from his true, unobstructed potential. Therefore, while flashes back to Sherlock's past drug use seem to concur with Sherlock's statement that drugs can 'heighten' his thought process, and improve his work, Miller's Holmes believes in his recovery, and that his work is better without them.

Another way that the themes of work and addiction manifest is through the adaptation of Watson, Holmes' some-time caretaker. Though often depicted as the audience surrogate and lesser of the pair - the 'naïve sidekick' to the 'super-intelligent detective' mirrored in later iterations like Christie's Hastings (Gillman 1980, p. 14) - the army doctor of Doyle's original stories tried to keep his Holmes' addiction in check. While he sometimes 'lacked the courage to protest' (Doyle 2001, p. 5), A Sign of Four depicts the doctor as trying to find ways to keep Holmes occupied, and stop his drug use. With regard to the theme of work however, Watson himself states at the end of the story that 'The division seems rather unfair' as Holmes has 'done all the work in this business' (Doyle 2001, p. 118), painting himself into the role of the unintelligent sidekick who merely acts as a sounding board to the great detective. The same can certainly be said of John's role in Sherlock, with many commentators noting his lack of agency; one of the villains of the show foregrounds this, explicitly calling him Sherlock's 'damsel in distress' ('His Last Vow', 2014,

1:12:01). Additionally, John does not act as Sherlock's caretaker, as he is completely powerless in 'The Abominable Bride', outside of Sherlock's hallucinations. *Elementary* and *House M.D.* both opt for alternate depictions of their Watsons, making them equal partners in the work of detection, as well as allowing them to care for their respective Holmes' addictions.

Lucy Liu's Joan Watson enters *Elementary* as Sherlock's 'sober companion', whose role is to keep him clean upon re-entry into society, with the detective having just left rehab, so acts specifically as a caregiver for much of the show's first season. This attention to Sherlock's recovery continues throughout, and the only instances in which the detective relapses and uses heroin are moments in which he has been separated from his Watson. House and Wilson develop a similar partnership in the sixth season of *House M.D.*, with the aloof doctor moving in with his friend post-rehab in order to maintain his recovery. In addition to this role, the writers of *Elementary* include Joan much more directly in the work of detection, with her medical expertise and intuition leading to the resolution of the case in the show's pilot episode ('Pilot', 2012, 30:05), and many more in the seasons that followed. Their (platonic) relationship is one of equals, in marked contrast to both the original stories and adaptations like Sherlock, in which 'normal mortals can do little more than goggle and gasp in the presence of [Holmes'] mastery' (Berlatsky, 2018). *Elementary*'s depiction of an 'egalitarian' relationship between the detective and his sidekick (Berlatsky) means that not only can Holmes finally overcome his addiction and begin recovery, but also that work transcends being a mere alternative to narcotics. As Berlatsky puts it, 'the real value of his work is that he does it with Watson, and with others'. Work becomes detached from its prior role in Sherlock's life, as a mere stimulant, and becomes an act which he can actively enjoy, and take pride in.

As I have shown, adaptations of Sherlock Holmes stories will inevitably, at least in passing, discuss the relationship between work and narcotics, themes which are essential for understanding the character of the great detective. *House M.D.*, despite being a non-traditional adaptation, handles the theme with great care, updating Holmes' addiction to the thoroughly modern context of the opioid crisis, and much of *Elementary*'s season-long plot arcs are concerned with Sherlock's relationship to his recovery. An adaptation of the great detective cannot be successful in portraying its protagonist without fully discussing his addiction, as it is such an essential part of Doyle's characterisation. Furthermore, when adapting into a long-form medium such as television, allowing Holmes to recover from his addiction, and enter a stage of recovery, is a worthwhile endeavour. Not only does it allow for a depth of character that modern viewers expect of their heroes, but it enables the detectives of each show to disentangle the relationship between drugs and work, with the latter no longer standing in for the high that drugs provide. Instead, they can use work as a productive means of maintaining their sobriety, and as something to take pride in.

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[1] Own translation. Same for the rest of the research

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Review of Shraddha Chatterjee's Queer Politics in India - Towards Sexual Subaltern Subjects (2018)

Shraddha Chatterjee's book *Queer Politics in India Towards - Sexual Subaltern Subjects* (2018) has recognised the contemporary issues of queer subjects in India by studying particular incidents and contextualising them with the historical emergence of queer politics in South Asia. Further, these movements' outstanding effort and advocacy to include queer identity in the more extensive political discussions is the most crucial notion of Chatterjee's work. Chatterjee complicates the idea of inclusion by presenting the stronghold of the dominant 'reproductive heterosexual patriarchal structure' in South-Asia, and inclusivity, proposed by the queer activism, would mean continuing such structures' centrality. Thus, maintaining the 'structurality of the structure'. The repercussions would be to exclude the subaltern subjects that do not belong to the system. (45)

They critically evaluate the past and present political dogma and then provide a new viable alternative towards queer politics; the pivot of this new approach is the subaltern subject. According to them, it "is marked by an effort at bricolage, a piecing together of interdisciplinary tools to expose and understand what lies at its margins or limits – the sexual subaltern figure." (122). It is built to "create a condition for their speech" and should paradigmatically shift itself from "identity politics to a politics of identification." (128). The current queer political discourse cannot provide the space to represent their lived experiences. Subsequently, due to capitalist tendencies, such political movements erase subaltern voices altogether.

Chatterjee uses the death of two sexual subaltern subjects - Swapna and Sucheta in 2011-to navigate the complex construction of such identities and their position within queer politics and identity frameworks throughout their text. They declare that "Swapna and Sucheta, are remainders of what queer politics has emerged from, the grounds it currently stands on, and the futures it intends to build" (119). Thus, demonstrating the violence, erasure, suppression and misrepresentation in queer politics after examining its modes and practices through the feminist, queer theory, Lacanian psychoanalysis, subaltern studies.

Subaltern discourse is trapped between 'representing' others - speak on behalf of, in political conversations and (re)presenting as in art or philosophy. Therefore, it can talk in case of political alliance, and intricate understandings and concomitantly cannot articulate because of "the epistemic violence and mis-(re)presentation inherent in most intellectual and political thought" (105). Influenced by Anthony Gramsci, the Subaltern Studies Collective conceptualised the subaltern identity based on subordination and marginalisation; however, this analysis could not provide adequate space for women. According to Gayathri Spivak, women's subaltern history was perceived as marginal rather than a structured issue.

Thereby promising a paradigmatic shift to "necessitate redefinition of the subaltern, as opposed to mere inclusion of women into an established mode of history" (102). This shift would locate women differently within the subaltern subject matter and illustrate the subaltern's meaning and function.

Chatterjee demonstrates that the subaltern identities and their voices have become crucial to discuss the dominant structures in societies and ways to dismantle them. They do this by dividing the text into six parts; each deals explicitly with language, South-Asian aspect, global-political academic knowledge, the dilemma of representation, situating the subaltern and, at last, the prospects of the new approach. Suppose the heterosexual blueprints are the foundation of the queer movements. In that case, queer individuals who adhere to such design will be part of the establishment, thus marginalising individuals who do not resonate with such attributes.

They then deduce that the assimilation of certain queer subjects into "the logic of nationhood, neoliberalism, and capitalism demonstrates how such projects of inclusion are built at the cost of excluding queer subjects who are poor, disabled, and people of colour" (46). This act of assimilation becomes a violent attack on queer bodies that remain marginalised due to the system because of their gender, sexuality and sexual identity, class, caste, race, or cultural capital of another kind. Therefore, solidarity among the queer movement becomes difficult, causing fissures within the queer community. The perception that the queer movement is guided by a single conscientious is deeply alarming. Inclusivity consequently does not improve the subaltern subject's agitation of being excluded.

They identify and locate this problem using Butler's theory (1997) of the subject's psyche and propose that the discourse should shift from the perspective of power to desire. Thus, providing scope to raise question such as "what is the desire behind inclusion in queer politics? What can we learn from the demand for human rights made by the queer political subject? What is the relation of demand to desire?" (52) and so on. According to Butler, the psyche decentres the notion of the subject, and unlike Foucault's proposal of subjectivation - The material and physical effects of power on the subject actively produce the subject. Therefore, normalisation is enacted on the body of the individual. These individuals are the queer people at the forefront of the queer movement and eligible to be 'included'. These subjects are at the cusp of being 'marginalised within the structure' due to the inclusivity campaign. Chatterjee concludes their work by reminding the readers of the urgent need to build new political-theoretical frameworks that create conditions for subaltern subjects like Swapna and Sucheta, which provides space to articulate grief, a task that bridges queer politics and sexual subaltern subjects.

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Laura Stanley

'The Exchange'

After Carly receives her eviction notice, she Googles the website.

Here at LifeBank, we believe in opening up the benefits of modern science to every woman. Founded in 2012 by Stanford university students, Physics major Patrick Laverty and Business major Al Saunders, we now have twenty clinics across the globe, using cutting-edge technology to offer the best in patient care. (Use our virtual mapper to find your nearest clinic.)

Painless. Non-invasive. The procedure has never been simpler. You'll be in and out within hours. Book your free consultation today.

What have you got to gain?

Carly sees those six words every day during her commute between Bellomo Cleaners and McDonald's. The words are emblazoned on posters along the tube platforms. On the posters there's a picture of two hands clasped together. One red, one blue. When Carly arrives at the clinic, she sees the hands again, gigantic and silver, embossed onto the glass doors. She sees the hands a third time, miniaturized, on the chest of the nurse behind reception.

As Carly waits for the nurse to finish a phone call, she drums her fingers on the desk. She spots a hole in the sleeve of her T-shirt and drops her arm. She turns around. Two young children chase each other around the waiting room. A young mother sits in a plastic chair. She wears a grey track-suit, faux suede boots and heavy black bags under her eyes. She bounces a wailing baby on her knee. Carly's eyes flicker to the television on the wall. It is on mute. A man in a suit mouths words like a goldfish. The text in the corner of the screen reads: Baltimore, Maryland. The camera pans behind the newsreader to a crowd of protestors. One of the placards reads: "Only God can give and take life."

"Can I help you?" At the nurse's question, Carly turns away from the television and back to reception. The nurse's voice has the hoarseness of someone who is coming down with a cold.

"I have an appointment at nine o'clock," Carly replies, pushing her thumb through the hole in her sleeve, making it bigger. She talks too fast and has to repeat her name and date of birth. The nurse picks up an iPad (the back of which is engraved with two interlocking hands), taps the screen a few times and frowns.

"It looks like the online booking system is playing up," the nurse says. "Could you fill in this instead?"

The nurse hands Carly a ten-page booklet with a glossy blue cover. Carly suppresses a sigh. She has an afternoon shift at McDonald's. She can't be late. She opens the booklet. She has answered all the questions before. Her medical history, any medication she is on, her expectations about the procedure and what her life will be like afterwards. There is a section for Carly to write her bank details.

She must sign at the bottom of every page. Her hand tires and the letters of her name start to mutate. The last page of the booklet is written entirely in capital letters.

THIS PROCEDURE IS IRREVERSIBLE.

I _____ HEREBY CONSENT TO PERMANENTLY GIVE AWAY . . .

Carly hands the booklet back to the nurse, who spends a minute flicking through it. As the nurse leads her to Theatre One, Carly recalls the information on the LifeBank website. Recites it in her head like a prayer.

As the Exchanger, you will be prepped first. Arrival times are staggered, so patients will not be able to meet and interact before the procedure. We take great pride in our patient confidentiality and this measure ensures the anonymity of both the Exchanger and Exchangee.

Carly also read up on the experience of an Exchangee. They will arrive in half an hour. Carly wonders if the iPad will be fixed by then or if the Exchangee will be given a ten-page booklet. She saw two piles of booklets behind the reception. One red, one blue. A month ago, during her telephone consultation, the doctor explained the science behind the procedure to Carly. He repeatedly used one word: exchange. Energy is neither created nor destroyed, he said, only exchanged.

The nurse takes Carly to one of the side rooms for Theatre One. She gives her a teal gown and asks Carly to take out all of her piercings. There isn't a mirror in the side room, but Carly saw her mum in a hospital gown enough times; she knows how stupid she must look. After her mum's third and final operation, her mum had thrown up violently. Carly remembers the wrinkles on her mum's white, bald head as her mum leaned over a basin. She remembers thinking about the head of a newborn baby.

Once Carly is gowned, the nurse in the clinic directs her into Theatre One. It is sparkling clean, but it doesn't smell of the usual medical disinfectant. In the centre of the room, two padded armchairs, the kind chemotherapy patients sit in, face each other.

"Wait. Where's the screen?" Carly asks the nurse. "There has to be a screen to separate us."

Each Theatre is partitioned by an opaque screen. You will sit behind the screen. You will hold hands with the other patient by putting your hands through the holes cut into the screen. This will be your only point of contact. It is essential for the procedure to work.

"New policy," the nurse replies. "The doctor will be here in a bit. He'll explain everything." Carly sits down. The nurse puts sticky tabs on her chest and ankles, wires to monitor her vitals. "Don't forget to fill in our feedback form later," the nurse tells Carly before she leaves. "There's a chance to win a £100 L'Oréal voucher."

Thirty minutes pass before the door to the other side room opens. The doctor comes out first.

"Why isn't there a screen anymore? Will it still work?" Carly asks the doctor.

"Our clinic is spearheading a new technique. Eye contact has been proven to increase the effectiveness of the procedure. And I'm sure that's something we can all get behind," the doctor says, directing his look away from Carly and back to the Exchangee as she enters the room. The woman wears a teal gown identical to Carly's. She is freshy tanned with fluffy blonde hair and dark, precise eyebrows, so precise they must be tattooed. Carly recognizes her immediately. Brianna Jackson. She and Carly were best friends in primary school. Brianna must be in her late thirties now, but Carly doesn't think she's changed a bit – apart from her teeth.

Brianna holds out her hand for Carly to shake as if they are at the start of a business meeting and

about to discuss the terms of a contract for a company merger.

"Sorry, it's all a bit weird, isn't it?" Brianna says, sitting down.

"Face one another directly," the doctor tells Carly and Brianna, even though they are already looking at each other. Only a centimetre separates their naked feet. "Lean forward and hold each other's hands. Firmly." Carly and Brianna join hands. "When the light dims the Exchange will begin. You will hear a faint buzzing sound. The Exchange will last approximately two hours. Please remain as still and silent as you can throughout, without breaking contact."

At the back of Theatre One, there is an area cordoned off by a transparent screen. The doctor stands behind it as if he is about to perform an X-ray. He presses a button on a machine. The light over Carly and Brianna goes out. There is only the soft yellow glow from the doctor's area and the sound of a cricket-like buzz. Carly and Brianna continue to look directly at each other and holds hands. The corner of Brianna's lip twitches as if she is trying not to laugh. For a moment, Brianna closes her eyes.

Carly looks at Brianna's teeth. They are the kind of teeth Carly's only ever seen in the movies. Luminously white and perfectly straight. When she was a girl, Brianna had an overbite. Her upper canines pointed sideways, as if to draw even more attention to the way the four teeth in between them stuck out. Carly remembers spending school lunchtimes together with Brianna. One day, after the other kids had called Brianna 'Bugs Bunny' and Brianna had burst into tears, Carly gave Brianna her special birthday Kit Kat.

Everything changed when they moved up to high school. Brianna and Carly were put in different classes and no one seemed to care about Brianna's teeth anymore. She was one of a chosen few: a teenager who miraculously retained ownership of clean skin. She came into school with a Ted Baker handbag one day and, the next day, dozens of other girls came in with a Ted Baker handbag. She was the first in the year to get a car. At the clinic, Carly watches Brianna arrange herself in the padded chair opposite. Carly wonders about how it feels to have your jaw broken and realigned.

The buzzing stops. The light comes back on. The doctor steps out from his area behind the screen and tells Carly and Brianna that the Exchange was successful. Two nurses enter the room and take the sticky pads off Carly and Brianna. Brianna stands up first.

"See you soon," she says, before disappearing into her side room. Carly isn't sure if Brianna recognised her. "See you soon," is an automatic phrase, something you say to strangers, even only after meeting them once, even when you know it's unlikely that you will ever meet them again.

The nurse leads Carly back into her side room. She gives Carly time to take off the gown and put on her jeans, T-shirt and trainers, then she returns with a mirror.

"How are you feeling?" the nurse asks. "Are you ready?"

Carly nods. The mirror is the size of a paperback book and surrounded by little lightbulbs. It's time to gently acclimatise to the new you. During Carly's telephone consultation with the doctor, he had told her about the clinic's specialised software. For a small fee, a computer could take a full-body scan and generate a 3D image of what she would look like after the procedure. With one hand, Carly holds the mirror up to her face. With the other, she stretches the creases of skin around her right eye. They are

deeper than before. Carly pushes her hair back from her scalp. She is completely grey. Ten years is the limit in the U.K., but in America the amount of years that patients can exchange varies. In California, for example, they have just raised the maximum number to twenty years.

Carly hands the mirror back to the nurse. Naturally, many women who undergo the procedure focus on their appearance, but the changes are not limited to the surface. Everything ages. Every organ. Every cell. Before Carly leaves the clinic, the nurse gives her a standard aftercare booklet for Exchangers. The pages have titles such as:

Becoming fifty: cholesterol, menopause and mammograms

Advice for changing legal documentation

What if I want another exchange?

Carly scans the carpark outside LifeBank for Brianna, but she doesn't see her. She wonders if Brianna is satisfied with her results. When the doctor turned the light back on, Carly couldn't spot any change in Brianna's appearance, the incredible revitalisation of your youth . . . smoother, more radiant skin . . . fuller, more luscious hair. It doesn't matter. Exchangees pay upfront. The money will be in Carly's bank account by the end of the day. The clinic takes a cut, but it is still a sizeable sum. Carly can pay off everything, finally. She takes the tube to work. As she waits on the platform, she begins to feel a strange tingling sensation in her gums, as if a dose of anaesthetic is wearing off. She prods a finger inside her mouth and feels a tooth wobble.

~

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'A rat in a maze is free to go anywhere, as long as it stays inside the maze': Political Invisibility and the Distribution of the Sensible in Gilead

In an interview discussing her bestseller, The Handmaid's Tale, Margaret Atwood clarified that the novel 'did not start from ideology' such as the feminist discourse it is typically paired with, but rather it arose 'from what [she] was collecting and seeing' (Atwood, 1986). It is Atwood's own emphasis on surveillance, on what is seen and recognised in society, that this article seeks to explore further. Diverging from the well-trodden path of Derridean hauntology, this analysis will mobilise the work of Jacques Rancière and his 'Distribution of the Sensible' in which he uses spectrality to define citizens who are not fully seen within society (Rancière, 2013). Rancière defines the sensible as a logic, 'a system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective pats and positions within it' (Rancière, 2013, p. 12). In other words, the sensible is a logic that determines spaces, time and forms of activity within a community and, specifically, 'the distribution determines those who have a part in the community' and how much of the political is known (Rancière, 2013, pp. 12-3).

For Rancière, the 'political' is not 'the practise of power or the embodiment of collective wills and interests and the enactment of collective ideas', but as before all else […] an intervention on the visible and sayable' (Rancière, 2013, p. 8). It is a disruption in the 'distribution of the visible and invisible, of speech and noise [which] pins bodies to their place and allocates the private and public to distinct parts' (Rancière, 2013, p. 8). Citizens are rendered unable to achieve a political position because dictating what, and who 'is visible or not in the common space' denies them a of full personhood (Rancière, 2013, p. 9). In Gilead, each citizen is identified as a role, a political pawn, whose concern is facilitating the political agenda. They become knowable only as their function to society; they are Commanders, Commander's Wives, Handmaids, Aunts, Marthas, Guardians, Eyes, Econowives or Unwomen. In organising its citizens into roles which defines their existence, Gilead, in Atwood's words, is about 'power […] how it operates and how it deforms or shapes people who are living within that kind of regime' (Atwood, 2019). The more power one possesses, the more visible the regime. For Offred, the protagonist handmaid, this visibility is limited both in terms of what she can see and how she is seen.

In the first lines of the novel, the reader is made aware of the physical manifestation of Offred as 'defined' by 'red: the colour of blood' (Atwood, 1985, p. 20) that denotes her political necessity to the regime as a fertile woman, with red symbolising the menstrual cycle. Visually, Offred is seen only as her political function to the regime, she is, as Avery Gordon puts it, 'a haunting reminder of the complex social relations in which [she] live[s]' (Gordon and Radway, 2008, p. 17). Her red, handmaid uniform determines how she is seen, and by extension how she is identified, by society and more importantly by the regime. Though she is physically present because she is alive, she is politically absent; she is denied

access to and involvement in the distribution of the political (Rancière, 2013, pp. 8-9). This is exaggerated in the 'white wings' (Atwood, 1985, p. 18) worn by the handmaids, and indeed the various headdresses donned by the other women of Gilead. The wings 'keep [the handmaid's] from seeing, but also from being seen' (Atwood, 1985, p. 18). Though the handmaids are physically present in society, they become invisible to society and society invisible to them. The 'white tunnels of cloth that enclose them' (Atwood, 1985, p. 31) veil their identities, their faces, meaning that they cannot be fully seen, and nor can they fully see out. This notion of veiling, of simultaneously occupying a political role but lacking a societal presence is seen in the Marthas. Martha is the title given to the Commanders and their Wives' housekeeper, cook, cleaner and nanny. Rita, Martha to Commander Fred and Serena Joy, 'puts [her] veil on to go outside' even though 'nobody much cares who sees the face of a Martha' (Atwood, 1985, p. 21). The veil is not about occluding specific individuals, but bout the distribution of the sensible, about dictating who and what can be seen of the political. The Commanders, for examples, are present in the public space behind 'blacked out car windows' (Atwood, 1985, p. 27). They are hidden from the public from a position of power that permits them to regulate and distribute the sensible of Gilead. The Commander's make themselves invisible to retain a sense of authority whereas, for Offred, her invisibility is given to her to dictate her inferiority. However, 'the white wings aren't necessary for the evening' because '[e]veryone in the house knows what [Offred] looks like' (Atwood, 1985 p. 77). Offred 'won't be going out' (Atwood, 1985, p. 77), she will be occluded from society by staying at home and therefore is already physically hidden from society. She can only be seen by those in her household and more importantly, can only see what is within her household.

The home plays a key role in depicting who and what is visible to the social and political realm. While men occupy the social, political realms, women are designated to the hidden space of the home. This is first demonstrated in Offred's own narration of the home almost facilitates the political agenda in keeping Offred from being fully seen. Hidden away in her room, Offred

> […] sits on the window seat, looking out through the semi-sheer of the curtains. White nightgown. The window is as open as it goes, there's a breeze, hot in the sunlight, and the white cloth blows across [her] face. From the outside [she] must look like a cocoon, a spook, a face enshrouded likes this, only the outlines visible, of nose, bandaged mouth, blind eyes' (Atwood, 1985, p. 182).

The 'semi-sheer curtains' and window that can only open partially keep Offred hidden from society, even when she sits on the windowsill, on the threshold of the private and the public. Offred recognises that 'from the outside' she looks like 'a spook', an 'outline' neither present nor absent, seen nor hidden. Offred, along with the other women of Gilead, 'belong to', and their socially spectral existence enabled by, 'the private and domesticated life' (Rancière, 2013, p. 17). Not only are they physically occluded, but the tasks they are permitted to do are designated to the domestic space; 'their thoughts and interests [are] of the private life'. The political remains invisible to them, even when they are at their most seen; 'they are

'free to go anywhere, as long as [they] stay inside' (Atwood, 1985, p. 168). Even Offred's narrative structure is limited to the duties of the home or the hidden with sections entitled 'shopping', 'the household' and 'nap' and 'night' (Atwood, 1985, p. 11). Written in the 1980s, The Handmaid's Tale placement of women in the home reflects the political thoughts of British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, whom Atwood has said to be inspired by (Atwood, 1986). Thatcher's 'Speech to Conservative Women's Conference' notes that many women wish to 'devote themselves mainly to raising a family and running a home' (Thatcher, 1988). The running and raising of families is the sole priority of Gilead; it is that which defines the women's political function while simultaneously denying them full personhood in that same political regime. The home is this perverse space of 'family' where handmaids are raped; babies taken from their biological mothers and wives forced to be complicit in their husband's adulterous behaviour. The home, rather representing Thatcher's ideal of mothering and huswifery, becomes a place of regulation and hostility that parodies the family dynamic in a hyper-politicised way. Women are forcibly designated a politically and socially invisible existence that denies them of social agency and a full personhood. By segregating women and the public realm, the political system has made women entirely observable. Gilead is fully aware of them and the need to maintain their occluded status which in turn denies them the kinds of power and agency which might pose a threat to the dominant political system in Gilead.

The lack of political power of Gileadean women is epitomised in the Ceremony; the monthly sexual ritual whereby the Commander, Serena Joy and Offred try to conceive a baby. Inside the house, hidden from society, and looking purely at the Commander the women are able to see the political, but only that which the regime wants them to see. The women 'watch [Fred]: every inch, every flicker' (Atwood, 1985, p. 100) however their sight is limited to a political necessary to perform their roles in the Ceremony. While Offred notes how 'it must be strange. To be a man, watched by a woman' Fred still holds the power; the women 'turn their heads' (Atwood, 1985, p. 100) towards Fred who stands in front of them as they kneel. This 'tableau' (Atwood, 1985, p. 100) depicts a visual representation of the power dynamics at play; the women are inferior beings invisible to the political as anything other than their function in Gilead, compared to Fred who leads their way. Furthermore, the women 'watch' rather than participate; watching is 'the one thing they can really do' (Atwood, 1985, p. 101) but what they see is that which the political wants them to see. The women are therefore 'separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act' and in this seclusion women are rendered politically spectral (Rancière, 2013, p. 10).

Within this same social invisibility, however, lies the possibility of political subversion. The home, as a space, while occluding the women from society, also hides society from the women; in this ability to act without being seen, Serena Joy seeks to disrupt the normative distribution of the sensible. Her desire to be a mother outweighs her devotion to the political, despite her own, and her husband's, involvement in creating Gilead. Serena Joy reveals that Fred is 'sterile', meaning that in following the orthodoxy of the regime, Serena 'will always be childless' (Atwood, 1985, p. 174). Thus, shielded from view by the 'willow tree' (Atwood, 1985, p. 217) that enshrouds them, Serena proposes to Offred a scheme that ruptures the

logic of the regime. In forming an alliance, Serena and Offred subvert the pragmatic functionality of the regime; the women become women rather than functions of a political operation. In attaining an agency, the two women de-spectralise themselves and make themselves active in the distribution of the sensible, even if that sensible is one that goes against the regime they exist within. Offred 'look[s] up at' Serena, and she 'looks down' (Atwood, 1985, p. 217) at Offred in silence. 'It's the first time [they've] looked into each other's eyes in a long time [...] The moment stretches out before [them], bleak and level. [Serena is] trying to see whether or not [Offred's] up to reality' (Atwood, 1985, p. 217). They shift from passive to active beings in their ability to see one another and while they are occluded from society they are visible to one another. More than the silent ability to look, Serena de-spectralises herself and Offred verbally. Serena says, 'I want', 'I need you' and 'you can' (Atwood, 1985, p. 218) to Offred as she both asserts her individuality, and Offred's agency. Serena's declarative use of modal auxiliaries, first and second-person pronouns individualises the women in a patriarchal society that denies them subjectivity.

Serena and Offred are aware of the arrogance of the patriarchy in which they live. It is the Commanders who have created the regime, and it is Commander Fred whom the women seek to politically betray. However, they are also aware of their political inability. Somewhat paradoxically to their subjectivity, and Serena's re-distribution of the sensible, their plan is described as almost spectral itself. The 'idea hangs between [them], almost invisible, almost palpable: heavy, formless, dark; collusion of a sort, betrayal of a sort' (Atwood, 1985, p. 219). The idea is neither present nor absent, it occupies a liminal space between actuality and fantasy that reinforces the women's spectrality as individuals occluded from political participation. While Serena and Offred have de-spectralised themselves in their plan to subvert the social order, they must remain invisible to Gilead's political authority. Their invisibility is no longer hindering but empowering as they manipulate it for their own purposes.

Thus, the concept of invisible becomes contradictory which we can also see in the veiling talked about earlier. While the veils make handmaid's invisible, the invisibility is not wholly spectralising. They 'have only the veils; so [they] could talk, as long as we did it quietly and didn't turn to look at one another' (Atwood, 1985, p. 83). Their sight is restricted in a way which their verbal discourse is not. However, a more striking episode of invisibility as paradoxical is seen when Offred finds the 'tiny writing' 'scratched with a pin or maybe a fingernail, in the corner [of her room] where the darkest shadow [falls]' (Atwood, 1985, p. 64). The inscription reads Notile te bastardes carborundorum which translates to 'don't let the bastards grind you down'. From the 'darkness' an 'unknown woman' 'commun[es] with' Offred as if the two are engaged in a séance. Offred's predecessor, who is absent from Gilead either because she is dead or has been exiled from the regime, not only speaks to Offred but forces her to confront her lack of political agency. As she reads this note, Offred is in her cupboard, in her room, in the home in a series of occlusions from the public space; while she can see the writing, she is unseen. Her visibility is controlled by the restrictions put in place by Gilead to keep her socially invisible, and the full political regime invisible to her.

'Whoever and whatever is silenced will clamour to be heard, though silently': Conclusion

By the end of The Handmaid's Tale the reader is unable to conceive of Offred as anything other than spectral. As each chapter has demonstrated, Offred has failed to de-spectralise herself; visually she belongs to a cohort of handmaids; aurally she is scripted by the regime; physically she is confined to the domestic; socially she is inferior, and politically she is rendered invisible. As chapter three articulated, even when Offred escapes the political gaze of Gilead, she is trapped in a patriarchal, sexual gaze that denies her full personhood, full visibility. This constant play between visibility and invisibility is epitomised in her final act as she 'step[s] up, into the darkness within; or else the light' (Atwood, 1985, p. 309). Even in her departure she is neither present nor absent, alive nor dead, visible or invisible.

In a final turn of invisibility, Atwood's 'Historical Notes' irrevocably spectralise Offred. Throughout Offred's narrative, she remains somewhat visible in her vocalisation of her tale. She admits that some parts are 'reconstructions' (Atwood, 1985, p. 45) showing her ability to detach herself from the oppressive reality she exists in and speak subjectivity rather than as a political spectre. In Professor Pieixoto's symposium entitled 'Problems of Authentication in Reference to The Handmaid's Tale' (Atwood, 1985, p. 314) however, Offred's visibility and narrative ownership is challenged. It is Pieixoto who reveals that Offred's 'voice' was found in a 'concealed […] footlocker' (Atwood, 1985, p. 316). The 'thirty-odd cassette tapes' (Atwood, 1985, p. 316) were then organised by himself and male peer, Professor Wade. Not only has Offred's voice been hidden, but her narrative of political oppression, victimisation and spectralisation have been co-opted, organised and 'authorised' by men. As this project has established, throughout Atwood's novel it is the women who are continually silenced and veiled. While Offred's narrative attempts to assert female authority, it is ultimately the men who get to speak. Literature is, as Rancière remarks, a 'way of linking meaning and action, of framing the relationship between the sayable and the visible, of enabling words with the power of framing a common world' (Rancière, 1998, p. 155). Conversely, Offred is denied that ability to frame together the sayable and the visible. While alive Offred is silenced by political oppression, and after she departs from Gilead she becomes a 'silently bur[ied] invisible monument' (Rancière, 1998, p. 133).

As this project has analysed, Offred is continually made invisible and in the final moments of the novel, Offred is reduced to a voice by Pieixoto: 'the voice is a woman's and, according to [the] voice-print experts, the same throughout' (Atwood, 1985, p. 316). While when we read her story, we are able to think of her speaking, of her retaining political agency, Atwood concludes with a renouncement of such subjectivity as the male co-authors make themselves heard. Offred cannot speak 'because [she] is a being without a name' (Rancière, 1995, p. 21). She is reduced to a 'voice', only identifiable so far as a gender, but not an identity. A further indication of the profoundly political gesture towards the spectralisation of women in favour of men.

The two male historians 'held out no hope of tracing the narrator herself directly [because] the Gileadean regime was in the habit of wiping its own computers and destroying printouts' (Atwood, 1985, p. 318). The extensive oppression and censorship that the regime created have irrevocably spectralised subjecthood. Ultimately,

> […] the past is a great darkness and filled with echoes. Voice may reach us from it; but what they
> say to us is imbued with the obscurity of the matrix out of which they come; and, try as we may,
> we cannot always decipher them precisely in the clearer light of our own day. (Atwood, 1985, p.
> 326)

Yet, it is still the unseen who are privileged. In applying Rancière's theory to The Handmaid's Tale it becomes clear that though Offred is made invisible and silenced by oppression, it is that same invisibility that allows her to challenge the regime. Atwood has 'frame[d] a new fabric of common experience, new scenery of the invisible and a new dramaturgy of the intelligible' (Rancière, 1995, p. 21). Atwood's novel centres around the everyday actions and experiences of Offred and while they are perverse due to political oppression, they are comprehendible for the reader as daily, common tasks in the context of Gilead. It is that ordinariness which allows us as readers to intuit the uneven distribution of the sensible both in the novel, and in our own social and political contexts.

Through both Atwood and Offred's authorship, and our reading of the tale, we become 'involved in this partition of the visible and the sayable in this intertwining of being, doing and saying that frames a polemical common world' (Rancière, 2013, pp. 7-8). It is the literature itself, both as Offred's narrative and Atwood's publication, that comments upon the potential consequences of political oppression, showing that 'whoever and whatever is silenced will clamour to be heard, though silently' (Atwood, 1985, p. 163).

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La Douleur Exquise

It is snowing. How do you feel?

stuffed in rained over
cardboard box   beneath
a moth munched coat
bruised relentless pair
of hands   we love

to hold books   uninterested eyes
will watch for a lover who reads
hold myself stuffed with letters I
never wrote   even to you

It is snowing. How do you feel?

cold that tingles   burns hotter
than beloved froth
what is it about cafes   steam
evermore silhouettes
saddest of faces   how it hurts
to fall
for the one
paid to catch you

swollen air with whisper
glances   pressing prickling
cardboard creases
wounded salt
beautiful   without me

dream you ask me a secret
the audacity   a hair stroked
I have never kissed anyone
coffee laden scents
soaked fur coats

smouldering   still

hand caressed

I didn't do the always done
see how cold my hand is
to feel you   only this once

It is snowing. How do   I
feel?

~

Ameek is an English and Creative Writing student at the University of Birmingham. Their work has appeared in Overground Underground, Streetcake, and the Babel Tower Notice Board. Twitter: @AmeekSalvatore.

Tracing

My dad's wooden bed

has grooves he spent years smoothing

to satisfaction.

A bed that saw Christmas, caught the nose of hot rye,

felt the shivering truth of ends:

potions. The click-clack of hope in a bottle.

I wiggle in, bend the pillow to the crook of my arm,

suffering – I feel guilty writing that.

My cold feet, traces,

just enough for sleep.

~

Tom is interested in the intersection of narrative and poetics, the 'plot' of a poem. Through prolonged adventures in creative academia, Tom is working on a first collection. He lives and works in Birmingham.

Tracing

Ilana Gilovich-Wave

Columbia University

Dauntless

now is when you put those teachings to work—

when the roiling pitch of your thoughts refuses to listen,

and your matted hide will not flatten into sleek dark fur.

when night unfurls all its ecstasies and bruises

and there is only the soft beating of your own heart,

reminding you who to live for.

in this now, you bind your hands for one more bout.

in this now, you slide your feet into the earth

and dance all your jagged corners,

guiding a slice of moon down your throat

to glow from the inside out.

in this now, you hold the moment— that precipice—

in your arms before it spills out

as sand, as furry dreams, as bottle caps;

emissaries from a distant unreachable shore.

in this now, a box is meant for unwrapping

with nothing but a feather, a cherry pit

and a sprig of dried rosemary inside.

in other words, riches.

in other words, a reminder that you and the earth are always more.

an empty box is an invitation to fill a space with breath.

a now is an invitation to hand the learnings

of your past self to the courage of your future self.

you are a cathedral of potential, tipping forward into the world

locking eyes with the horizon and daring it to blink

howling your mighty opera into the void as you learn:

how to plunge into the great uncertainty and then to stay there.

how to make love to the wind, even as it leaves you.

how to say sweetly and in a whisper: and this and this and this.

~

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Wills Leng

Review of Square Haunting by Francesca Wade

Francesca Wade's *Square Haunting* draws our attention to the significance of Mecklenburgh Square. Inhabited by five women over the inter-war period, Wade's work pulls us towards a vision of female autonomy framed through Phil Hubbard's words; 'the key question about space and place is not what they are, but what they do'.[1] Between Virginia Woolf, H.D., Dorothy L Sayers, Jane Ellen Harrison, and Eileen Power, their time spent in this typical middling-sorts, London Square shaped dramatic relationships, gave substance to great literary works, and helped inform momentous social and political aspirations.

Wade's choice of protagonists elicits a discussion about the interdisciplinary potential of crosscutting 'spatial studies' with literary and biographical works. Virginia Woolf's central, defining motif of *A Room of One's own* should speak strikingly to spatial historians. Such a defining theme, framed in Wade's work within the experiences of motherhood, failed relationships, poverty, ageing and work, gives the 'spatial' a refreshingly personal and valuable aesthetic. It also disrupts any nostalgic attachment to our sense of historicized 'place'. One must realise that the complexity of lived experience supersedes the value we place in architecturally pleasing facades, or even the retrospective pleasure of seeing a series of buildings change or remain over time. Indeed, if the experiences of these women reveal anything, it is such a perspective's failure to accommodate the harsher sides of historicised reality. One is encouraged not to read into *Square Haunting* some nostalgic, comforting picture of Mecklenburgh Square in the 1920s and 30s. Wade's narrative takes us in a different direction, one which results in Mecklenburgh Square being blown to pieces by German bombs, rather than beautifully restored. And whilst Wade concludes poignantly with the prospect of a female student taking up the pen in the very same room as Woolf did a century ago, she maintains that only a single, blue plaque gives any hint of its fascinating history. Mecklenburgh Square, like so many places, has an important history *in spite* of how dramatically the landscape and buildings have changed. This is what gives *Square Haunting* that real sense of indebtedness to spatial studies, realising that the construction and representation of 'place' is a work in progress. Her work, in and of itself, represents a part of that discourse of remembering and realising. Reading *Square Haunting*, we are reminded that the importance of place is not in its geographic or architectural makeup, but in its capacity to hold historical memory, to locate and enact a wanting for a shared past. Such an engagement does not prerequisite a focus on individual biography, although it does require some kind of collectively imagined experience, within which one place revolves centrally. One may read Wade's work as a response to Phil Hubbard's 'cultural geography', or perhaps- stretching further back- Henri Lefebvre's 'representative space'.[2] There is a long tradition distilled through such writers, in which 'space', that lofty, open aired boundless area, is contrasted with 'place', which is imbued with meaning and history.

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[1] Phil Hubbard, 'Space/Place', in David Atkinson et al. (eds.) *Cultural Geography: A Critical Dictionary of Key Concepts* (London, 2005), p.47.

The discipline of 'spatial studies' asks exactly *how* that distinction comes into being- how a 'place' has been constructed and represented. Wade's work appears a natural offshoot of such disciplinary work. If one was to locate her work within the bounds of historical and literary studies, the word 'spatial', if not topographical, would be a leading axiom. The question remains, however, exactly how successful one can be in fixing people's lived, myriad experiences to the confides of a single 'place'. There is a tendency in historical discourse to be drawn towards determining agents. A prerequisite to 'spatial studies' is that one such determining constituent is the significance of 'place'. The extent of such significance, however, has long been in dispute. One thinks of Edward Relph's humanist argument against a materialist tendency, that scholars ought to have a deeper appreciation for 'the lived experience of place'.[3] Such a perspective, framed within the lexicon of Raymond Williams's work on cultural studies, has clear links to Wade's emphasis on an entangled, multiple biographical narrative. One hesitates to call *Square Haunting* a 'group biography', exactly because the sense of individualised experience is so strong between each of her protagonists, and the moments of overlap so sparse if not entirely absent, that a single, identifiable 'group' is nondescript. The one familiar, anchoring constituent of each chapter is that emphasis on place, on the rooms and apartments of Mecklenburgh Square. But even that significance is displaced in favour of complex, individual experience, where even in 'a room of one's own', Wade isn't afraid to go beyond the theme of 'spatially ordained' independence, to look at lost love, tragedy and motherhood. Consequently, Square Haunting reads as a necessarily dislocated work, stretching the contingencies of both group biography, and spatial study collectively. It's greatest strength, therefore, is how it corrects the absences in both fields. Wade gives the 'spatial' a necessarily personal and authentic aesthetic, and grounds the significance we as readers find in the 'place' of Mecklenburgh Square to historical reality. Whilst *Square Haunting* is short of answering many of the questions spatial studies has thrown to the fore in recent decades, it does show the potential of lived experience to re-define the parameters of any initial, historical investigation. Wade encourages us to look at a 'place' as a continually re-configuring, re-emerging phenomenon, not as something indebted to the constraints of purely historical or topographical enquiry. For the sake of Virginia Woolf, H.D., Dorothy L Sayers, Jane Ellen Harrison, and Eileen Power, they would no doubt be relieved that their legacy stretches beyond the walls of one, single room. As Wade herself concludes, 'But the legacy of these women lives on not only in static objects, but also in future generations' right to talk, walk and write freely, to live invigorating lives'.[4]

[2] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, (1974).

[3] Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London, 1976).

[4] Francesca Wade, *Square Haunting* (London; Faber, 2021) p.344.

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Sarah Chung is a part-time PhD researcher based in the School of Education. Their research focuses on Primary school governor training: exploring the fitness for purpose of the content and mode of delivery in England.

ASSOCIATIVE EDITOR

Laura Smith is a PhD student in Theology. Their research focuses on gender, Late Antique Christianity and asceticism – particularly literary representations of gendered suffering in hagiography and ascetic literature.

PUBLICITY AND PROOF EDITOR

Emma Thompson is a MRes Archaeology student whose research investigates the interplay between rank and gender in "female" Viking burials on the Danish Jutland. In their spare time they can be found writing poetry or plays.

NOTES EDITOR

Miriam Gartner is a PhD student whose research focuses on recent theatre productions about border politics, migration regimes, and forced displacement. They are analysing plays and activist performances from the last five years to explore how our understandings of transnational solidarity, community, and humanitarian discourses have been shifting. Beside my research, Miriam also works as a literary editor for an Austrian publishing house.

CREATIVE EDITORS

Helen Ingham is a PhD student researching Thomas Hardy and musicality

Francis Williams is a PhD student whose research explores literary masculinity in the context of the New York School Poets. They contend that Frank O'Hara's work exists in a unique space between the 'normative' 50's masculinity and the 'othering' gay masculinity that it is traditionally seen to fit into.

BOOK REVIEW EDITORS

Elaine Goodey is PhD student in English Literature. Their research examines little-known texts published by retired police detectives between 1880-1939, exploring their role in crime literature as entertainment, the genres of texts, the author's objections to detectives depicted in contemporary crime fiction and how the detectives obscure their own individuality by identifying themselves as part of the police institutions.

Oscar Mealia is an audio-visual doctoral researcher. Their research is an exploration of the philosophy of Jean-François Lyotard in the realm of film. Outside of academia they are a published poet and exhibited visual artist under the moniker Oscar Vinter.