

PersonalQueerAcademic: Constructing a Queer Self  
across a Graduate Career through Reflective Narrative and Literary Criticism

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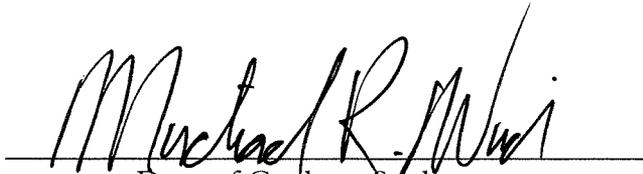
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Under the Supervision of Dr. Jennifer Shaddock

What follows is a queer project, and there are many reasons for labeling it as such: One, this project consists of a mixture of genres, in terms of the construction of this paper rhetorically, meaning it incorporates traditional academic “high” writing (research with sources used to substantiate claims), as well as less formal “interludes” of more personal prose to help connect portions of the paper. Additionally, this project mixes genres in terms of the content discussed herein: We begin with a study of two early nineteenth-century British novels (Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*), then we move on to a mid-nineteenth-century American novel (Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance*). We follow this novel with an explication of an historical/sociocultural text—circumcision. This discussion of circumcision leads us into the consideration of a 1970s American poem (Snyder’s “The Bath”), and this poem leads us into an examination of an Early Modern Shakespearean drama (*Measure for Measure*). From there, we tackle queer issues in an Early Modern non-Shakespearean drama (*Arden of Feversham*), and we round out this project with the examination of a late-twentieth-century American short story (O’Brien’s “Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong”). Two, quite literally, the critical modes are queer—the ways of exploring all of the texts within this



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**CHAPTER 1**


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 Introduction
 

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At the outset of this experience, I was asked what I envisioned this paper to be, should it work as I hoped. In response, I wrote, “If this project turns out as I intend it to, this paper will represent the culmination of my undergraduate career, and it will validate my pursuits in graduate school.” I truly strive to make the work I do representative of the best of my ability. Enmeshed in the “best of my ability” is *myself*—something I noticeably left out before. The papers I write *must* reflect my values and aspirations; otherwise, they do not represent quality work in my opinion. (Peeples ii)

Having just read my epigraph above, you ponder its implications and think to yourself—even *say* to yourself, in your best Cockney accent—“That’s a might bit queer, innit?” You are most correct in your befuddled assertion; the epigraph I present here is most queer, indeed, for it proves quite unusual to quote one’s self in one’s own academic endeavors at all, let alone in a prominent epigraph at the outset. But, for the purposes of this paper, being queer is the point. Being queer is the point of this paper, just as much as it was the point of the project I refer to in the quotation above—my undergraduate capstone paper, entitled “‘I am, and am not’: Queer Identity, the Margins, and Social Change in James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*.” I intend *now*, just as much as I did *then* to include myself in this project as much as I possibly can.

This is, after all, my project, and I strongly believe that my voice and personality should resound as strongly as possible throughout it. This very notion about ownership—through voice—of upper-echelon academic work proves a point of contention for many a student engaged in the process of writing things like capstone papers, theses, and dissertations. Feminists of the 1970s were among the first people to include narratives of self, and feminist/queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains that these women were drawn to the power afforded to them by reflexive modes: “The immense productiveness of the public/private crux in feminist thought has come, not from the confirmation of an

original hypothesized homology that male:female::public:private, but from the wealth of its deconstructive formations” (109). By bringing the once hushed lives of women into the public eye, feminists—powerfully—began to deconstruct notions of women as others who should be hidden away and never heard from. These women took ownership of their voices and actively included themselves in discourse.

Professor Robert J. Nash believes strongly in the importance of including the self in such high-level academic projects, and he offers a useful outline of his case in his book *Liberating Scholarly Writing: The Power of Personal Narrative*. Writing about his frequent conversations with graduate students in the middle of composing theses or dissertations, Nash remarks that students often arrive at his door “with a common complaint: ‘I just can’t get started. Where’s the ‘me’ in all of this? Why can’t I just write a dissertation that people, in addition to those on my defense committee, will want to read? Why do I have to write in the third person, passive voice? Why can’t I show my passion and excitement for my topic in my own writing style without making it as dry as dust?’” (17). I think I was very much rendered incapacitated by these precise questions when attempting to compose a traditional Master’s study of South African writer Bessie Head’s groundbreaking novel *A Question of Power*. Yes, it was true, I had nearly every scholarly article about her book in my possession, and I could summarize them and parrot back the theoretical interpretations set forth in them, but I could not see what this project had to do with me. Much like it did for Nash’s students, this proved to be a troublesome and halting conundrum for me. What I realize now is that a scholarly paper like I am composing here does not have to be “as dry as dust”; rather, it can be a lively intermixture of personal narrative and scholarship that says something important about both me and the research I have done. Nash believes so strongly in the power of

including personal narratives in scholarly works, in fact, that he tells us in his title that they have liberatory possibilities.

I wholeheartedly agree with Nash's proposition that utilizing a personal "I" voice in academic endeavors can prove quite empowering and liberating for (aspiring) academics, indeed. This assessment, however, is not universal within academia, I am afraid. In fact, this relatively recent approach to scholarship finds, more often than not, vehement opposition from the powers that be within the academic regimes that hold power. As critic Jeffrey Gray remarks in his study of the personal in discourse, "the personal..., far from being empowered in contemporary discourse, is often associated with guilt and disengagement and is not encouraged but penalized" (53). Writers who attempt to engage the personal in their academic discourses, then, often find themselves ridiculed as being disengaged or simplistic, and they often feel wracked with guilt because they are told that their voices, in some way, do not matter—or do not fit within the so-called appropriate auspices of *true* academic work. Discourse scholar Ken Hyland disagrees with the exclusion of the personal in academic writing to an extent when he writes that "acknowledgements [in scholarly papers] can act as a means of recognizing debts and achieving a sense of closure at the end of a long and demanding research process, [and] they also reveal the writer as someone with a life beyond the page; an individual among academics" (12). To Hyland, a space exists within academic discourses for the inclusion of the personal. This space, however, proves quite narrow and limited to the biography and acknowledgement sections of published works. While such thinking allows the personal voice into academics, it does so minimally and nearly excludes its inclusion wholly. This makes me question how useful such an exclusionary practice proves to be. I would argue that including the personal in academic work should be embraced by the powers that be in academia as long as these works set forth worthy agendas

that ultimately reveal something worthwhile and useful to the field at hand—and as long as they, of course, are coherent and decipherable.

As I suggest at the outset of this introduction, and as I hope the viewpoints I have revealed thus far indicate, I strongly believe in and advocate for the inclusion of the self within academic undertakings, despite the fact that my viewpoint falls, oftentimes, outside the accepted standards of traditional academic work. We find ourselves situated within a society that increasingly values the potential of the self. Gray situates this phenomenon within “a larger culture of disclosure” that demands maximum information at all times about political figures and celebrities (51). We see such an embrace of disclosure even in our means of entertainment in the form of reality television shows like *Keeping up with the Kardashians* and *The Real World* (51), so it makes sense, then, that the self should find acceptance within the various fields of academics and academic discourses, given its wide societal appeal. Despite this, I ended my last paragraph with a caveat that essays and research papers that employ the personal “I” voice should be deemed “worthwhile” and “coherent.” By stating this, I simply wish to make it clear that I do not advocate for the blind acceptance of substandard work merely because it employs what I consider to be an important and empowering discursive mode—the use of the personal and the “I” voice. More directly put, academic work requires legitimacy—legitimacy afforded to it by explication of a topic, regardless of rhetorical mode, that offers new, unique, and provocative insights into the field of inquiry. The sheer number of different ways in which an academic or scholar can achieve such insights is tremendous, and the scholar’s potential ways of accessing such knowledge should not be limited to one of a few standard practices.

One of the most effective ways to actively engage with academic topics of inquiry, I believe—and many scholars do as well—is through the use of critical reflection. Writing

professor Ann N. Amicucci uses reflective writing in her undergraduate composition classes in order to help her students better engage with their thoughts. “Reflection,” Amicucci writes, “asks students to engage with their own learning processes by thinking about and commenting on them” (36). Amicucci goes further and describes how reflective writing makes her students better thinkers and writers overall: “Reflection asks students to make decisions—commitments—about where their learning processes will go in the future and how they will move in that direction. Reflection is also necessarily personal because the processes on which students reflect are their own” (36). Reflective writing produces more effective writers and learners. Such personal writing endeavors create a dialectic of sorts for those students actively engaging with it, for, as Amicucci succinctly states, “[b]eyond the learning potential of the act of producing writing, then, the writing that is produced has something to teach” (37). The writers learn from writing and the written word helps the writers to further learn. This dialectical phenomenon that occurs through the process of reflective writing illustrates the power of metacognition—thinking about thinking. Researchers Binda M. Colley, Andrea R. Bilics, and Carol M. Lerch believe strongly in the power of metacognition, as evidenced by their assertion that “learning begins with metacognition, knowing one’s own thoughts and reflection, which allows the individual to identify the factors that influence one’s own thinking” (1). Reflective writing, Colley and colleagues posit, is metacognition in action, since “[r]eflective writing focuses learners’ attention on their thinking by asking them to delve into their thoughts about specific topics as well as their individual learning methods” (1). Delving into one’s thoughts is an incredibly powerful act.

Reflective writing, and the metacognitive ability afforded by it, should be regarded as an invaluable tool within academia. Colley, Bilics, and Lerch set forth the following

argument: “[S]tudents are part of a rapidly changing world where knowledge is constantly evolving. They will need to have skills that will facilitate their success in that environment... [R]eflection is one of those tools. It allows them to develop a realistic sense of efficacy and motivation... [and] it will develop their metacognition so they will be able to set and monitor the achievement of realistic goals” (12). Margaret Willard-Traub would likely agree with this assessment, and she even seems to take the argument a bit further by contending that “reflexivity is not beside the point of good academic work, but instead is central to rigorous scholarly practice” (33). Willard-Traub holds that reflective writing is not just important to an active scholar, but, rather, that it is *central* to scholarly practice as a whole. Willard-Traub’s use of the phrase “rigorous scholarly practice” evokes a powerful image of a scholar hard at work thinking thoughts and dreaming ideas that have not yet been considered. Much like it does for Naomi Hodgson in her article about Emerson, Cavell, and Foucault, this understanding of the scholar evokes Ralph Waldo Emerson’s notion of “Man Thinking” when she asserts that “the scholar” should be “allocated the role of the thinker” (90). By this, I mean—like Hodgson and Emerson both do—that the scholar should be easily differentiated from somebody who can merely parrot back facts and figures rather than creating real, new, beneficial knowledge.

If this mode of discourse—that is, reflective writing—proves so valuable to thinkers and scholars, I wonder why it is not more widely advanced within critical studies. Perhaps, as I have hinted, the academy as a source of power does not wish to have the standard voice, thinking processes, and research methodologies that it has imposed over hundreds of years to be threatened in any way. It is this fear that the academy has of losing its hold on power that causes critic and reflective writing advocate Jane Tompkins to remark in her book *A Life in School* that “[u]nfortunately, ... the academy does not encourage introspection” (qtd.

in Daly 80). Composition scholar Patricia Bizzell would agree with Tompkin's assessment here, but she makes her point less politely when she pointedly remarks that "personal experience ... is absolutely taboo in traditional academic discourse" (qtd. in Gunter 89). Taboo is a pretty strong word to use to describe the lack of enthusiasm the academy has for reflective scholarship.

This "taboo" assessment of reflective content in scholarship by the academy must be based upon well-founded and strong arguments in order to deem it as such, or so one would think. Some investigation into the matter should prove fruitful. In her study of emotional elements in scholarship, Anna Neumann explains why such introspection lacks encouragement in scholarly work: "Doing so [engaging in introspection] risks personalizing intellectual work, painting it as a less than serious endeavor—even as biased and unscientific—and thus as irrelevant, unimportant, or frivolous" (381). She goes on to say that introspection in academia "also risks painting academic workers, and academe generally, as questionable contributors to the larger social good, a serious concern in an era of declining faith in the social value of higher education" (381). So, in a sense, Neumann's explanation of the resistance to reflection in academia serves almost to argue that reflection should not make its way into the academy because it may shed a sour light onto an already highly criticized institution. Nash notes, similarly, that the institution of the academy must maintain an air of authority through the concept of rigor. The scholarly personal narrative, Nash writes, "is controversial, at least in part, because it dares to redefine the idea of 'rigor' to fit its own set of truth criteria. Some examples of these criteria are trustworthiness, honesty, plausibility, situatedness, interpretive self-consciousness, introspectiveness/self-reflection, and universalizability" (5). Frivolity and fear of tarnishing the reputation of the

academy are but a few of the rationales offered against the inclusion of reflection in scholarship.

Neumann and Nash, who advocate for reflective writing, succinctly summarize, as reported in the paragraph above, the so-called arguments against the use of reflection and narrative in academic work, but these arguments seem to lack robust reasoning to back them up. Perhaps this reflects what Thomas Newkirk, in his book *The Performance of the Self in Student Writing*, refers to as “a strange schizophrenia” in English studies: “On the one hand, [English Departments] are built upon the narrative—it should come as no news that students become English majors to get academic credit for reading narrative fiction. Yet in writing classes there is a sense that narratives are relatively easy to write and academically suspect” (qtd. in Paley 184). When framed in the way that Newkirk does, the arguments against the use of personal narrative in academic writing appear just as frivolous as the critics claim such narrative endeavors to be themselves.

We know that scholars assert that reflective thought is beneficial for—and, in fact, required by—students in order to become effective thinkers, and we also know that the arguments by scholars against reflection are weak, so it makes sense, in order to gain further insight into the merits of reflective writing, to examine what scholars who advocate critical reflection have to say on the issue. The most basic argument for including personal narrative in scholarship is that such reflection is fundamental to any aspiring writer or academic. As Gunter thoughtfully puts it, “[t]o separate students from their lived experiences, cultural intelligences, and counter rhetorics with only the promise that they will acquire power as they adopt the language and mores of the academy is short-sided, dishonest, unnecessary, and *impossible*” (76, emphasis mine). Impossible, indeed, for as much as institutionalized academia would like to completely erase the identity of any writer from his or her work, it is

simply a matter of fact that this can not and must not happen. Nash agrees, remarking that his “students believe deep down that they have earned the right to put themselves into their scholarship [because]... writers are always an integral part of what they observe, study, interpret, and assert. The inclusion of the self in research and scholarship is inescapable, even more so when writers try intentionally to excise the self from their research” (26). Author and critic Roz Ivanič agrees, noting that she came to this understanding while composing her book: “Working on this topic,” she says, “has convinced me that, although dilemmas about self-representation in relation to readers are rarely made explicit, they are at the heart of most acts of writing. The social struggles in which the self is implicated through the act of writing are the topic of this book, and they affect the way I am writing it” (2). Discovering the importance of including the self in one’s scholarship sparked Ivanič to compose an entire book based upon further understanding this theme.

If such a discovery can spark the massive undertaking of writing a book, so too can it find effective and productive use in the works of undergraduate and graduate students who are composing capstone projects, master’s theses, and doctoral dissertations. Reflection and personal narration can prove effective, that is, if students choose to actively engage with their critical reflections. For so many students, Gunter posits, “[a]cademic writing has never been as simple as constructing a thesis and locating evidence and incorporating sources. It’s more often been about constructing the *correct* thesis or finding the *right* evidence or incorporating *appropriate* sources, so much so that the academy has become recursive, often walling itself off from new knowledge, particularly knowledge from cultural outsiders” (77, emphasis in original), and many students find themselves stuck within the mindset that they must replicate the ideas that their professors expect and wish to hear. The usage of reflection and personal narratives, Gunter argues, has “the power to pierce such myopias ... [and

teaches students to] cope with the tension of multiplicity on the page, and it also asks individual students and (eventually) academia as a whole to incorporate and contend with the new knowledge that is made” (77). Such critical reflection effectively deconstructs traditional notions of academia, and this is one of the most powerful reasons why an increasing number of critics are advocating its practice.

Deconstruction—a powerful ideation of poststructuralist thought—imparts modern critics (and those critical of the regimes of power that dominate) with many powerful tools that can help them make sense out of what we find is a quite fractured world. Graham Badley astutely looks to Derrida when pondering the ways in which deconstruction shapes the minds of reflective writers: “Derrida suggests, indeed, that deconstruction creates a tension between a conservative fidelity to existing texts and the radical possibility of something new, some new insight or interpretation as a result of our particular reading of a text. An interdisciplinary approach may be especially helpful here where readers/researchers could be encouraged to cross borders, establish new themes and make new *connections* between ideas.” (212, emphasis in original). So, while encountering many disparate ideas and theories when researching and reflecting upon that work may frighten or put off a great many students, our fragmented world demands that we as critical writers and thinkers engage regardless. This engagement has the potential to break down long-affirmed barriers between the various disciplines one encounters—the power and potential to deconstruct old knowledges and (re)construct new ones.

While engaging with the concepts of deconstruction and breaking down barriers within academia may prove troublesome, the process proves momentarily enriching as well. “For basic writers,” Gunter fervently contends, “academia becomes more relevant even as it is deconstructed. Students do not simply consume and replicate a mythically homogenous

and often foreign academic writing; instead, they tell a shifting story, their own shifting stories, of survival among the multiplicities and fragmentations of multiple discourses, many cultures” (77). This increased relevance of academia, as Gunter puts it, stems from the notion that even though something that sounds destructive—deconstruction—brings students into closer contact with themselves and their studies more so than they have ever experienced in the past. Nash reflects upon his work as a writing professor and explains that his students more clearly remember personal critically reflective narrative projects than any other writing assignment assigned while in school. “One of the reasons they can do this with such vivid recall,” Nash suggests, “is that they were given so few opportunities to write in the first-person voice; therefore, this type of project stands out even now. I have heard this particularly from people of color who have had to suppress their strong, distinct voices, along with their anger, for years in the academy” (2). Such projects push writers to think and reflect in ways they are not used to, and this push serves to make them more critical thinkers. A writer’s use of reflective writing and personal narratives “increase[s] their agency as writers” (90), Gunter remarks, indicating her agreement with me as well as others.

Writing in general, and reflective personal writing specifically, increases the active agency of such writers, and this means, quite importantly, that reflective writing empowers those engaged with it. To Badley, writing is a powerful act because it promotes action on the part of the writer: “Writing is the act of taking hold of language in order to *do* something—to *act*—and not just repeat ideas verbatim” (214, emphases mine). This “doing” that writers “do” is a powerful act that renders them more complete thinking and reflective individuals—individuals with increasing say over the shaping of their (discursive) lives. Roz Ivanič summarizes my thoughts here much more eloquently: “Writing is not a neutral ‘skill,’” she says, “but a socio-political act of identification in which people are constructed by the

discoursal resources on which they are drawing, construct their own ‘discoursal identity’ in relation to their immediate social context, and contribute to constructing a new configuration of discoursal resources for the future” (345). Critical reflective—and personal—writing helps writers construct powerful discourses and powerful selves that dialectically inform and shape each other.

Marginalized or oppressed groups, research shows, have the most to gain, power-wise, from personal writing. Gunter, who has extensively reviewed the literature on personal writing and has drawn from her expertise in the writing classroom, agrees that the personal does indeed afford power to underrepresented groups: “Expanding academic writing by asking students to theorize the personal reallocates power, and basic writers who are almost always more likely to be multivocal stand to become some of the most effective rhetorical power players in our classrooms” (77). By “multivocal” here, Gunter refers to students who have had to navigate the world in more than one language or dialect. Interestingly, Gunter finds that “[f]or students from marginalized communities, this theorization of [personal] experience already happens. It is a matter of survival” (77), and she remarks as well that these students “by necessity, already theorize experience and play with language” (93). For those who have had to navigate the world using a variety of different and competing discourses, theorizing the personal comes naturally to them, meaning that these people have always had to consider the ways in which their selves and their ways of speaking (and writing) do or do not mesh with the larger or more powerful discursive modes.

Peter Elbow, a well-known figure in the field of composition studies strongly believes that marginalized peoples must not be asked to strip themselves of their multivocal interplay with the world. “After all,” Elbow writes, “we experience our language or dialect—our natural grammar and syntax—not just as something we use but as a deep part of us.

How can students get energy, vitality, and voice into their writing—deeper resonances—if they can't use the dialect that has access to their unconscious?" (129). One's primary way of writing and speaking, Elbow posits, has the sole power to access one's unconscious mind. Whether you believe in the existence of an unconscious or not, the bigger idea here is that native tongues and dialects act as powerful probes of individual consciousness and thought. Elbow wholeheartedly advocates the use of one's native dialects so much so that he goes as far as to insist that all writers should be able to "compose in their vernacular dialect" (136). Although I feel we are a ways off from finding entire master's theses written in African American English or hip-hop, for example, I do understand the importance and value of including such language to the extent that it helps enrich and enliven such a paper's overall voice.

The overarching mantra I wish to exhibit here can be easily summed up: Marginalized people lack access to the power of the dominant discursive modes, so they must constantly and repetitively make their voices heard by forcefully inserting them into the public consciousness. Paley's article brings to mind images of Frederick Douglass and his autobiography, reminding us that "[p]ersonal narrative has been historically associated in this country with African Americans and with women who are writing against oppression and producing what Foucault has called subjugated knowledge" (182). Although many examples of the personal narrative exist within the broader realm of literature, Deborah Mutnick, in her article "Rethinking the Personal Narrative," voices concern over the "comparatively scarce" number of "stories of subaltern students" (qtd. in Mlynarczky 22). Nash agrees, remarking that "[r]arely do these students get an opportunity to tell their personal stories in formal scholarly writing assignments, or to challenge and question the dominant white, male, Western research ethos in the university. In fact, rarely do *any* of my students, white or

otherwise ... get a chance to enrich and deepen their scholarly activities with their personal perspectives” (3-4). For Mutnick, these personal narratives are important for both students and society, so she advocates for students to more fully engage with and utilize this discursive mode:

“For students on the social margins, the opportunity to articulate a perspective in writing on their own life experiences can be a bridge between their communities and the academy. Such student writing is also a potential source of knowledge about realities that are frequently misrepresented, diluted or altogether absent in mainstream depictions. To an extent, this view of college composition as a cultural repository is true of all students, regardless of social background.... [T]he personal narrative as an instructional mode is especially important in that it can give voice to these new nonwriters, making the classroom a more dialogic space and inserting the ‘I’ of ordinary working people and their everyday struggles into public discourse.” (qtd. in Mlynarczyk 22)

I firmly agree with the critics I have engaged with above, and I, too, argue for the further disruption of the dominant discourse through the use of personal narrative.

If these narratives are as scarce as the critics above believe—and I have reason to believe them—then it is imperative that marginalized people actively make their stories heard by using them to slap the dominant powers in the face. Patrick Fuery and Nick Mansfield demarcate “[w]omen in a patriarchal order, non-Whites in an apartheid system, gays and lesbians in a sexually repressive society” as minority groups who exist as minorities “because of their lack of access to the ruling voice” (74). If these groups stand silent, they are “rendered absent because the voice of their subjectivity (the feminine, the negritude, the

different erotics) is denied,” so it is important that these people “articulate their differences ... to maintain or create a voice outside of the restrictions of the dominant language” (74). Speaking up and making one’s voice heard is critical for marginalized groups. David L. Wallace agrees and writes that speaking up serves to help call out injustice in the world: “For those of us who have had aspects of our identities silenced or rendered invisible, challenging the autonomous, centered, Cartesian self is critical if we are to expose racism, ableism, and other axes of domination” (65). Willard-Traub contends that the insertion of marginalized voices into the dominant voices of authority must continue, for “increasingly” these voices will begin “mixing with traditional voices of disciplinary authority,” leaving them “challenged and disrupted” (33). This mixing of marginalized and dominant voices holds incredibly powerful potential.

Out there in the margins of the margins lie those deemed sexually “other”—those people deemed “queer” and radically different in some fundamental way. As a means of empowerment, radical queers have reclaimed the very word of their oppression and have reconstituted it as a badge of honor of sorts. Such a powerful act stems from the mixing of discourses that I and others agree is so powerful for marginalized people. Jennifer DiGrazia and Michel Boucher invoke legendary theorist Michel Foucault in their article “[b]ecause power, knowledge, and truth are integrated, [and] Foucault argues that current constructions of gender and sexuality provide an opportunity for us to produce counterdiscourses” (30). It is, after all, Foucault who was one of the first (and most central) critics to begin to theorize the self as a socially constructed entity, so it makes sense to implicate his works here. Counterdiscourses—like the queering of the word “queer,” for instance—serve as a means via which marginal people can counteract and deconstruct the dominant regime(s) of power. Heterosexism, Jonathan Alexander and David Wallace argue, is one particular site of

hegemony that affects everybody and, thus, should be deconstructed: “Whether we are aware of it or not, we are all implicated in this struggle [of heterosexism]; when we fail to acknowledge and engage the queer, we not only ignore an important tool for deconstruction, but we also participate in the ongoing marginalization of LGBT people and perspectives and miss opportunities to work toward the unseating of heteronormativity” (W316). Failure to engage the dominant and oppressive discourses serves only to further oppress already oppressed and disenfranchised people.

In order to avoid further oppression of already oppressed and disenfranchised people, we, as queers, must engage in radical criticism of the powers that oppress. Robert Andrew Nowlan describes radical criticism as an incredibly powerful tool that requires action by those who seek to engage in the struggle with oppressive power: “Critique is motivated by a concern to *intervene* in, effect, and (re)direct the course of change—change both in and of the object, and change in what the object effects as it changes” (365, emphasis in original). Further, Nowlan warns us that “A CRITIQUE IS NOT A MECHANICAL EXERCISE, but rather an *investigation* which requires *imagination* and *creativity* as well as rigor and precision” (363, emphasis in original). Radical critique, then, requires much critical and creative thought; it is not something one partakes in willy-nilly. One such creative and powerful way of working toward social change is through the wide dissemination of critically reflective personal narratives. “Far from reifying the personal,” Daly contends, “this sharing of *reflections* about our personal experiences, allows us to participate in the ultimate goal of radical introspection: insight toward social action” (91, emphasis in original). Professor and scholar William J. Spurlin advocates the writing classroom as a site of queer contestation of the powers that oppress:

“In one sense, a ‘queer’ pedagogy would imply not only an analysis of (sexual) difference(s) in the classroom but of interrelated, broad-based pedagogical commitments to free inquiry and expression, social equity, the development of more democratic institutional and pedagogical practices, and the broadening of dialogical spheres of public exchange within and beyond the classroom as sites for engaged analyses of social issues and collective struggles. Indeed, the intersections of queer theory and critical pedagogy are filled with numerous and exciting possibilities for productive classroom inquiry, cultural analysis, public deliberation, and social (ex)change.” (10)

Whether inside the classroom or out, invoking a queer positionality has the potential to effect meaningful social change, leading to the betterment of society for queer and non-queers alike.

One way of adopting a queer positionality, as I have already hinted at, is through the blending of traditional and non-traditional discourses. “[S]lowly but surely,” Patricia Bizzell tells us, “previously nonacademic discourses are blending with traditional academic discourses to form the new ‘mixed’ forms” (2). “These new discourses are still academic,” Bizzell cautions her readers, “in that they are doing the intellectual work of the academy—rigorous, reflective scholarship...[and that they appear] in top-rank academic journals and in books from prestigious academic presses” (2). This occurs even though these pieces blend together “elements of traditional academic discourse with elements of other ways of using language, admitting personal experience as evidence, for example, or employing cultural allusions or language variants that do not match the cultural capital of the dominant white male group” (2). Gunter finds this inclusion of mixed discourse important, remarking that “composition as a field has much to gain by advocating for *mixed* academic discourses” (67,

author's emphasis). DiGrazia and Boucher describe in their article a writing course they constructed in order to explore the ways in which mixing discourses would play out. They found that "by recombining genres such as poetry and expository writing, fiction and autobiography, and by blurring the lines between public and private writing, we questioned what possibilities for representing selves and cultures would emerge" (26). DiGrazia and Boucher's students blended discourses and found themselves questioning and critically engaging with the various selves and cultures that emerged. In order for such an interplay to occur, it is important to maintain an open mind, for, as Bizzell cautions us, "[i]f we want to see the whole beast, we should be welcoming, not resisting, the advent of diverse forms of academic discourse, and encouraging our students to bring all their discursive resources to bear on the intellectual challenges of the academic disciplines" (9). Keeping an open mind proves key to those aspiring to critique dominant power systems.

This mixed discursive mode that I have touched so much upon here holds significant power, but I wonder how it does so—and why. Gunter terms such mixed modes in writing as acts of "braiding." "[W]hen we ask students," Gunter writes, "to *braid together in the same text* the always already enmeshed subjective/objective—to weave, for instance, the mandates of academes with alternative discourses—we enable student writers to be both spectators and participants in the same document, thereby opening up academic writing by giving expression to ... the subjectivities students bring into our classrooms" (67-68, author's emphasis). Braiding, therefore, empowers marginalized people because braided works allow writers to show off their own unique self-knowledge as well as their intertwined understanding of more traditional academic knowledge. Gunter makes a bold claim in her article regarding the rationale for incorporating braiding into the writing classroom:

“*Rhetorical consciousness* and *rhetorical empowerment* (that is, cognizance of and facility with the creative power of discourse) can be achieved through the rhetorical strategy of braiding. If literacy is not just a storehouse of knowledge but a social action, then literacy instruction stands as a call to action; likewise, if our classrooms privilege a naturalized, narrowly defined academic discourse, then we effectively interpellate students into a status quo that re-marginalizes many (in- and outside the classroom).” (76)

Basically, Gunter says here that the failure to include braiding in writing courses serves to maintain the status quo and further marginalize already marginalized people. To utilize braiding in a writing classroom is a queer act, Gunter argues, for “[t]he queerness of braiding, then, is that it allows students to be one thing and another in their writing. Braiding assists students in becoming critical academics” (91). I might slightly revise Gunter’s assessment here and argue, rather, that the queerness of braiding assists students in becoming active critics who have the power of mixed discourse in their toolboxes in order to break down barriers and effect social change.

So, the marginalized queer voice is empowered in academic discourse by mixing genres, and I believe this is so. I believe this is so, and I hope, in this project to illustrate that it is so. I want this document to be sort of a guerrilla barrage of “in-your-face” discourse. I will not let you ignore me or pish-tosh what I have to say. Instead, I implore you to pay attention to my words by presenting you with ideas and language that may, at times, shock your sensibilities and make you think hard about the regimes that shape and coercively dominate our lives. I will speak to you here in a blast of seemingly disparate voices, and I will link together texts in seemingly incompatible ways. What I present here is a uniquely queer project. This living document before you does not necessarily fit within the constructs of

“normal” thesis types, but, then again, I do not believe it has to, *per se*. This work, I believe, should illustrate to an audience that I have attained some sort of demonstrable mastery of the field(s) at hand. This is about explicating myself. And the best way to explicate myself is to engage with myself in discourse, critique myself, and convey my overarching conclusion that the contents of this project represents the best of my conscientious, critical, thought-proving hard work.

I demarcate this project as a queer one, and there are many reasons for labeling it as such. The ways in which this project is a queer project are as follows: One, this project consists of a mixture of genres, in terms of the construction of this paper rhetorically, meaning it incorporates traditional academic “high” writing (research with sources used to substantiate claims), as well as less formal “interludes” of more personal prose to help connect portions of the paper. Additionally, this project mixes genres in terms of the content discussed herein: We begin with a study of two early nineteenth-century British novels, then we move on to a mid-nineteenth-century American novel. We follow this novel with an explication of an historical/sociocultural text—circumcision. This discussion of circumcision leads us into the consideration of a 1970s American poem, and this poem leads us into an examination of an Early Modern Shakespearean drama. From there, we tackle queer issues in an Early Modern non-Shakespearean drama, and we round out this project with the examination of a late-twentieth-century American short story. Two, quite literally, the critical modes are queer—I mean the ways of exploring all of the texts within this project employ queer frameworks to help better understand the texts. Three, the texts within this piece dialogue with each other (talk to each other), illustrating yet another way in which various discourses mix and mingle to inform and implicate each other. Four, I tackle and explore queer topics of interest, such as circumcision (a taboo subject about which we should never

speak), rampant sexuality that exists yet remains unspoken, and dismantling capitalism. Five, this project is entirely queer-produced. Six, this project is pointed toward effecting social change in useful ways—in each paper, individually, as well as when taken as a whole.

Having illustrated the ways in which this entire text is queer, it makes perfect sense, now, to move on to the rest of this project in order to let you see for yourselves the ways in which this queer project truly is just that—queer.

## CHAPTER 2

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### Beginning at the End: An Opener

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Given the queer nature of this project as a whole, I think it makes queer sense to begin at the ending and open this collection of queer graduate papers by reflecting upon the last paper I wrote while enrolled in the program. “The reason for this?” you may ask, and I will answer that I have organized the papers herein specifically in order to make certain that the content of each creates a subtly intuitive flow that helps makes sense of these immensely different pieces—and helps illustrate to the reader, I hope, that I have gained a significant understanding of both the literary content with which I engage, as well as the queer ideas I delineate and explore.

While many might organize a project like this by placing each project in the order in which it was originally created, I believe that this organizational scheme does not help show the subtle intertextual connections that arise more obviously when the pieces are situated as I have them in this project’s current form. Truth be told, I had originally intended to organize this endeavor in the very traditional chronological mode, but I have decided to reject this mode because chronicity, I find, appends my works to and upholds the overarching hegemonic notion—seen in the “keeping up with the Joneses” mentality that runs rampantly through our everyday lives—that tells us that the newest things—whether they be cars, clothes, or even *ideas*—always and forever will be the best things. A great many “new” things prove invaluable and illustrate the incredible powers of innovative thought. I am thinking here, for instance, of the invention of penicillin or the founding of the Internet. But not all “new” things find such usefulness or prominence. I am thinking here, for example, of New Coke or the Segway scooter—both items touted as revolutionarily innovative—that proved not to meet societal needs and, thus, flopped.

Organizing this compilation of work in chronological order would have proved, in my critical opinion, to be a flop of the New Coke variety. You see, in my original conception of this project, I thought that I would be able to merely lump my seven graduate course final projects together and argue that I clearly, over time, engage more fully and coherently with the texts and theory I studied. I do not think I can, nor should, make such a bold claim. To make such a claim, I feel, implies some sort of infallibility on my part. I am not from Lake Wobegon, so I realize—despite how intensely I would like to be—that I am not like the children there—always above average—nor am I like the women there—always strong. Each and every project I present here constitutes a living artifact of my critical endeavors, and each piece has both its strengths and its weaknesses. What I “get right” in one piece, I may not as fully theorize in another. What I overlook in one manuscript, I may astutely expound upon in another. Basically, what I wish to convey here is my belief that—when taken as a whole and organized in the fashion put forth here—these disparate—though crucially linked—documents illustrate a profound understanding of queer theory and literary analysis. To say that my work simply gets better as time progresses would be gravely illogical and naïve.

I characterize this chapter as queer because I have chosen to jumble the order of the papers I present here and discuss the most recent project first, even though convention might tell me that I should have stuck with beginning with an introduction to my first graduate paper. But this is not the only reason this chapter might be described as queer. To begin, I should explain that this compilation consists of sixteen individual chapters which include an introduction, a conclusion, one opener, six interludes, and seven graduate course final papers. This chapter, then, is queer in the sense that this chapter stands alone as what I am calling an “opener.” By using the term “opener,” I mean to make it clear that this chapter

serves only to transition from my encompassing introduction and orient the reader toward the first individual graduate paper selection.

Elsewhere in this work, the reader will encounter “interludes,” which will differ greatly from this opener. Whereas this opener leads into only one of my original graduate manuscripts, these interludes occur between two different manuscripts. It is my goal and intention, in these interludes, to explore the ways in which the two seemingly disparate manuscripts speak to and inform each other intertextually. This opener differs from the interludes in that there are not graduate manuscripts before and after it with which I could engage in the way I will in the interludes that comprise this volume.

For now, I will lead you into the first graduate manuscript of this text. The piece that follows is entitled “Naturalized Heterosexuality in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*: Maintenance—and Subversion—of the Sexual Norm,” and it was composed during the summer session of the year 2007 as the final project in Dr. Jennifer Shaddock’s “Seminar in British Literature after 1790 (Special Theme: Jane Austen)” course. As you engage with this piece, I suggest you think about the ways in which sex does or does not play a role in typical novels of the time in general—and in Jane Austen novels in particular. You may think to yourself that sex clearly does not exist in such novels—for that would simply be far too risqué for the time period—but is this line of thought *necessarily* true? Does one have to witness sex, or read about it explicitly, or have a dildo slapped in his or her face in order to know that something sexual is occurring? Keep these questions in mind as you delve beyond this opener.

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**CHAPTER 3**


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Naturalized Heterosexuality in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*.  
Maintenance—and Subversion—of the Sexual Norm

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By Josiah P. Peeples IV

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(Special Theme: Jane Austen)

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Nature without sex would prove to be a very boring place. On the other hand, a natural world founded upon very narrowly defined notions of appropriate sexual activity would prove entirely oppressive, indeed. Thankfully, nature allows for and embraces many types of sexualities, even though cultures may not do the same thing. Novelist Jane Austen was immersed in such a culture that relegated sex to heterosexual marriage. Despite this, however, close examination of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* reveals that the heroines of both novels—Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse, respectively—realize their love for the men they initially disdained—Darcy and Knightley—while immersed in nature—a sexually encompassing and inclusive space. By placing these realizations of love within nature, Austen naturalizes heterosexual love, thus promoting and reinforcing an emerging sexual norm; at the same time, intriguingly, by enjoining her heroines with men who respect women and nature, Austen forces her readers to question the very same patriarchal norms she seemingly maintains.

Both Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse initially disdain the men who they eventually marry, thus suggesting that the relationships that form later are in some sense not overtly obvious or natural. Speaking of Mr. Darcy, for example, Elizabeth remarks that it “would be the greatest misfortune of all!—To find a man agreeable whom one is determined to hate!” (62). Elizabeth, of course, is “determined to hate” Mr. Darcy because of his prejudice against her—prejudice illustrated when Darcy remarks at a ball that Elizabeth “is

tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me*” (9). Elizabeth even extrapolates her hatred toward Darcy to include all men. Greatly pleased with the prospect of touring the countryside with her aunt and uncle, Elizabeth rhetorically asks, “What are men to rocks and mountains?” (103). Paula Marantz Cohen suggests that this question indicates Elizabeth’s “disregard for male opinion” (226), but I would extend the argument a bit further, for Elizabeth seems not only to disregard male opinion, but also to embrace nature as a viable alternative to relationships with men in general. Elizabeth does not link Darcy with nature prior to her trip through the English countryside.

Emma Woodhouse’s initial disdain toward Mr. Knightley, though present, proves less marked than Elizabeth’s. Until very late in the novel, Mr. Knightley and Emma exhibit a very tenuous relationship. Knightley continually attempts to educate Emma in order to make her a better person, and Emma constantly questions his authority to act in this way. Notably, we learn that “Mr. Knightley, in fact, was one of the few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse, and the only one who ever told her of them: and...this was not particularly agreeable to Emma herself” (5). Emma has controlled the household as long as she can remember, so she greatly dislikes Knightley’s attempts to direct the course of her life. Critic Susan M. Korba offers an intriguing queer reading of *Emma* in which she argues basically that Emma engages in lesbian relationships with the women in her life—and especially with Harriet Smith. I will return to Korba’s interpretation later, but one point she raises seems useful here. Korba remarks that through her consistent domination of the women in her life, Emma plays the role traditionally assigned to men (143). Knightley’s interference with her ability to enact her dominant role angers Emma and places a rift between these two characters.

Strained relationships—like those between Elizabeth and Darcy and Emma and Knightley—result in confrontations that notably occur in nature. While visiting Charlotte Collins at Hunsford, Elizabeth answers the Collins' doorbell where she finds Darcy waiting. Having come over to tell Elizabeth “how ardently” he “admire[s] and love[s]” her (125), Darcy continues his speech by qualifying his love and maintaining “[h]is sense of her inferiority” (125). After refusing his faulty proposal of marriage, Elizabeth meets Darcy on her walk in the grove the next day. Darcy takes Elizabeth somewhat by surprise by calling out to her. Though wishing to avoid him, Darcy confronts her and remarks with “haughty composure” that he had “been walking in the grove some time in hope of meeting” her and that he wants her to read the letter he has handed her (129). Both scenes that I have presented thus far represent uncomfortable confrontations between Elizabeth and Darcy.

One might easily argue that the confrontation that occurs in the Collins' house when Darcy proposes proves more pivotal and important than the meeting between Elizabeth and Darcy while in the grove, but I believe the confrontation in nature proves more important because Elizabeth discovers Darcy's vulnerabilities and true feelings while she is in nature. Darcy does, of course, tell Elizabeth that he loves her when he proposes, but he overqualifies his love and puts her down at the same time. In his letter to Elizabeth, Darcy responds to the accusations she has made regarding his mistreatment of her sister Jane (in her relationship with Bingley) and his dismissal of Wickham. Darcy remarks that he “must have been in an error” regarding Jane's feelings toward Bingley because her “countenance and air was such, as might have given the most acute observer, a conviction that, however amiable her temper, her heart was not likely to be easily touched” (130). Darcy thought he had an ability to recognize love, but he was greatly mistaken. Darcy's inability to recognize mutual love shows itself in his interactions with Elizabeth, for clearly her rejection of his

proposal indicates that he was wrong in thinking she loved him as well. In his letter, Darcy tries as best he can to make his side of the story as clear and as minimally vindictive as possible, and he even tells her, “[i]t pains me to offend you” (131). Though far from an apology, Darcy’s letter does make Elizabeth aware of his vulnerabilities and misguided intentions.

Emma’s confrontation with Knightley in nature proves to be much more dramatic than the confrontation between Elizabeth and Darcy. Emma’s infamous treatment of Miss Bates during the Box Hill picnic scene greatly upsets Miss Bates and enrages Knightley. The fact that Emma subtly slighted Miss Bates in front of the whole party because of her endless and inane chatter forces Knightley to confront Emma about her behavior. Knightley reminds Emma that she and Miss Bates come from very different situations: “She is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to; and, if she live to old age, must probably sink more. Her situation should secure your compassion” (246). Emma had not considered how influential her remarks regarding Miss Bates might prove, and Knightley points out that many other members of the picnic party “would be entirely guided by [Emma’s] treatment of her” (246). Many members of the party, that is, look to Emma as an example of how to live their lives. Such mistreatment of the poor may encourage the others to mistreat the poor as well. It is for this reason that Knightley harshly reprimands Emma, remarking that her actions were “badly done indeed!” (246). So entirely affected by Knightley’s scolding, Emma cried during the entire carriage ride home.

Thus far, I hope only to have explored and illustrated the nature of the relationships between the main love interests of both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*. The relationships between Elizabeth and Darcy and Emma and Knightley are tenuous to say the least, and they both seem like very unnatural matches. Interestingly, however, both couples begin to

experience each other more fully while in nature. Elizabeth, as mentioned above, reads Darcy's letter while in nature—shortly after being confronted by him in the grove—and she learns more about his character and intentions. Emma faces Knightley's reprimand while in nature—at Box Hill—and she cries all the way home. This indicates, of course, the fact that Emma values Knightley's opinion of her and that she regrets any actions on her part that would make him think less of her. Having established the nature of these relationships, I wish now to turn my discussion toward the role that nature plays in helping these characters fall in love, for nature occupies, indeed, a crucial role.

Elizabeth Bennet, as mentioned previously, gratefully accepts her aunt and uncle's invitation to tour the English countryside, for she feels that the journey will keep her mind focused on nature rather than on men. To Elizabeth's surprise—and even dismay—the tour leads her to Darcy's estate—Pemberley. Upon spying Darcy's house after winding through Pemberley Woods, Elizabeth describes the estate: “in front [of the house], a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal, nor falsely adorned” (159). Darcy maintains all of the natural features of his estate, and Elizabeth greatly admires him for that. The narrator even remarks that Elizabeth “had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste” (159). Darcy, then, appreciates nature too, as shown by the fact that no aspect of his estate seems “falsely adorned.” Linda V. Troost argues that “[a]lthough Austen places no emphasis on the formal gardens of Pemberley, they would have been a major feature of a stately home at that time” (480). Although it is certainly possible that Austen glosses over the formal gardens, it also seems entirely possible that Darcy simply chose not to “falsely” adorn his estate with such a formal feature.

Darcy's respect for nature greatly influences the way Elizabeth feels about him. In fact, experiencing Pemberley helps Elizabeth to realize that she is in love with Darcy. Notably, while speaking with her sister Jane, Elizabeth relates the exact moment at which she fell in love with Darcy: "I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley" (244). Elizabeth's love for Darcy, then, finds affirmation in their mutual love of nature. As Troost writes, "Austen gives a clearer description of the grounds around Pemberley than she does its interior, suggesting that the landscape is a more significant marker of Darcy's character than his possessions" (490). Austen aligns Darcy with nature in order to effectively align Elizabeth with Darcy. Elizabeth's realization of her love for Darcy, of course, probably should not be simplistically reduced to the moment of "seeing his beautiful grounds" because her realization truly occurs as a culmination of many historical variables. As William C. Snyder argues, seeing Pemberley helps Elizabeth integrate aspects of Darcy's character that she has witnessed in the past in order to see him as a more fully developed person: "Because this picturesque setting is representative of his character, Darcy can now be viewed as more complete, integrated and attractive, but most importantly, as a male with clear promise of domestic intimacy" (150). Darcy's affiliation with nature helps Elizabeth to see Darcy as a man worthy of her love, and, most importantly, as a man with the ability to be a good husband and father.

Emma Woodhouse becomes increasingly fond of Knightley while in nature as well. As mentioned before, Knightley reprimands Emma while at Box Hill and Emma shows obvious regard for his opinions of her. Perhaps the events of the day before this incident will help to explain Emma's outburst of emotion on her way home from Box Hill. With a party of many others, Emma spent the majority of the previous day on the grounds of Donwell Abbey—Knightley's estate—engaged in enjoying nature and picking strawberries.

While there, Emma views the grounds and finds “ample gardens stretching down to meadows washed by a stream” and an “abundance of timber in rows and avenues, which neither fashion nor extravagance had rooted up” (234). Though more formal than Pemberley, Donwell Abbey exists as a very natural place as well, for much remains unaltered even if “fashion” or “extravagance” might demand that it should be changed. While walking through the estate, Emma describes Mr. Martin’s farm as “a sweet view—sweet to the eye and the mind” (236), thus illustrating Emma’s potential acceptance of Knightley’s respect for a gentleman farmer like Mr. Martin. Soon after reflecting upon Mr. Martin’s land, Emma meets up with Knightley and Harriet and joins them on their walk. Emma, Knightley, and Harriet “took a few turns together along the walk....and Emma found it the pleasantest part of the day” (236). Emma has begun at this point in the novel—while in nature—to more greatly respect Mr. Knightley and his opinions, and it is likely for this reason that she becomes so emotional after his reprimand the next day.

Emma realizes the love she and Knightley share for each other during another, later, nature scene. The weather clears after a mostly dreary day and “[w]ith all the eagerness which such a transition gives, Emma resolved to be out of doors as soon as possible” (278). When suitable, Emma leaves the house and loses “no time in hurrying into the shrubbery” (278). Not long into her walk, Emma stumbles upon Knightley, who had been looking for her. Emma and Knightley walk the grounds talking about Frank Churchill’s upcoming marriage to Jane Fairfax at first. The discussion then moves to marriage more generally, and Emma soon becomes aware of Knightley’s love for her and the fact “that she was every thing herself” to him (282). Though not overt, a proposal of marriage is implicit in Knightley’s interaction with Emma, and she implicitly accepts the engagement. Emma and Knightley soon return to the house for tea with Mr. Woodhouse and Emma can barely concentrate on

the conversation because of her joy regarding the engagement. The narrator links Emma's joy in love with her love of nature: "how often had her eyes fallen on the same shrubs in the lawn, and observed the same beautiful effect of the western sun!—But never in such a state of spirits, never in anything like it" (285). Emma had always enjoyed viewing the shrubs in her lawn, but they have never seemed as beautiful to her as they do after realizing Knightley's love for her. Much like in *Pride and Prejudice*, nature and love go hand-in-hand in *Emma* as well.

The main characters in both novels find love while in nature, quite obviously, but it still proves valuable to examine the reason why this phenomenon is important. Rosemarie Bodenheimer remarks, for instance, that "the views of landscape in her [Austen's] novels are more fully and wittily weighted with metaphorical value than has been recognized in any sustained fashion" (605). By this, Bodenheimer means that landscapes in Austen's novels do not exist as any sort of ordinary filler; rather, the landscapes Austen presents her readers illustrate something important about a character or characters. Bodenheimer considers the same novels explored in this paper when she writes that "*Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* both have well-known sections in which the view of an estate appears as an indicator of social worth. Elizabeth recognizes Darcy's value at Pemberley; Emma validates her esteem for Mr. Knightley at Donwell Abbey" (610). Here, we see that the landscape serves "as an indicator of social worth." More generally, the heroines of both novels fall in love with the landscapes of Darcy and Knightley—and, in turn, they fall in love with the men themselves.

Certainly, nature plays a metaphorical role within Austen's works, but Austen's use of the natural may prove somewhat subversive as well. By this, I mean that Austen's characterization of nature seems to negate the utilitarian views of nature resultant from Enlightenment, scientific, and industrial thought. Writing about Austen and her

contemporary female writers, Snyder remarks that these women “drew the self not as individualized against natural and social barriers, but as communalized with other and Nature” (143). Such women writers—Austen included—wrote about nature, then, not as entity to be subdued and utilized, but, rather, as a realm with which they were connected. Expanding his argument further, Snyder writes that Austen and her contemporaries “turn[ed] to the picturesque to elevate alternate ideals or patterns they saw implied in natural processes: community, generosity, sympathy, delight, connection, and intimacy” (145). Nature represents a communal force in Austen’s works that helps to explain the deep connections her heroines make with their love interests while in nature.

Although Austen’s use of nature may prove subversive, such use may also serve to naturalize heterosexual love as a societal norm. After all, the heterosexual love relationships in the Austen novels discussed here *do indeed* occur in nature. Perhaps an intense examination of sexuality in Austen’s two novels will help my argument to progress. Both Elizabeth and Emma seemingly show very little interest in having a heterosexual future. Elizabeth remarks, for example, that “if I were determined to get a rich husband, or *any husband*” she would scheme to get one (15, emphasis mine). Elizabeth clearly has no immediate plans of marrying anyone. Emma, similarly, “always declares she will never marry” (25). Although Elizabeth’s proclamation regarding marriage may call into question her sexuality, critics tend to focus on Emma’s refusal to marry as indicative of her affinity for her own sex. Korba remarks, for instance, that “Emma’s initial interest in Harriet is a very physical one” (152), thus strongly implying that Emma might best be described as a lesbian, were that term available for use during Austen’s time. Even if Emma—and potentially Elizabeth—feel a stronger affinity for their own sex, such a sexuality is denied them in Austen’s novels in favor, of course, of heterosexual love.

Austen naturalizes heterosexuality in her novels by denying the affirmation of lesbianism. Influential critic Judith Butler writes that “heterosexuality naturalizes itself through setting up certain illusions of continuity between sex, gender, and desire” (366). By this, she means that by setting up heterosexuality as the natural way of life, one’s gender of, say, female necessitates that that person must desire one of the opposite sex. One’s gender and one’s sexuality must, therefore, fall within the realm of “natural” sexual relations. Adrienne Rich understands the negation of lesbianism as the maintenance of sexual norms:

In the tradition of the social sciences it asserts that primary love between the sexes is ‘normal,’ that women need men as social and economic protectors, for adult sexuality, and for psychological completion; that the heterosexually constituted family is the basic social unit; that women who do not attach their primary intensity to men must be...condemned to an even more devastating outsiderhood than their outsiderhood as women. (657)

Basically, Rich sets up the notion of what she terms “compulsory” heterosexuality in the argument she makes within her article (631). Such compulsory heterosexuality is evident in both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* as illustrated simply by the fact that both of the heroines end up ultimately getting married. Korba states quite succinctly, for example, that Emma’s lesbian sexuality is effectively denied by the novel’s ending and that “[t]he only alternative model available to her, which she is forced to embrace at the end of the novel, is...[to] play woman and wife, to submit in her turn” (160). Compulsory heterosexuality denies the validity of other sexualities.

I have been discussing the nature of sexuality in the two Austen novels under consideration here, and this may prove distressing for readers since they may wonder exactly where the sex in Austen’s novels occurs. Of course one cannot classify Austen’s novels as

pornographic in any way, for she does not offer her readers any explicit descriptions of sex. This leads critics like Susan Morgan to conclude that “[t]he romantic encounters between Austen’s leading characters are not sexual, not literally sexual, but also not metaphorically sexual” (351). Such an argument, in my opinion, is quite naïve because it fails to consider potentially sexual undertones. Morgan is correct to note that no overt sex occurs in Austen’s novels, but I believe sexuality runs quite rampantly throughout the novels’ subtexts. Critic Jill Heydt-Stevenson examines the bawdy humor that occurs throughout Austen’s novels and remarks that “laughter in general and female humor in particular were seen as a threat to the foundations of public order and social harmony, partly because sexual freedom was linked to—or even seen as a consequence of—the authority of wit” (311). The simple use of wit by Austen—and, in turn, by the characters she develops—illustrates a highly sexual subtext that runs throughout her works.

Perhaps the sexual aspects of Austen’s novels are overlooked because of the shifting views of sexuality that were occurring during Austen’s lifetime. Heydt-Stevenson remarks that around Austen’s time “there was a shift in the definition of women from assertive and sexual to passive and passionless” (312). Nicholas E. Preus notes, similarly, that “[d]uring the nineteenth century, to take one example, the sexualities of women and sexuality in marriage were undergoing significant redefinition as a result of the spread of evangelicalism and its moral conservatism” (197). Sexuality was gradually becoming more rigidly and narrowly defined than it had been in the past. What we see here is what influential critic Michel Foucault terms the “repressive hypothesis” (10). Foucault uses this term to describe his understanding of the ways in which sexuality became increasingly repressed throughout the nineteenth century. “Codes regulating the coarse, the obscene, and the indecent were quite lax compared to those of the nineteenth century” (3), Foucault writes. Throughout the

nineteenth century, however, “[o]n the subject of sex, silence became the rule. The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law. The couple imposed itself as model, enforced the norm, safeguarded the truth, and reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy” (3). Heterosexuality, thus, became the sexual norm—the sexual norm relegated to family units that people were not to speak about.

Although sexuality became silenced as a result of what Foucault calls the repressive hypothesis, it is important to understand that people did, indeed, allow sex to be a part of common discourse. Preus, for example, writes that “[s]ince the truth, because it is sex, cannot be spoken but on the other hand, because it is the truth, must always be spoken, the discourse of sexuality becomes the hidden, metaphorical, and secretive language of allusions and codes” (204). Sex, then, though seemingly silenced, is ever-present. This, of course, helps to explain the coded sexuality we see in Austen’s novels. Bawdy humor, dancing, and piano playing all emanate with sex without overtly saying its name.

Though Austen seemingly naturalizes heterosexuality due to her immersion in a time period of repressed sexuality, one must critically consider whether she truly maintains those norms. Certainly, it is quite clear that Austen’s heroines do, indeed, marry at the end of her novels, but we, as readers, do not see these characters’ lives beyond their wedding days. Given this fact, it seems important to examine what the married lives of Austen’s heroines *may* prove to be like after their weddings. Do Darcy and Knightley seem to be men who will prove to be oppressive husbands? I think not. Consider, for example, the fact that Darcy welcomes Elizabeth’s aunt and uncle, the Gardiners, to stay from time to time at Pemberley. Notably, “Darcy, as well as Elizabeth, really loved them” (254). Even though he showed initial disdain for people such as the Gardiners who earned their money through hard work, he appreciates and even loves them after spending time with them. Darcy, thus, does not

allow his prior prejudices to turn him into an oppressive husband who does not allow his wife to see her family. Similarly, Knightley does not demand that Emma move with him to Donwell Abbey upon their marriage. He proposes, in fact, that “he should be received at Hartfield; that so long as her father's happiness—in other words his life—required Hartfield to continue her home, it should be his likewise” (295). Knightley quite cordially and democratically enters into his marriage with Emma. Referring to Pemberley, Cohen regards this space as “a utopic community where Elizabeth and Darcy can live and entertain according to socially and sexually democratic values” (230). Emma’s Hartfield seemingly proves quite “socially and sexually democratic” as well.

Though Jane Austen naturalizes and maintains heterosexuality as a cultural norm, she, at the same time, subverts this norm by insisting upon love and democratic values within the heterosexual marriage institution. Austen’s view on marriage, then, seems quite progressive indeed, even though many critics regard her values are inherently conservative. Austen proposes a more organic, interconnected, mutually beneficial type of love—a natural love, if you will. Founding marriage upon natural love serves to more thoroughly enrich relationships than did the prior foundations of marriage—which were primarily economic in nature. Though Austen’s marriages do, indeed, involve economic considerations, Austen’s employment of natural love subversively suggests that love should be the first and foremost consideration when making a marriage match. Love of nature, the love of the love of nature, and natural love all drive Jane Austen’s works and exist to show her readers how to live compassionate and thoughtful lives.

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**CHAPTER 4**

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**Shacking Up in a Den of Silent Sex: An Interlude**

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The preceding paper, as mentioned in the opener, was the last official classroom assignment of my graduate career. I composed it during a time of great transition in my life—for completion of this piece, entitled “Naturalized Heterosexuality in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*: Maintenance—and Subversion—of the Sexual Norm,” as well as completion of the Seminar in British Literature after 1790 course signaled the time for me to move—for the first time in my life—away from my family home in Eau Claire. I was in the process of packing up my things and moving to Madison to “shack up” with Mark, my partner of four years—at that time, ten years now.

I think it proves quite fitting that I was reading Jane Austen that summer as I began to pack things and prepare for a monumental move. I say this because Jane Austen’s characters in the novels explored in the preceding piece and I both found ourselves struggling—whether we knew it or not—with many of the same issues. Austen’s heroines Elizabeth and Emma were both seeking out suitable husbands throughout the course of their individual tales. They were out on the hunt for husbands who would be able to love and care for them. Above and beyond the love and care, these two women sought out partners who would prove able to provide them more than just the basics of house and home; these women hoped to find mates able to provide them—and their eventual families—with a “comfortable” lifestyle. I identify as a man, so it might seem rather ridiculous for me to say this, but my frame of mind during the time in which I was composing the preceding paper aligns quite closely with the mindsets of Austen’s leading women.

Ridiculous or not, I will say it anyway: That summer when I was reading Jane Austen and grappling with the stresses of leaving home and setting up a household with a mate, I did, indeed, feel and act much like an Elizabeth or Emma. The women in these novels know they *must* marry in order to live a happy and *fulfilled* life, and they know they need to court a man of substance in order to live said life comfortably. To live comfortably requires money, so economic issues play a pivotal role in choosing a mate. Interestingly, moving in with Mark in Madison, I knew, would allow me to become a domestic partner on his health insurance plan. Having gone without insurance since childhood, having a partner who could provide such a worthy luxury proved delightful indeed.

For Austen's heroines, finding the "right" man for the job as husband proves more daunting than ascertaining if he has insurance benefits. (That would be anachronistic.) It proves to be a real struggle that these women must face head-on. They have to scan their prospects and determine which of a few potential candidates best suits them—and which stands poised to best suit their needs. The most obvious choice, after all, may not prove to be the best choice, or maybe the best choice does not seem obvious because of some intervening factor, such as a case of clouded judgment. Take Emma Woodhouse, for instance. As I remark in the preceding paper, "Emma has controlled the household as long as she can remember, so she greatly dislikes Knightley's attempts to direct the course of her life" (26), and this issue of control clouds her judgment regarding Knightley's potential as a suitable mate.

If I think very critically here about my situation at the time while I was composing the paper you just read, I, too, had to carefully consider my Mr. Knightley, who, too, tends to attempt to exert control over and shape my life with seeming disregard for my feelings or opinions. "Get your thesis done in a week," Mark implored me just hours after moving to

Madison—and just days after completing my final graduate course. “I’ve seen you crank out a paper that fast dozens of times,” Mark retorted, as though offered as encouragement. I had to question myself at that time whether I was willing to put up with a lifetime of such senseless comments in order to meld a life together with one person forever. I wondered, too, if these comments would stop or continue, and if they would get worse, and if they served any useful purpose at all. Much like Emma, I questioned the ability of a potential life partner to provide a comfortable life because of the partner’s seemingly controlling nature.

I shall offer one further example that illustrates another way in which my mindset around the time of the Austen class might be likened to that of an Austen heroine. This time, I wish to explore the relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*. Although Elizabeth and Darcy do not go “house shopping” prior to their marriage *per se*, I likened Elizabeth’s visit to Darcy’s house Pemberley to such an outing anyway. Elizabeth begins to realize her love for Darcy when she sees his house. In a way, I would argue, Elizabeth’s love for Darcy’s estate evokes a sort of mystical offer to purchase sent straight from Elizabeth’s heart to Darcy’s. Choosing a home to share with a life partner is a great undertaking, and I am grateful that I was able to help Mark choose a home in Madison that suited us both. It was a great surprise to me, when I finally moved to this shared home a few months after Mark did, to find a plaque, inscribed with a Henry David Thoreau quote, hanging on the wall, waiting to welcome me with the words “The language of friendship is not words but meanings.” The words of Thoreau have proven quite influential to me and seeing that plaque helped make an unfamiliar place my home.

A comfortable home makes for a great place to have oodles of sex with the partner with whom you have chosen to share said comfortable house. That awkward transition signals a shift here to a discussion of the rampant sex found within the two Austen novels

studied in the preceding paper. I wish to discuss this topic of sex because it will help to show how the Austen paper you just read relates to the Nathaniel Hawthorne paper you are about to read next. Now, it would have been obscene to openly discuss sexual matters—let alone explicit sex acts—in either an Austen novel or a Hawthorne one, so no explicit references to sex exist within any of the pieces considered directly before this interlude nor in the piece considered directly after this interlude. Despite this, I argue in both papers that sex does exist rampantly in all of the novels considered. One simply must know where and how to look to find it.

Sex is spoken in coded languages in Austen's novels, critics remark, and I agree with them. My agreement is illustrated by my assertion that "[s]ex, then, though seemingly silenced, is ever-present. This, of course, helps to explain the coded sexuality we see in Austen's novels. Bawdy humor, dancing, and piano playing all emanate with sex without overtly saying its name" (36). Sex is coded during the nineteenth century when Austen's novels and Hawthorne's novels were published because of what theorist Michel Foucault termed, in his *History of Sexuality*, the "repressive hypothesis" (10). Basically, according to the repressive hypothesis, throughout the nineteenth century, "[o]n the subject of sex, silence became the rule" (3). But this does not mean that sex was completely absent from everyday life. In fact, Foucault critiques the notion of the repressive hypothesis, remarking that "around and apropos of sex, one sees a veritable discursive explosion" (17). This means that "[t]here was a steady proliferation of discourses concerned with sex...a discursive ferment that gathered momentum from the eighteenth century onward" (18). Rather than being repressed, sex was at the forefront of everything in life. At the same time, sex was subtly silent because of highly coded discourses, but explication of these codes reveals the truly rampant sexuality that became increasingly present in discourse.

The word “sex” does not come out and slap the reader in the face when he or she is reading Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance*, but (silent) sex plays an important role in this novel too. Described as an “optimistic bachelor,” Coverdale, the main character of the novel, spends much of his time alone gazing at others in a voyeuristic fantasy of sorts. He gazes at men and women and his gaze is so intense it tells the readers of the novel that Coverdale wishes to become intimately involved with all those he stares upon—regardless of their gender or other factors that might hinder such relationships. The term “bachelor” also stands out in the description of Coverdale, for it makes me wonder if it has any relationship to the common understanding of the “confirmed bachelor” we see in more contemporary discourses. Such a connection would help lend further credence to Coverdale’s already incredibly queer sexual proclivities—or orientation. Given the fact that Hawthorne’s panic after receiving sexual advances from Herman Melville is widely known by critics and scholars today, it makes sense that Hawthorne would subtly write queer characters into the novel he wrote immediately following that incident.

I now leave it to you, dear Reader, to explore the ways in which Coverdale’s unspoken, queer sexuality plays out in the piece that follows: “‘Crooked Sticks’ and the ‘Faggot’: (Queer) Individualism, Community, Social Change, and the Conundrum of Queer Theory in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance*.”

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**CHAPTER 5**


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“Crooked Sticks” and the “Faggot”: (Queer) Individualism, Community, Social Change,  
and the Conundrum of Queer Theory in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance*

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By Josiah P. Peoples IV

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Persons of marked individuality—crooked sticks, as some of us might be called—are not exactly the easiest to bind up into a faggot. (Hawthorne 82)

Americans highly revere their individuality, and they seem to consider it the foundational tenet that precipitated the formation of this country. In a nation where people vastly differ—and embody innumerable unique identities—one must wonder how collective action might take place—or if it even can take place, for that matter. Nathaniel Hawthorne speaks to this problem in the excerpt above by noting that attaining collective action amongst those “of marked individuality” is “not exactly the easiest” thing to do. In fact, these people resist efforts of others to “bind” them “into a [collective] faggot.” “Persons of marked individuality,” then, remain individuated, dispersed, and separate from one another. To take this metaphor one step further, Hawthorne’s words do not negate the possibility of binding individuals together, but one might suggest that, once bound, this “faggot”—due to its fragmentation—has the potential to burst—to break apart at any moment, dispersing and separating people once again. Bearing this elucidation in mind, I argue that Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance* illustrates the conundrum of queer theory: The construction of queer identities allows for individuation and breaks down the binaries of sexuality and gender, but at the same time this individuation factionalizes people, pits them against each other, and maintains the very society their community sought to oppose—the society that collective identity would help them to undermine and break down.

Although a primer on the tenets of queer theory is beyond the scope of this essay, it seems worthwhile to at least rudimentarily define queerness and its critical implications here at the outset. Queer theorist Donald E. Hall describes using the word “queer” as an adjective very succinctly: “Queer—the adjective—means that there is no... single word, no simple slot into which complex personalities, behaviors, desires, abilities, and ambitions can be placed” (13). Queer theorists seek to illustrate the fact that sexual and gender categorizations are “discursively constructed,” to use the words of theorist Nikki Sullivan (1), meaning that sexual and gender identities find their bases in historical and cultural interpretation; they are not “natural” essences. Such cultural and historical constructions of gender and sexual identity can—and do—vary over time, but queer theorists seek to show how current notions of sexual and gender identity were discursively shaped during the middle of the nineteenth century as binary oppositions. “Male and female” and “heterosexual and homosexual” are both binary pairs that have been constructed by the dominant system of power to favor the first, rather than the second, term. Queer theorists seek to call into question such binaries, for they strive continually to “resist closure” and support a broad range of potentially valid identities (Sullivan *v*).

The queerness of Blithedale and its inhabitants finds consideration in two notable analyses—namely, in Monika Mueller’s book, *“This Infinite Fraternity of Feeling”*: Gender, Genre, and Homoerotic Crisis in Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance* and Melville’s *Pierre*, and Benjamin Scott Grossberg’s essay, “‘The Tender Passion Was Very Rife Among Us’: Coverdale’s Queer Utopia and *The Blithedale Romance*.” These two texts effectively establish and analyze the queerness of Hawthorne’s novel. Mueller’s reading of the text posits her notion that Hawthorne wrote *Blithedale* after his brief friendship with Herman Melville because he wished to illustrate the fear he felt as a result of what Mueller believes to have been

homosexual advances made by Melville (14). Grossberg argues that “[t]he problem with the [Blithedale] community is not the failure of its vision, but the failure of its members to agree on a unified vision” (23). Basically, Grossberg believes that the Blithedale experiment fails because of rampant individuation that trumps attempts at communal life. I certainly agree with Grossberg’s assessment here, and Mueller’s reading of the text is interesting as well, but her overarching conclusion does not apply to the work at hand. Notably, both authors fail to link the demise of the Blithedale experiment to economic factors and influences—namely, the tenets of incipient capitalism that permeate the community.

The narrator, Miles Coverdale, an optimistic bachelor, has high hopes regarding the Blithedale experiment at the novel’s outset. Coverdale comments, for example, that he “felt, so much the more, that we had transported ourselves a world-wide distance from the system of society that shackled us at breakfast-time” (Hawthorne 46). The dominant regime of power “shackles” Coverdale and his companions, thus effectively stifling them and limiting their potential, in Coverdale’s opinion. Zenobia, the Margaret Fuller-like feminist, links her disfavor of the “system of society” with oppressive gender roles and she hopes that the Blithedale experiment will help to call into question and perhaps even subvert these roles: “By-and-by, perhaps, when our individual adaptations begin to develop themselves, it may be that some of us, who wear the petticoat, will go afield, and leave the weaker brethren to take our places in the kitchen!” (48). Zenobia questions the construction of gender roles within her society and she hopes for the potential queering of them, asserting that gender roles and identities do not have to match what those in power expect. Coverdale triumphantly declares, shortly after Zenobia’s comment, that the Blithedalers effectively leave “the rusty iron frame-work of society behind” them (50), thus indicating that the

inhabitants of Blithedale feel that the societal structures are worn out and ineffective and that, further, they have no place within the Blithedale community.

Although both Coverdale and Zenobia question the power and authority of the social system early into the experiment, the economic reality of the community stands in stark contrast to their positions. Silas Foster, the resident agriculturalist on the farm, notes that “[s]ome of us must go to the next Brighton fair, and buy half-a-dozen pigs” (Hawthorne 51). Foster points out the fact that the community must still remain connected with the institution of the market-place in order to obtain necessary supplies. Further, Foster tells the inhabitants of Blithedale that “the women-folks will undertake to do all the weeding” of the garden in order to make the most profit at the market (52). Richard H. Millington suggests that incipient capitalism structures the framework—and, thus, the organization—of Blithedale (558). Notably, the Blithedalers not only must buy into the dominant economic mode, they also seek to profit within it. In light of this, although the members of the Blithedale community envision their utopian scheme as a defiant act against the dominant system of power, they find themselves wholly enmeshed within that system.

Coverdale resents the market dynamics that occur on the Blithedale farm. Theorist David Leverenz comments on this aspect of Coverdale’s personality, noting that “[r]elentlessly he exposes the class hierarchies and marketplace dynamics at the heart of their effort to escape social inequality and ‘selfish competition’” (249). After all, Coverdale *is* the narrator of the book, so it is he who chooses to pass along the information about the pigs and the marketing of the garden. Coverdale cannot help but feel that the members of the Blithedale experiment “were making a play-day of the years that were given” them (Hawthorne 52). The system of Blithedale, thus, maintains a false air of opposition to the system. During the first dinner at Blithedale, for example, the inhabitants “saw fit to drink” their “tea

out of earthen cups” (54-55), but they note their understanding that they have the “option to use pictured porcelain and handle silver forks again, tomorrow” (55). Described in this way, the actions of the Blithedale inhabitants do seem quite false and performative in nature. It is important to note here that the majority of the utopians come from considerable means and leisurely lifestyles; they can afford to play at being a member of the lower class, but they can also afford to maintain the practices of their—once, and, arguably, continued—upper-class lifestyles.

Coverdale’s inherent queerness stands quite noticeably opposed to the queerness of others in the text. He seems to occupy a queer position uniquely his own. A more traditional reading of *The Blithedale Romance* by John N. Miller suggests that “the concepts of *brotherhood* and *sisterhood*, *familiar* (or *familial*) *love*, and *mutual bond*, appear frequently enough [in the text] to identify, at least in Coverdale’s mind, Blithedale’s basic ideology” (2, emphases in original). Certainly, these concepts pervade the text, but as later discussion will illustrate, striving to create and maintain familial relationships only serves to maintain the economic mode (capitalism) that constructed the concept of familialism as a means to serve its own ends; thus, Coverdale’s wish for familial relations does, indeed, exist within the text, but this wish does not prove very queer. Grossberg, on the other hand, argues that Miles Coverdale understands the utopian Blithedale as “a space for sexual desire and gender definition that is...‘fluid’” (6). Coverdale wishes not to succumb to the societal pressures that tend to box people into narrow sexual roles and identities; he wishes to love—and sexually interact with—anyone he chooses, thus refusing to occupy a single position of the limiting binaries mentioned previously. Coverdale even seems to resist atomizing differentiation between people, for critic E. Shaskan Bumás’ analysis points toward his understanding of what he describes as “Coverdale’s largely nonindividuated version of Blithedale” (20). Bumás asserts

that Coverdale's version of utopia is "based on singularity" (21), but I would suggest that an embrace of individuation points more closely toward singularity of purpose than does Coverdale's embrace of nonindividuation. In fact, I wish to illustrate—after the establishment of Coverdale's overarching queerness—the ways in which Coverdale's "nonindividuated version of Blithedale" actually proves to be the queerest and *potentially* the most useful means by which to effect social change.

Soon after dinner on the first night at Blithedale, Coverdale takes ill. While recovering—for at least two to three weeks—in his chambers, Hollingsworth nurses him back to health. Coverdale observes that "there was something of the woman moulded into the great, stalwart frame of Hollingsworth; nor was he ashamed of it, as men often are of what is best in them, nor seemed ever to know that there was such a soft place in his heart. I knew it well, however" (Hawthorne 67). Here, Coverdale describes Hollingsworth's inherent embodiment of both male and female characteristics. Because Hollingsworth maintains simultaneous masculine and feminine characteristics without feelings of shame—thus repudiating the binary notions of gender identity—he can easily be deemed a queer character. Coverdale is also queer in the sense that he can recognize and appreciate Hollingsworth's dual-genderedness.

Coverdale's experience with Hollingsworth during his convalescence further illustrates his queerness. Thinking of Hollingsworth, Coverdale tells the reader that "[t]here never was any blaze of a fireside that warmed and cheered me, in the down-sinkings and shiverings of my spirit, so effectually as did the light out of those eyes, which lay so deep and dark under his shaggy brows" (Hawthorne 67). Coverdale clearly admires Hollingsworth's beauty and is drawn to his intense eyes. Shortly after this thought, Coverdale thinks to himself, "How many men, I wonder, does one meet with in a lifetime, whom he would

choose for his deathbed companions!” (67). Coverdale seems quite content to die—alongside his cherished companion—at this point of the novel. Notably, his statement reveals quite overtly the fact that he feels complete enough to die simply because of the presence of Hollingsworth. In most traditional “deathbed scenes,” the “deathbed companions” would be spouses, parents, or children—not same-sex nursemaids. The growing bond between Coverdale and Hollingsworth appears quite queer in nature, for it transcends the boundaries of traditional male-male interaction.

After recovering from his illness, Coverdale begins to work on the farm, but he continues to extensively observe Hollingsworth. “I have seen him, a hundred times,” Coverdale says regarding Hollingsworth and his plans to build a reformatory for criminals, “with a pencil and sheet of paper, sketching the façade, the side-view, or the rear of the structure, or planning the internal arrangements, as lovingly as another man might plan those of the projected home where he meant to be happy with his wife and children” (Hawthorne 78). Grossberg reads this passage as Hollingsworth’s rejection of “heterosexual family” and love in favor of his dream to “live with criminals in place of such a union” (8). Given the fact that Coverdale tells Hollingsworth that he wishes to find himself “treading the same path with” Hollingsworth (Hawthorne 78), and also the fact that Hollingsworth guarantees that he “will, at least, wait awhile” for Coverdale (78), it seems evident to me that these two men wish to live and (sexually) love together. Grossberg argues that Hollingsworth wishes not to “be effeminized by marrying a woman” (8), but I would argue that Hollingsworth is simply not sexually inclined in that direction; he does, for example, wish to devote his life solely to the reformation of—*male*—criminals.

Coverdale’s wish to tread the same path with Hollingsworth clearly indicates his deep affection for the man. Frequently in his narrations about Hollingsworth, Coverdale mentions

the love he feels for him. Even after making his love well known, Coverdale asserts his position once again: “I loved Hollingsworth, as has already been enough expressed” (Hawthorne 88). It seems readily apparent that Coverdale excessively expresses his love for Hollingsworth. Queer theorist Donald E. Hall considers “reading for excess” an essential element when reading queer texts (148). By this, he means that readers should look for excess “which complicates the binary of heterosexuality/homosexuality” (149). Coverdale’s frequent declarations of love do, indeed, complicate the heterosexual/homosexual binary, for Coverdale firmly asserts his fondness for the unfavored end of the binary opposition. Miller suggests that “[i]n characterizing Hollingsworth, and in allowing Coverdale to express his complicated feelings about him, Hawthorne threatens the socially acceptable, utopian ideal of brotherhood with an erotic bond not normally considered proper between one man and another—not in the nineteenth century, at least” (7). Coverdale pursues his desire anyway, and his excess indicates that he finds pursuit of the unfavored end of the binary as an endeavor that will prove worthwhile and good, even despite its social construction as empty and aberrant.

Although Coverdale certainly indicates his fondness toward the homosexual end of the binary opposition, it is important to note that Coverdale entirely resents and repudiates the notion of binary oppositions all together. The atmosphere at Blithedale reminds him of “the soft affections of the Golden Age,” for “it seemed to authorize any individual, *of either sex*, to fall in love with any other, regardless of what would elsewhere be judged suitable and prudent” (Hawthorne 90, emphasis mine). No one type of (sexual) love can find hierarchical distinction as “better” or “worse” in Coverdale’s framing of love and desire. “Accordingly,” Coverdale tells his readers, “the tender passion was very rife among us” (90), thus indicating that experiments in “free love” commonly took place at Blithedale. This type of openness

was, then, not merely some unattainable fantasy, but, rather, a real, enacted, and potentially subversive exhibition of desire.

Coverdale's notion of Blithedale certainly *allows* anyone to love anyone else, but this fact does not guarantee that all people will feel free to engage in romantic and sexual multiplicity. Hollingsworth's inclination serves as a case-in-point, as illustrated in the chapter "A Crisis," which lies at about the midpoint of the novel, and, indeed, serves as the crucial turning point of the Blithedale experiment. Whilst engaged in building a stone fence, Hollingsworth speaks to Coverdale about joining him in his prison reform scheme, begging Coverdale, "Be my brother in it!" (Hawthorne 135). Coverdale makes no response and Hollingsworth's "deep eyes filled with tears, and he held out both his hands to" Coverdale, telling him that "there is not the man in this wide world, whom I can love as I could you. Do not forsake me!" (136). Further, Hollingsworth begs Coverdale to be his "friend of friends, forever" (137). Hollingsworth's words resound like a proposal of marriage, rather than a business proposition, and it appears as though Coverdale is the only person that can fulfill Hollingsworth's desires. Coverdale tells the reader that he felt as though Hollingsworth had "caught hold of" his "heart" and was "pulling it towards him with an almost irresistible force" (136). "Had I touched his extended hand," Coverdale notes, "Hollingsworth's magnetism would perhaps have *penetrated* me" (136, emphasis mine). Mueller looks critically at the word "penetrated," and she suggests that Coverdale "ultimately views Hollingsworth's advances as a type of homosexual rape. Afraid of being penetrated by Hollingsworth's phallic, rigid philanthropic ideas, he rebuffs his friend" (22). Yes, it is true that Coverdale wishes not to engage with Hollingsworth in his narrow-minded reformatory scheme, but I think the important part of this scene lies in the fact that Hollingsworth can commit his desire to only one person (notably, one of the same sex); he is not willing, like Coverdale is,

to open himself up to simultaneous (and multiplicitous) desire. As Grossberg points out, Coverdale rejects the narrowness of both Hollingsworth's reformatory ideals as well as his sexual desire: "Hollingsworth's homosexual desire, finally, is incompatible with Coverdale's queer vision because it requires a no less discrete, stable sexual identity than heterosexuality would" (16-17). Coverdale's potential desires remain much more encompassing.

Further, Hollingsworth makes his limited desire explicitly well-known to Coverdale. Notably, Hollingsworth tells Coverdale, "Be with me...or against me! There is no *third* choice for you" (Hawthorne 137, emphasis mine). Hollingsworth forcefully maintains his position that no "third" choice exists, clearly pointing out his binary mindset. Only one person—namely one man, Coverdale—can join together with Hollingsworth for the rest of his life. Hollingsworth appears only to embrace the homosexual side of the sexual identity binary. A critical reader might ask, "What about Zenobia?" Yes, Coverdale does speak about the seeming romantic connection between Hollingsworth and Zenobia, but he notes as well that Hollingsworth only seeks out Zenobia as a means to obtain the funding for his reformatory; romantic love and desire do not exist in that relationship—at least on Hollingsworth's part. Interestingly, Hollingsworth must maintain a false air of romance and sexual attraction when around Zenobia because he wishes to *exploit* her wealth. Yet again, capitalist economics serve to shape the desires (or at least the perceived desires) of characters in the book.

Coverdale even does so in a sense as well, for he chooses, after his "crisis" with Hollingsworth, to leave Blithedale and return to the city, thus bringing himself back into the "rusty iron frame-work of society" (Hawthorne 50). In the city, Coverdale resumes his leisurely habits and takes to watching other people in their houses from his hotel room window. This voyeurism—and his resultant ruminations about his observations—leads

Coverdale to wonder whether the whole Blithedale “affair had been anything more than the thoughts of a speculative man” (145). Coverdale calls into question the reality of his experience at Blithedale. One may argue that the whole drama had been imagined, but this seems to hold less weight than the argument that the Blithedale experiment *seemed* like a dream to Coverdale because of the utopian unattainability of it. Many things are unattainable for Coverdale—namely, his queer desire. Coverdale desires Zenobia and the mysterious Priscilla (in addition to Hollingsworth), and he finds that both of these women have come to town and inhabit the rooms of a boarding house across the street from his hotel room window (indicating their realization that they can always return to the society of the dominant regime). Coverdale watches the happenings in the apartment with great delight until Zenobia notices him. Zenobia lets “down a white linen curtain between the festoons of the damask ones” (154), thus thwarting Coverdale’s desire.

Voyeurism is an intriguing practice that Coverdale engaged in at Blithedale and continues to engage in when he gets back into the city. Coverdale happened upon a place uniquely his own while walking through the woods at Blithedale one day. Calling this place his “hermitage,” Coverdale notes that it was his “one exclusive possession” that “symbolized” his “individuality” (Hawthorne 110). This symbol of his individuality was formed when a “grape-vine...had caught hold of *three* or *four* neighboring trees, and *married* the whole clump with a perfectly *inextricable knot of polygamy*” (110, emphases mine). Grossberg emphasizes the same words and phrases within this scene and comes to many of the same conclusions regarding it as I do, noting that the hermitage “binds four characters: Coverdale, Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Priscilla” (12). The talk of “marriage” and “polygamy” also clearly points towards this extreme bond between the characters. Grossberg suggests that Coverdale’s assertion about the hermitage as representative of his individuality

indicates that Coverdale has “a desire for independence” (13). I suggest, however, that Coverdale truly does not desire this.

Grossberg bases his assertion about Coverdale’s “desire for independence” on Coverdale’s actions within the hermitage. One might assume that a place representative of one’s individuality would be one’s exclusive possession. Despite this, Coverdale makes it known that he wishes to reserve the hermitage as a place “to spend a honey-moon” (Hawthorne 110). More intriguingly, Coverdale tells the reader that Hollingsworth was the only “man alive with whom” he “could think of sharing all” (110). Basically, Coverdale says that the hermitage is his individuality, yet he wishes to bring others into it. Furthermore, Coverdale engages in very little—while occupying the hermitage—that would constitute individuality. Well, he does engage with his thoughts, of course, and in light of this, Harvey L. Gable, Jr. suggests that Coverdale’s hermitage represents “the healthy man reigning supreme, like a god, over his own psychic matter” (275). Coverdale’s thoughts are, indeed, “his own psychic matter,” but the subjects of this thoughts exist beyond his personal bounds.

While in his hermitage, Coverdale observes Hollingsworth in the field and he imagines what Hollingsworth might be saying to the oxen while plowing (Hawthorne 111). Coverdale also spies Priscilla in “the farm-house” (111), as well as Zenobia walking and talking with a stranger just below his hermitage (112). Thus, Coverdale spends the time enmeshed in his “individuality” voyeuristically observing those he desires. Perhaps this is the “individuality” Coverdale seeks. The individuality Grossberg assumes Coverdale desires is individuality in the traditional sense, but I would suggest that Coverdale’s unique individuality—and position in the world—stems from the fact that he desires three others, regardless of sex, and that he deems such desire worthwhile, good, and desirable to others.

Further, it seems as though Coverdale is alone in his queer desires. Hollingsworth's desire for Coverdale is certainly "queer" as well, simply because it affirms the homosexual position—the unfavored end of the binary—but his desire maintains the binary in the sense that he only affirms the validity of one end of it. It has already been made quite clear that Hollingsworth's desires are quite narrow indeed. Zenobia's and Priscilla's desires are both notably quite narrow as well, for they both desire Hollingsworth, and Hollingsworth alone. Zenobia accuses Hollingsworth of being "all self! ... Self, self, self!" (Hawthorne 197), thus seeming to recognize the detrimental effects of singular desire on one's self as well as those around one. Hollingsworth forsakes Zenobia in favor of Priscilla, who turns out to be the true inheritor of the fortune supposed to go to Zenobia. Zenobia realizes, as well, her singular affection, and she chooses to commit suicide. Priscilla maintains her singular affection and chooses to love and aid Hollingsworth.

It may prove somewhat needless to say, but the experiment at Blithedale ultimately fails. Various critics have posed a number of ideas as to why this occurs. Mueller, for example, suggests that "romance is still not part of the plan because ideally the utopian community proposes to base itself upon egalitarian relationships imitating the love siblings feel for one another" (26). In Mueller's understanding, romantic love amongst those playing as brothers and sisters proves inherently problematic and undesirable, leading to the demise of the venture. Additionally, Mueller goes even further to say that homosexual love proves even more problematic and leads to the downfall of Blithedale (68). As mentioned previously, Grossberg, suggests that individuation leads to the collapse of Blithedale (23). Critic Nicholas Canaday, Jr. would agree with Grossberg, and his assessment of the collapse of the Blithedale experiment harkens closest to my own interpretation: "The willingness of each [inhabitant of Blithedale] to pour his own life into a stereotyped mold and to see in

others only what is announced by a label militates against both brotherhood and the real function of a community” (34). Members of Blithedale, other than Coverdale, proclaim that they are one thing—and only that one thing. Thus, rampant individuation—even queer individuation, as in the case of Hollingsworth—in a socialist community, then, precipitates its downfall, and, more importantly, queer desire that maintains binary oppositions created by capitalism ultimately do so as well.

Queer theorists have focused on issues of the social construction of (homo)sexuality during the mid-nineteenth century, but they have often failed to (or only briefly) mention the fact that capitalism—and its values—were being constructed at about the same time as well; the rise of capitalism and the creation of homosexual identities go hand-in-hand. The notion of the “homosexual” has been queered by employing Michel Foucault’s notion of a reverse discourse that reappropriates the “homosexual” as a useful means to effect social change, “often in the same vocabulary” (101) as the dominant regime (i.e., “queer” or “fag”)—rather than accepting the notion of the homosexual as the aberrant individual constructed by capitalism (43). Notably, however, the employment of a “reverse discourse” simply only does what the phrase implies—it “reverses” the discourse, thus favoring the opposite end of the binary opposition (which is notably part of the binary that maintains society, nonetheless).

Perhaps, then, queer theorists need not queer sexual identity. Rather, they should queer the (capitalist) system that oppresses people and maintains such identities. Just as the notion of homosexuality preceded the idea of heterosexuality (Sullivan 2), the idea of communal/socialistic life necessarily preceded the notion of capitalist, free-market economies. One might argue, then, that an understanding of capitalism is predicated on an understanding of socialism; that is, capitalism is defined by what it is not—socialism.

Capitalism, Judith Butler might well argue, sets itself up (falsely) as the original state of affairs (the most useful, best mode) and this assertion must be constantly repeated and ingrained into the psyches of the American (Western) public in order maintain its perceived status as such (361). Capitalism, thus, like identities, is a fragile construct. This fragile construct continues to be maintained, however. Dana L. Cloud notes the importance of the notion of “family” in maintaining capitalism. Specifically, she tells us that “[a] great deal of the nineteenth-century familialist discourse constructs the middle-class family as a utopian sanctuary (kept by women) of affection removed from the clash of public life” (76). I find this notion incredibly intriguing—especially in relation to *Blithedale*. Notably, the familial utopia created in the novel serves only to maintain the system, for “a relentless focus on ‘the family’ prioritizes the narrow task of protecting or enriching one’s private life over a broader program of political struggle” (Cloud 73). Henceforward, I shall explore queer theory and capitalism in relation to *Blithedale*, in order to show that those occupying queer identities can, indeed, challenge capitalism, as long as they join collectively with other queers; here, by the word “queer,” I refer to the type of queerness embodied by Coverdale—the type of queerness that opens itself up to the broadest conceptualization, for this type (should) represent all those who are oppressed by the dominant regime—namely, the majority of the population.

People cannot simply enshroud themselves with queer identities and separate themselves from society. Critics of queer theory like Cloud and Max H. Kirsch argue that queer theorists and queer theories advocate such separatism, either via removal from society, or by creating individual selves so unique that they cannot be penetrated by society. Cloud and Kirsch argue that queer individuals need to seek out others who share their queerness, and these people need to work together to effect change, for the self “cannot be the center”

of working toward social change (Kirsch 79). In my opinion, Coverdale could have used his queer position to break down the system if he had been able to find others to join him in this mission. The other characters are like queer theorists: They play with identity and queer notions of it (hence their performativity, masquerades, and occasional same-sex desire), but they do not queer the system that oppresses them. The other characters, as Cloud would say, “are pre-occupied with their own self invention” (84). Coverdale might be deemed as consistently inventing himself as well, but the intent of such self-invention deserves consideration, for Coverdale chooses to construct a multiplicitous self that hearkens unto communal respect, love, and mutual beneficence, rather than to self-serving individuality.

Interestingly, Coverdale thinks throughout the novel that “practicing free love would make the revolution” (Cloud 86), and he works toward this practice. Coverdale does not realize, however, that this practice needs to be coupled with action against the system, for as Kirsch notes, “consciousness does not act on its own” (9). Ideas and positionalities need to be put into practice in order to effect change. At the end of the novel, Coverdale chooses to live the life of a so-called “frosty bachelor” (Hawthorne 43), prompting Mueller to suggest that “[i]n *The Blithedale Romance* homoeroticism is finally abandoned in favor of ‘frosty bachelorhood’” (71). Coverdale does, indeed, abandon *singular* homoeroticism, in favor of more encompassing erotic attachments, but I argue here that the frostiness that Coverdale speaks to more closely relates to his inaction—his inaction in fulfilling his very queer (non-binary) desires.

And Coverdale maintains these desires until the bitter end. After the collapse of Blithedale, the inhabitants disband, all going their disparate ways. Coverdale later seeks out Hollingsworth in order to ascertain his progress in reforming criminals. Happening upon Hollingsworth and Priscilla during a walk near their cottage, Coverdale realizes that

Hollingsworth seeks only to reform the heart of “a single murderer” (Hawthorne 215)—himself. Understanding Hollingsworth’s guilt about having pursued such a singularity of purpose, Coverdale forgives Hollingsworth and parts from the couple. Reminiscing upon this event, Coverdale feels compelled to relate to the reader “one foolish little secret” (218). “I—I myself—was in love—*with*—Priscilla!” (218, emphasis mine), Coverdale tells his readers, suggesting this revelation makes him blush. Kenneth Kupsch argues that “this single hitherto undisclosed fact” is an important point that was left out of the narrative and that deserves consideration when rereading, for he suggests that Coverdale truly loves Priscilla—and Priscilla alone (1). Grossberg argues a similar point, noting that Coverdale’s love for Priscilla had not been previously articulated (23). I argue, however, that Coverdale’s revelation simply maintains his unindividuated queer position. His statement suggests both that he loves Priscilla and that he is in love *with* her, meaning he shares the same love that Priscilla does—love with Hollingsworth. Although Zenobia is dead, Coverdale continues to wish for multiplicitous love and desire with the two remaining others.

Miles Coverdale refuses throughout *The Blithedale Romance* to allow himself to play into the rampant individuation he sees others pursue. Coverdale stands out from the others because he chooses to live his life vicariously through others and because he seeks to incorporate the three other main characters into his being. I have referred to Coverdale as “queer” for this very reason. Although he maintains this queer position throughout the novel, Coverdale cannot find others who share his queerness. All he can find at Blithedale are discrete, self-defined, and singular individuals who falsely claim to want to bind together in a socialist community. Such false claims serve only to separate these people from the society that oppresses them—the society they falsely claim to repudiate. The separation allows for further individuation and acceptance of—rather than collective action against—

the *status quo*. Coverdale fails to engage in collective action with others occupying a similar position, for none exist—and he fails to engage in any action altogether. Coverdale wishes throughout the novel to bind himself up with those individuated others in hopes that they will realize the value of his queer identity to bring them all together—and also in hopes that they will realize that their individualities simply serve as a means to mask themselves from the regime that oppresses them. Identity constructions should not tend toward individuation, but, rather, toward incorporation of myriad identities, for this would constitute a truly queer identity—a queer identity that lends itself effectively towards collective action. Queer identities are plural—not singular—and they stem from oppression. Communities consisting of “crooked sticks” are bound to fail, for binding people “of marked individuality” together serves only to build tension and pit them against each other, leading to “agitation...more *between* groups of minorities than *against* objects of oppression” (Kirsch 123, emphases in original); thus, the “faggot”—the community—explodes and disintegrates and its members fail to work collectively towards the eradication of the system that maintains binaries and seeks to coercively oppress people into mindless submission.

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**CHAPTER 6**


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 From Coverdale to Covered Dick: An Interlude
 

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So, there you have it. You have just found out that Miles Coverdale’s wishes for a queer existence do not come to fruition during his time at utopian Blithedale, but at least he gave that utopian social experiment a shot, right? Blithedale is indeed best described as a social experiment and it is important to note that such experiments were the work of reality—not fiction—at the time when Hawthorne composed *The Blithedale Romance*. Hawthorne himself even participated in such a social experiment when he became a member of the (in)famous Brook Farm community. In a way, Blithedale might represent a fictionalized version of the real Brook Farm. If we as readers regard Blithedale as such, we can agree that Hawthorne sets up a fictional social text—that had wide appeal at his time—in order to see how various characters and complications might play out.

It is this notion of “social text” that serves as the most important link between the *Blithedale* paper you have just read and the circumcision paper you will encounter next. The following paper examines the social text of circumcision in order to tease and tug out the ways in which its practice coercively constructed as a social norm. Circumcision, as text, proves wildly different from *Blithedale* as text, but they are both texts nonetheless and they can both be critically examined and critiqued in many of the same ways, as you saw in the previous paper, and as you will see in the paper that follows.

The title of my paper “Cutting Cock: Routine Neonatal Male Circumcision and the (Medico-)Social Construction of Good and Bad Dick” pays homage to the essential queer work of Gayle Rubin. Her piece, entitled “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” was first published in 1984 and sets forth her radical understanding of sex and the ways in which it is shaped by society. I draw extensively from her work because

her content significantly aligns with my ideas regarding the practice of circumcision, even though she does not mention the practice in her piece at all. Basically, Rubin sets forth a rough-and-tumble explication of the ways in which sex has become increasingly imbued with taboo and stigma over time. If I were to summarize her points here and write them down, I would find that what Rubin says about sex could just as easily be said about circumcision—or a circumcision-related term.

We can engage in a little play here now with the proposition I have just laid forth. Let's take Rubin's assertion, for example, that sexuality acts as a scapegoat for social ills. Quite effortlessly, I can replace the word "sexuality" with the word "foreskin" (imbued with all of its sexual properties) and set forth the following argument: "Foreskin acts as a scapegoat for social ills." I make this very argument in the following paper, for the foreskin gets blamed for the purported social ill of masturbation. Let's try another one. Rubin writes that society constructs notions of both good and bad sex. Replacing the word "sex" with the word "dick" results in the notion that society constructs notions of good and bad dick—namely where "good dick" is the circumcised version. I make this argument in my paper, and I use the good dick/bad dick motif in its title. One last one, just for fun—and to show how deeply Rubin's work in her article has informed the piece that follows. Summarizing Rubin's article here, I think I can assert her overarching theme quite simply: Sex is political. Here, we can take our choice of terms to replace the word "sex" in my brief summary statement; you could choose either "foreskin," "dick," or "circumcision" and any of these terms would work rather nicely.

I make the argument that the foreskin has been—and continues to be—wrangled around to further political agendas—those agendas of doctors, institutions, and the medical community, or basically anybody who stands to profit by exploiting the foreskin. Rubin's

ideas critically inform the piece that follows, and I take note of this by paying homage to her and her work in the title I have given to the piece you are about to read. I created this title purposefully to shout out to readers *explicitly* the critical queer agenda I had in mind.

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**CHAPTER 7**


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Cutting Cock:  
 Routine Neonatal Male Circumcision and  
 The (Medico-)Social Construction of Good and Bad Dick

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By Josiah P. Peeples IV

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Routine neonatal male circumcision is a practice that is considered normal in the United States. Various rationales have been offered throughout the course of American history regarding why the practice occurs so frequently in the United States when it rarely occurs elsewhere in the world. The procedure has been practiced as a cure-all for physical and mental diseases, as a means to prevent masturbation, as a hygienic measure, and as a prophylactic against cancers and sexually transmitted infections. Medical evidence, however, fails to conclusively support any of the purported prophylactic benefits, yet circumcision continues to be routinely practiced in the United States—with little or no questioning of its validity. In the tradition of queer re-readings of history that continue to be highly revered within queer studies (and practiced by theorists such as George Chauncey and David M. Halperin), this paper seeks to question the structures that perpetuate the senseless and unnecessary practice of circumcision. Specifically, this paper will consider circumcision throughout history in order to illustrate its tradition of coercive implementation, its glorification in the Victorian era, as well as its continued practice, despite the fact that most other countries gave up routine practice in the mid-twentieth century. Routine, male infant circumcision continues to exist in the United States today as a means to perpetuate and maintain an irrational social norm.

Any discussion of the role of circumcision as a form of normative or social control should certainly at least touch upon its earliest manifestations. It is important to understand,

as Adam Henerey succinctly puts it, that “[t]he practice of circumcising is perpetuated on a generalized fear of an intangible peril, which has taken many forms throughout the course of history” (265). In this sense, circumcision seemingly has always existed as a form of social control. In his history of the practice of circumcision, *Circumcision: A History of the World’s Most Controversial Surgery*, David L. Gollaher notes that the first representation of circumcision dates to the year 2400 B.C.E and was found by anthropologists in an Egyptian tomb (1). The etchings in this tomb clearly show knives being taken to the genitals of two men (2). The circumcision depicted in this etching most likely relates to the practice of circumcision as a ritual—often related to puberty or some other rite of passage; such ritual circumcisions were conducted by a variety of tribes throughout the world (9).

The circumcision practices of native tribes throughout the world vary widely and will receive no discussion at present, for the practices of Jewish and Islamic traditions relate most pertinently to the topic at hand. As is commonly understood, the Jewish tradition of circumcision serves as the means by which the Jewish people established a covenant with God, thus proving their loyalty. Islamic peoples took up the tradition for similar reasons as well. Notably, Henerey suggests that the practice of circumcision in these two religions relates to the “intangible peril” of Hell (265). Basically, the elders of these faiths promoted and practiced circumcision as a means to attain happiness in the afterlife. In this sense, the practice can be viewed as a means to control subjects, for the fear of Hell caused men to get circumcised. Shaye J. D. Cohen, on the other hand, suggests a different way in which circumcision acts as a means of social control. Specifically, Cohen discusses the ideas of the philosophers Maimonides and Philo who both suggest that circumcision was required in order to reduce the lustiness of Jewish men (145). Considered in this sense, then, circumcision served both as a means to avoid Hell and a means to reduce sexual

promiscuity—another practice that would likely land one in Hell, according to religious doctrine.

Given the suggestion that circumcision was used as a means to reduce sexual lust, it seems relevant to consider how other cultures viewed the practices when they encountered the circumcised Jew. Henerey, for example, cites 1 Sam 18:25 of the *Bible*, which notes that the foreskin was taken from the Jews as a means to emasculate them (266-67). For this reason, people of Jewish descent were often quite shunned and ostracized as deviant by those of other cultures. The Romans, for instance, maintained the lower classes—people of Jewish origin—by making them wear robes at all times, for the bared glans (head) of the penis was deemed by Romans as a sign of erection and was, thus, vulgar and obscene (267). For the Romans, the mark of circumcision served as a means to dominate a group of people and to maintain notions of their deviance.

The interaction between the circumcised Jews and the noncircumcised peoples elsewhere in the world did not cause circumcision to “catch on,” *per se*, as a worthy practice. In fact, as indicated above, the circumcised man was often deemed sexually inferior and emasculated in comparison to other—uncircumcised—men, according to Robert Darby in his book *A Surgical Temptation: The Demonization of the Foreskin and the Rise of Circumcision in Britain* (32). The circumcised man was deemed thus due to the understanding of the foreskin as integral to full sexual function. Even Aristotle, Darby notes, described the importance of the foreskin during sexual intercourse, noting that the gliding action of it allows for easy, comfortable penetration while providing a stimulating gliding action far superior to mere friction (24). For this reason, Darby notes that texts revering the foreskin as essential to sexual function circulated widely during much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe (24). Also circulating were a large number of cautionary tales that warned of the

potential of getting circumcised by a rogue Jew (35). Non-Jewish men were wholly unwilling to lose their foreskins and they perpetuated fear of the circumcised penis in order to maintain seeming superiority. Interestingly, this fear of circumcision failed to make its way into the nineteenth century.

As Enlightenment era ideas began to infuse Western societies, the notions of science, psychology, and medicine became increasingly important as sources of knowledge and understanding. Darby refers to this growing discourse when he notes that “[t]he demonization of the foreskin as a source of moral and physical decay was the critical factor in the emergence of circumcision and its acceptance as a valid medical intervention” (*Surgical* 4). In light of growing medical and scientific knowledge, circumcision appealed to various thinkers and practitioners as a means to a variety of ends. The ever-changing explanations about circumcision as related in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* from the late eighteenth through the early twentieth century offer a telling indication of the increasing medicalization—or perhaps scientification—of Western society, for the explanations ranged from describing the practice of circumcision as a religious sacrament in the late eighteenth century to describing the practice as a hygienic medical necessity in the early twentieth century (5). As will soon be discussed, it was quite evident, as Jay Brodbar-Nemzer, Peter Conrad, and Shelly Tenenbaum write, that circumcision “was considered a panacea for sexual problems including venereal disease and masturbation” throughout the nineteenth century (275). Furthermore, as Darby makes explicitly clear, circumcision “was surgery intended to modify behavior” (*Surgical* 15). The modifications to behavior intended by circumcision have taken a variety of forms over the course of history, but the prevention of semen loss effectively marks the starting point of the medicalization of circumcision.

Western medical doctors of the mid-nineteenth century found the loss of semen quite distressing. Spermatorrhea, as Darby explains in his article “Pathologizing Male Sexuality: Lallemand, Spermatorrhea, and the Rise of Circumcision,” is the medical name given to any loss of semen (284-85). Interestingly, under this blanket term fell a variety of other conditions such as gonorrhoea and any other discharge from the penis (284-85). During this time period, it was widely believed “that it was circulation of semen within the body that maintained masculine characteristics” (287). Drawing on this notion, a doctor by the name of Claude-Francois Lallemand studied semen loss between the years 1836 and 1842 and began to understand this loss as a disease, which he referred to as spermatorrhea and to which he proposed a variety of potential causes and potential cures (287). Friction caused by the rubbing of the foreskin against the head of the penis as well as internal irritations of the bladder and urinary tract were proposed as potential causes of spermatorrhea (287-88). As Darby describes, among the cures were cauterization of the urinary tract using probes and caustic chemicals, as well as “infibulation” (the tying closed of the genital organs), and circumcision (“Masturbation” 742). Quite notably, the loss of semen most often resulted from masturbatory practices, so it makes sense that the medical community began to search for ways to decrease or eliminate the practice of masturbation.

With the increasing industrialization of the mid-nineteenth century in the United States, it was deemed highly important for young men to be highly virile and productive. In order to maintain such marked virility and productivity, Darby notes that young men could not afford “the loss of a precious animating secretion like semen which debilitated the system” (“Masturbation” 743). Discussing the socially constructed nature of sexuality during the Victorian period, theorist Michel Foucault makes a similar argument: “At a time when labor capacity was being systematically exploited, how could this capacity be allowed to

dissipate itself in pleasurable pursuits, except in those—reduced to a minimum—that enabled it to reproduce itself?” (6). Young men, thus, needed to spend their time producing and reproducing—not wasting their seed through masturbatory endeavors. For this reason, the dominant elements of the emerging capitalist society inculcated the values that masturbation was an unnecessary vice and that “self-control and conservation of the body’s energies were vital, and masturbation was inevitably seen as a waste of resources and a threat to success” (Darby, “Masturbation” 744). Masturbation—and the resultant loss of semen—debilitated a male’s system and made him less productive. Moreover, as Gollaher relates, “[s]ince the Enlightenment, doctors in Western Europe and America had identified masturbation as a cause of illnesses” (“Ritual” 20). Many doctors linked the debilitating effects of masturbation and resultant spermatorrhea to mental illness (21).

Viewing mental illness as a manifestation of the debilitating effects of masturbation, many began to consider the effects of orgasm as the true origin of problems, rather than the loss of semen. This change in thought represents the increasing acceptance of reflex neurosis theories (Gollaher, “Ritual” 8). Basically, these theories posit the human body as a machine, in essence. Should any part of the workings of this machine become broken, dirty, or blocked, the machine fails to function properly. So, theories of spermatorrhea as the source of problems began to be disfavored around the year 1870 (Darby, “Pathologizing” 309). Instead, doctors posited beliefs that intense orgasms profoundly affected the nervous system, thus blocking the mechanisms of the body and causing harm. In light of this argument, Darby notes that “the emerging paradigm held that the greater the enjoyment and the more intense or prolonged the final orgasm, the greater the damage to the brain and nervous system” (314). Further, “[m]easures to reduce sensation and make orgasm briefer and less intense,” doctors believed, “must thus be beneficial to health, and the focus of

therapy thus shifted from minimizing emissions to reducing the nervous strain experienced in their procurement” (314). Thus, the prevailing notions of seminal emissions as the cause of disease and debilitation gave way to the notion that the intensity of orgasm was the true culprit of disease. Because of this, doctors began to seek out ways in which to reduce the likelihood of masturbation—and, thus, the resultant nervous-system-debilitating orgasm—and the doctors’ gazes focused on the foreskin.

One must understand the climate of science at the time when doctors shifted their focus to the foreskin. Although doctors and scientists thought they were basing their recommendations on empirically derived data, Darby writes that links between the foreskin and masturbation were not conducted scientifically (*Surgical* 206). That is, the doctors’ assessments of the foreskin as hazardous were based on the mere fact that the foreskin is on the penis and that the penis, in turn, gets masturbated. Bearing this in mind, there were a number of reasons why the foreskin was deemed the source of masturbatory inclinations. Among these reasons, doctors often posited theories of foreskin irritation, foreskin tightness, and foreskin dirtiness.

The theory that foreskin irritation causes masturbatory impulses and disease stems primarily from the work of orthopedic doctor Lewis Sayre (Henerey 269). Sayre was a well-known and respected physician in New York whose advice was sought regarding the case of a young boy with extremely bowed legs (Gollaher, “Ritual” 5). Sayre thoroughly examined the boy and became aware of the boy’s extremely red and inflamed penis (6). Sayre believed that the irritation of the foreskin of the penis was the source of the boy’s orthopedic problem; Sayre circumcised the boy and the boy’s legs miraculously returned to normal function (6). Sayre strongly believed that penile irritation served as a “block” within the mechanics of the body, thus causing a variety of ailments (Henerey 269). Once again, one

must consider the nature of science during this time period. “At the time, the support for circumcision in the medical arena was considered empirically sound even though there was no causal link established between the symptoms and the procedure” (270), according to Henerey. Sayre indeed believed that he had found a causal link, illustrating the success of circumcision at curing penile irritation and resultant diseases.

The irritation and redness Sayre noted was described by others as “tightness.” Inflammation due to the tight foreskin restricting the penis, many doctors believed, caused illness and disease. Even foreskins that were not inflamed or irritated were deemed problematic if they were tight, suggesting that the penis was simply too restricted and more likely to disrupt the body. Interestingly, Darby notes that prior to the mid-1800s, problems with foreskin retraction were considered normal and non-problematic, for the foreskin often takes several years to fully separate from the head of the penis (*Surgical* 121). Also, masturbatory and simple, gentle manipulations of the foreskin by a child while developing were known to help the foreskin retract (305). Although this was known and accepted prior to the mid-nineteenth century, the puritanism of the Victorian time period dreaded masturbation and stimulation of the penis. In light of this, doctors began to relate irritation and tightness to issues of hygiene, positing the notion that the foreskin was inherently dirty.

The relation of the foreskin to dirt, and thus disease, hearkens back to Henerey’s notion of the “intangible peril” (265). Basically, removal of the foreskin has been done as a means to avoid the intangible perils of hell, of mental illness (or debilitation), and, now, of dirt and disease. The basis for the notion of the foreskin as dirty and a harbor for disease stems from findings by Sayre and others which associated problematic irritation and tightness of the foreskin with disease. Further than this, however, doctors viewed the natural sebaceous secretion—called smegma—as dirt that served no other purpose than to cause

disease (Gollaher, “Ritual” 13). Interestingly, as Gollaher points out, the word “smegma” originates from a Greek word meaning “to cleanse” or “soap” (13). Doctors essentially associated the natural, cleansing secretions of the penis with dirt.

Although the circumcised Jews had once—not so very long ago—been deemed as “abnormal” by cultures at large, Darby notes that many doctors looked to the Jewish population for insights—for evidence to support their notions that uncircumcised penises were not hygienic (*Surgical* 137). Basically, doctors noted that Jewish, circumcised penises were “cleaner” and, thus, did not cause irritation and the urge to masturbate. The incidence of masturbation among Jewish boys, Darby says, was regarded as comparatively low—purportedly due to the lack of foreskin (6). Importantly, as well, the stature of physicians like Sayre and others who embraced the practice of circumcision as a preventative measure made the practice seem more valid and useful (Gollaher, “Ritual” 13-17). Additionally, the notion of circumcision as a means to attain—and maintain—cleanliness and hygiene appealed to the conservative nature of Victorian-era people—and especially the upper-class (11).

Conservative, indeed, and rife with class differentiation certainly both describe the Victorian time period in both the United States and Britain. As evidenced in movies depicting time periods prior to this, the practice of washing took place very infrequently. Cleanliness, in the Victorian era, took hold and people bathed much more frequently (Gollaher, “Ritual” 11). Hygiene during this time period consisted of more than just bathing, however. As both Gollaher and Kirsten Bell note, the notion of cleanliness related not only to the physical aspects of human life, but to the moral aspects as well (“Ritual” 11; 131). Bell states very succinctly that “the hygiene of the Victorian imagination conflated physical and moral sanitation much more overtly than the contemporary meaning of the word would suggest” (131). Not only would one need to have a clean body, one would also have to have

a clean mind—a conservatively moral mind that refused to engage in unclean practices such as masturbation.

Notably, simply washing the penis—engaging in good genital hygiene—was not good enough for the Victorians. With people so concerned about keeping everything clean, this notion might seem senseless. Darby, however, tells us directly that the Victorians commonly considered any genital touching, rubbing, and tickling as an unclean or masturbatory act (“Pathologizing” 296-97). In light of this, the process of pulling back the foreskin to cleanse the area too closely resembled masturbation. Furthermore, any rubbing during the cleansing process might be observed to cause an erection—a possibility that generally proved too distressing to the conservative Victorians. For this reason, Victorians sought out the removal of the foreskin, so as to keep the genitals clean and to minimize any stimulating contact.

However, the removal of the foreskin, of course, was not a procedure that was readily available for the masses. In fact, only members of the more elite upper-class were able to have the procedure done. Henerey’s analysis indicates that “circumcision became a clear sign of a hospital birth that was attended by a physician” (270). Along with a hospital birth and a physician, of course, came fees—fees so high that only members of the rich, upper-classes could afford to pay them, thus making the children of members of the elite much more likely to be circumcised. According to Gollaher, members of the upper-classes took great pride in their ability to have their sons circumcised, for the procedure served to mark their class status (“Ritual” 12). Furthermore, “[d]uring the later Victorian period, an age obsessed with racial and social hierarchies, there was an allure to ranking civilizations, peoples, and social groups from clean to dirty” (12). Thus, the upper-class used circumcision as a means to indicate their upper-class status and cleanliness; at the same time, the lack of

circumcision among the various other racial groups, immigrants, and lower-classes was used as a means to indicate and justify their inherent dirtiness and undesirability.

It seems sensible that members of the “lower” classes would not wish to feel inferior to others, and they certainly would not wish to seem deprived or dirty. Commonsense, then, indicates that these people would seek conformity if at all possible. Viewed in this sense, circumcision acted as a form of control; the practice imbued upon people a status that people desired—a status people were willing to attain by conforming. Henerey suggests that the practice of circumcision was of no “particular use to the powerful of society” (266). Despite this, Henerey contradicts himself when he notes that the powerful “profit greatly not from circumcision itself but from the system of beliefs that support circumcision” (266). Basically, circumcision served as a means to impart the values of the upper-class upon everyone. It acted as a form of social control because the values associated with the practice insisted upon conformity.

Sarah E. Waldeck, in her article “Using Male Circumcision to Understand Social Norms as Multipliers,” discusses the notion of conformity in terms of social esteem. As noted previously, the members of the upper-class used circumcision as a means to define their status—as well as their cleanliness and moral superiority. Members of the lower-classes, Waldeck says, looked to the upper-classes and wished to become more like them (472-73). Circumcision, the practice that seemingly served to indicate members of the upper-crust, then, appealed to members of the lower-classes as a means for them to move up the social hierarchy (473). Thus, as Waldeck discusses it, members of the upper-class esteemed circumcision (472). Those who did not circumcise lost social esteem, but social esteem could be attained—or regained—via the decision to circumcise. Not only was the practice of

circumcision highly esteemed during this time, the doctors who performed the procedure were esteemed as well.

As noted before, doctors often practiced medicine without utilization of the disconfirmatory techniques common to modern science. For this and other reasons, the medical establishment of the Victorian period did not have as much prestige as it does now. Doctors, of course, wished to increase their status, and they found that promoting cleanliness and circumcision helped to do so, for promoting the practice made them appear as people who supported Victorian morals. Promoting the practice also allowed doctors to make significant money via fees, thus increasing their social status through wealth. As Darby puts it, doctors increasingly became “professionals who delivered a service in return for a fee” (*Surgical* 8). Understanding that they could indeed charge fees for circumcision and that people would pay these fees for the service, doctors began to employ the discourse of rising germ theory to justify the necessity of circumcision (Gollaher, “Ritual” 12-13). Basically, germ theory allowed doctors to say either that the foreskin trapped germs, making it dirty, or that the natural penile secretion, smegma, was itself germ-ridden. Germ theory played into Victorian fears of dirtiness, so doctors were able to exert a form of control in this sense.

Additionally, germ theory provided the rationale for doctors to say that they—and only they—must intervene in the affairs of the foreskin, for the skin posed potentially great medical risks. Darby notes that doctors increasingly became regulators of the social norm, for they promoted circumcision as a means to maintain hygiene and prevent masturbation: “US doctors in the late nineteenth century successfully extended their ambit from the cure of disease to the enforcement of puritanical standards of sexual morality, and exerted a powerful influence on public law” (“Masturbation” 741). Although doctors were gaining powerful positions in late Victorian society, they still had trouble convincing adult males to

undergo circumcision (Darby, *Surgical* 9). In light of this, according to Darby, doctors asserted the urgent need for all infants to get circumcised as a means to avoid the potential ills of the foreskin and of germs (9). Furthermore, doctors continued to maintain their position that the procedure should only be done by doctors (Gollaher, “Ritual” 16). In order to back up their claims, doctors cited evidence of diseases such as herpes and syphilis that were occasionally given to babies by Jewish ritual circumcisers (*mobels*) as a result of unsanitary conditions (16; for a recent case of this phenomenon, see Jeffrey Rosen’s article “Is Ritual Circumcision Religious Expression?”). Circumcision, thus, was becoming gradually medicalized as a necessity.

The medicalization (and popularity) of circumcision increased through and after the turn of the twentieth century. The procedure became so commonplace and normal, Gollaher notes, that “[a]round the turn of the century, American medical textbooks and journals that used illustrations began to adopt the convention of depicting the normal penis as circumcised—a convention subsequently adopted by publishers of medical books for lay readers” (“Ritual” 25). Basically, the circumcised penis was depicted as the normal penis. Increasing exposure to images of the circumcised penis as normal commonsensically serves to make people internalize this image as the norm. Accordingly, the circumcision rate increased dramatically in the early twentieth century (17-18). This increase, however, was not due entirely to the norms imbued by the illustrations.

Increasing medical technology helped to substantially increase the circumcision rates during this time period as well. Gollaher’s investigations show that doctors spent significant amounts of time and money developing techniques and tools to make the circumcision procedure easier (“Ritual” 17-22). Some designed special scissors, while others designed clamps and restraint devices. This increasing technology made the procedure easier to

perform. Doctors, in turn, promoted the procedure and more people elected to have it done to their sons (18). The marketing of the new tools and techniques helped provide doctors all over the United States and the Western world with the means to perform and promote the procedure. Doctors, notably, made significant monetary gains from the devices they marketed. These tools also allowed doctors the opportunity to “perfect” their techniques and provide attractive results—a value that increasingly came into vogue during the roaring 1920s (22).

Although attractive results were often emphasized by doctors, doctors continued to medicalize circumcision by utilizing the hostilities of the world wars to justify and further the practice. Researchers agree that circumcision was promoted by doctors during each of the world wars as a means to prevent venereal diseases (Darby, *Surgical* 5; Gollaher, “Ritual” 15). Doctors at this time also suggested that the conditions of war were not conducive to proper hygiene and that the foreskin, thus, would pose a problem (Gollaher, *Circumcision* 118). Following World War II, however, Britain implemented a national health insurance plan in 1945 that made officials reconsider the importance of circumcision (114). Officials agreed that evidence supporting circumcision was spurious and that the money used for the procedure could best be used to fund other medical services; circumcision was dropped as a valid medical procedure and received no coverage under Britain’s plan (114-16). The work of doctor Douglas Gairdner influenced this decision, for Gairdner stated that the foreskin indeed had a purpose and that he was amazed about how willing people were to have it cut off (114). Accordingly, circumcision rates in Britain decreased dramatically to less than 0.5% by the end of the 1960s, according to Gollaher (153). Despite this trend in Britain (and Canada, as well), the United States continued to practice the procedure as a routine measure.

The conservatism of the 1950s served to maintain circumcision as the norm, for common perceptions of the time period indicate the most people were willing to uphold and maintain social norms. The sexual revolution of the 1960s, however, began to focus attention on the issue of circumcision and rights to sexual integrity. Not until the 1970s, however, was any true action taken regarding the practice. In 1971, the Fetus and Newborn Committee of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) declared that routine neonatal circumcision had no compelling or legitimate medical benefits or basis (Brodbar-Nemzer, et. al. 275). At this time, circumcision rates hovered between 70 and 80 percent (Waldeck, "Using" 455). Prior to this recommendation, Waldeck explains, many laypeople (about 10 percent) thought that circumcision was required by law, much like the law required the instillation of silver nitrate drops at birth (to prevent bacteria growth), illustrating the fact that people were not well-informed regarding this issue (455). Even after the AAP statement, Henerey notes that circumcision practices and rates changed very little (271). Waldeck attributes this fact to confirmatory biases, and she notes that people tend to pay attention to evidence that supports their preconceived beliefs while negating the importance of ideas that challenge them ("Using" 465). Circumcision was the norm and people validated it as such; thus, people, for the most part, ignored the AAP's recommendation, since it did not validate their embrace of the social norm.

Citing little heed to the previous recommendation, the AAP reaffirmed their opposition to practice of circumcision four years later ("Report" 610-611). Once again, Henerey notes that this statement had minimal effects on circumcision rates (271). Despite statements denouncing the importance of circumcision, the practice continued, and researchers agree that the general public's (as well as the medical community's) lack of education about the foreskin and the practice of circumcision helped to maintain the practice

as the social norm (Darby, *Surgical* 5; Brodbar-Nemzer, et. al. 275). Darby suggests that Americans in general tend not to think much about things that are considered normal, for he notes that more was known by anthropologists about the circumcision practices of native tribes (and the reasons for them) than was known about the circumcision practices and rationales in the United States (5). In order to avoid having one's child circumcised in the United States, Brodbar-Nemzer and colleagues note that parents had to be educated and informed about circumcision, for "[u]ntil recently it was standard medical practice in American hospitals and was routinely performed unless parents made a specific request that it *not* be done" (275, my emphasis). Uninformed American citizens and doctors maintained the practice of circumcision as the norm.

The public and scientific communities suffered a lack of information about circumcision for a number of reasons. Henerey notes that very little interdisciplinary research has been done regarding the practice of circumcision; that is, anthropological studies, medical studies, social studies, and others fail to intermix with and inform each other, leading to limited knowledge and understanding for all parties involved (266). Gollaher astutely observes that modern (medical) science validates claims that certain medical procedures or medications are useful by empirically testing them (*Circumcision* 126). In light of this, Gollaher notes that no scientific studies have isolated (or attempted to isolate) circumcision status as a causal factor for any number of the things for which the health profession claims the practice is beneficial (126).

Scientific studies, although not well known by the society at large, have been done regarding the role of the foreskin. Gollaher would agree with my earlier discussion about the value of the foreskin prior to the nineteenth century, for "[t]he trivialization of the prepuce is of fairly recent vintage" (*Circumcision* 109). People like Gairdner, mentioned earlier,

expressed amazement that people were willing to have their children's foreskins cut off without any understanding of its function (114). J. Steven Svoboda classifies the function of the foreskin "into three main categories: protective, immunological, and erogenous" (53). Joseph Zoske notes that the foreskin exists to make the penis an internal organ. Thus, the foreskin keeps the head of the penis moist and lubricated, and it also protects it from external harm and chafing. The foreskin also gradually acquires the ability to glide back and forth over the head of the penis, thus stimulating it during sexual activities. Notably, the lack of movement of the foreskin during early stages of childhood, as noted before, was often seen as a problem that required the removal of the foreskin, but Zoske notes that time often cures this problem and that the foreskin is essential to full sexual stimulation. Researchers studying the foreskin in Canada, Gollaher notes, "found that the glans, usually assumed to be the most sensitive part, is comparatively less sensitive to light touch, heat, cold, and even to pinprick" than the foreskin (*Circumcision* 121). The foreskin plays important protective and sexual roles. Despite this, these roles have often been (and continue to be) negated as the medical profession sought (and continues to seek) medical (disease-prevention) rationales for routine circumcision.

Doctors commonly recommended circumcision on the basis that it prevents urinary tract infections (UTIs) in infants. Waldeck notes that studies do, indeed, show a higher incidence of UTIs among uncircumcised infants in general ("Using" 482). Despite this, however, the incidence rates range from 1.4%, as related by Zoske, to 2.15%—the AAP's estimate, as reported by Waldeck ("Using" 482). These rates indicate that UTIs, in general, do not pose that great of a risk to infants. Furthermore, UTIs can easily be cured with mild antibiotics. Notably, the studies that found the incidence rates could not isolate circumcision status as the sole causal factor for UTIs. Any number of variables could confound the data.

For example, premature infants are less likely to get circumcised at birth (due to their fragile state) and they are more prone to disease; in cases such as this, the presence of the foreskin may have significantly less explanatory power regarding the acquisition of a UTI than does the child's premature status. The studies examined in my search have not tackled this potential intervening variable. Furthermore, as Svoboda notes, the foreskin serves to protect the penis from external harm, and in this sense, the foreskin serves as a barrier to protect the urethra from irritation and bacteria commonly associated with a diaper environment (53).

Circumcision has often been widely touted as a means to protect against cancers of various types. First, circumcision has been shown to reduce a man's risk of getting penile cancer. Despite this, however, even if a man is not circumcised, the risk of getting penile cancer is very low. Zoske reports that about 1 case of every 50,000 cases of cancer is penile, while Waldeck reports, however, half that number of cases (1 case of every 100,000 cases of cancer) is penile ("Using" 482). Needless to say, the risk of a person getting penile cancer is incredibly low. Second, doctors have suggested that the female partners of uncircumcised men are more likely to get cervical cancer, and some studies have shown this (486). Despite this, the studies often have large methodological problems; for instance, women may often inaccurately self-report the circumcision status of their partners, thus thoroughly confounding the data (486-87). Waldeck debunks the validity of using circumcision to avoid cervical cancer by noting that this notion is founded on the basis of protecting another from harm, and cites legal codes that suggest that in order to mandate a protective measure (in this case, circumcision), a close relationship must be pre-established with the person who will directly benefit from the protective measure, which, in this case, is some future and unknown female sexual partner—assuming, of course, the male chooses to have

(unprotected) sex with women (488-89). In light of this, circumcising an infant as a means to protect against cancers seems grossly unfounded.

Next, circumcision has been proposed as a measure to prevent the acquisition and spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Studies that have linked increased rates of STIs among uncircumcised men have often suggested that the foreskin harbors and facilitates the transmission of disease (Waldeck, “Using” 485-86). Intriguingly, this hypothesis seems to be a new “spin” on the widely posited belief, as related by Paula A Treichler, that women—and specifically prostitutes—serve as harbors for the transmission of disease (115). Despite the fact that the “foreskin as harbor for disease” notion runs rampant, it is important to note that correlations between circumcision status and incidence of STIs have wavered—and continue to waver—likely because the variable of circumcision status is incredibly hard to isolate. Notably, one correlation that tends not to waver is the fact, according to Waldeck, that the United States has the highest circumcision rate and the highest STI rate (“Using” 485). Doctors have often claimed, of late, by citing studies in Africa, that circumcision helps to prevent the most menacing of STIs—HIV—but it is interesting, however, that the United States has both the largest number of HIV-infected people and the highest circumcision rate (485). A recent randomized study in the United States even found no relationship between circumcision status and HIV infection rates (485-86). In light of this, Waldeck makes it entirely clear that behavior is the most important determinant of whether or not a person will get STIs or HIV. In their opinion, Francis R. Batzer and Joshua M. Hurwitz suggest, however, that behavior is too hard to change, and they endorse circumcision on these grounds (W26).

Other commentators have considered the information related above about the purported benefits of circumcision and have made other recommendations regarding the

practice. Michael Benatar and David Benatar, for example, suggest that the circumcision decision should be left up to the discretion of parents (45). Benatar and Benatar assume, however, that parents will be educated enough about the issues to make an informed decision. The medicalization of circumcision has led people to believe that the practice provides real and significant benefits. The medical evidence, however, does not affirm this belief. Even if people do claim that they chose to circumcise their son for medical reasons, Brodbar-Nemzer and colleagues note that social rationales most often are the true source of the circumcision decision, and they name three circumcision realities: “The current medical reality is that circumcision is not medically necessary; the religious reality, which applies only to Jews, Moslems and a few other groups, prescribes circumcision as a religious necessity; and the social reality, which essentially is that most American men are circumcised and thus a circumcised penis is a cultural norm” (277). Americans allow the social norm to dictate their decision to circumcise without truly considering whether the practice is worthwhile.

The social norm, as described above, demands that all boys and men have circumcised penises so that everybody looks the same. Parents often note that they chose to circumcise their sons so that they would look like their dads. Other parents simply choose to circumcise so that their sons would look like other boys. In fact, the study conducted by Brodbar-Nemzer and associates found that 46% of the respondents to their survey noted that their *sole* reason for circumcising their sons was so that they would look like the other boys (276). Interestingly, however, Henerey notes that the looks and “styles” of circumcised penises vary much more widely than do the looks of uncircumcised ones, thus suggesting that the “look like others” rationale might be unfounded (273). Jan M. H. Risser and colleagues found that 30% of adolescent boys—whether circumcised or not—do not even know what a circumcision is (1095). Henerey notes that of the boys who claim to know what

a circumcision is, only 68% of them can accurately describe whether they are circumcised or not (273). These data suggest that circumcision is so prevalent in the United States that boys often do not even realize there is an alternative “type” of penis.

Given the assumption that many boys do not even know an alternative type of penis exists, one might wonder what would happen should a boy suddenly discover—whether it be in the locker room or by other means—that another “type” does, indeed, exist. I might suggest that parents circumcise their sons under the guise of making them “look like other boys,” when, in actuality, they are doing so in order to make sure that their sons do not become the objects of homosocial(sexual) gazes. Theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick might suggest that parents circumcise to help their sons avoid scary situations of “homosexual panic” (19). In a culture such as ours, differences are readily noted as abnormal, and they tend to draw attention, and, interestingly, here parents circumcise their sons to prevent them from becoming the object of gazes. In my opinion, however, the true social stigma in this country would be to occupy the position of the one doing the gazing—not the one who is the object of the gaze. In order to point out that another—uncircumcised boy—was different, the circumcised boy who noticed would have to make his observations known to all others. The boy noting the difference would make known to all others that he was observing the genitalia of another boy. It seems as though parents should—I say should simply because society would—wish to prevent their children from becoming the person doing the homosexual gazing. Circumcising their sons almost guarantees that they will be the ones to point out penile difference—and that they will be the ones to (potentially) suffer the consequences of homosexual gazing—thus turning the “look like other boys” argument for circumcision upside-down.

One might look to the previous data and note that people seem to unthinkingly coalesce with the social norm. Alfredo J. Herrera and colleagues conducted a study in which half of a group of soon-to-be parents (of sons) were told that circumcision was medically unnecessary, while the other half was given no such counseling. The circumcision rate among those that were counseled was 98%, whereas the rate among those who were not counseled was 96% (597). Waldeck understands these statistics in terms of cognitive dissonance, for she suggests that Americans tend to block out or hyperscrutinize (and criticize) information that does not support their view of the social norm (“Using” 465). Henerey explains this notion of cognitive dissonance even further by noting that “if a study finds that circumcision has a perceived benefit, little explanation is necessary; it has an easy fit with the existing belief structure” (274). Gollaher also agrees by asserting that even medical journals “tend to confirm, not challenge, standard practice” (*Circumcision* 127). People simply ignore things that call into question their beliefs, for considering alternatives often proves too distressing and time-consuming. Interestingly, Henerey says that parents devote more time to deciding on a name for the baby than they do to considering the possible implications of a medical procedure—circumcision (272).

Considering the utter lack of thoughtful consideration on the part of parents, it is no wonder that the circumcision rate in the United States is so high compared to the rest of the world. Brodbar-Nemzer and colleagues conducted a study with a group of highly educated, soon-to-be parents who chose to have their babies at home with no medical intervention; the researchers found that 60% of the parents subsequently chose to have their sons circumcised (277). Given the fact that these parents chose minimal medical intervention during the birthing process, the fact that the majority of the parents had their sons circumcised points toward social factors as the cause. At the time of their article, Brodbar-

Nemzer and associates estimated that 80% of male infants were circumcised shortly after birth (275). Zoske suggests that circumcision rates for newborns are often reported at about 65%, but he also notes that circumcisions often do not get reported and that they are often included, but not mentioned, in standard hospital maternity packages; thus, the actual circumcision rate could be much higher than the often touted 65%, but such a rate still clearly indicates that the majority of infant boys are circumcised in the United States. Waldeck notes that among the current population of non-Hispanic, white males in the United States, about 81% are circumcised, whereas other cultural and ethnic groups have incidences slightly less—hovering between 65 and 80% (“Using” 455). Worldwide, however, the sheer majority—about 85%—of men are *not* circumcised (Cruz, Glick, and Travis W19; Delano). Social norms coerce Americans to engage in practices grossly out of step with the rest of the world.

Critics of circumcision often assert, like Henerey does, that “[a] pattern of coercion and internalization of values can be traced through the history of circumcision” (273). Wayne F. Hampton suggests that doctors often recommend the procedure as a means to accrue additional income, for “presenting parents with a consent form to sign is as much a suggestion as a question. This solicitation is hard to distinguish objectively from systematic exploitation of normal children’s genitals for money” (W22). Corporate interests also stand to benefit from circumcisions, for both Delano and Gollaher refer to a biotech company in Boston that uses foreskins to make synthetic skin grafts for burn victims and the like. Since the grafts do not get rejected by the bodies of victims (because the cells taken from the foreskin to make the grafting material do not pose compatibility issues), one can only assume that the demand for foreskins will continue to grow (Delano; Gollaher, *Circumcision* 123).

People like Batzer and Hurwitz maintain coercive positions as well, for they assert (falsely) that infants become distressed during circumcisions only because of the restraints and that the cutting of the foreskin causes no pain (W26). Additionally, Batzer and Hurwitz explicitly posit their understanding that “[m]ale circumcision—whether religious, cultural, or cosmetic in purpose—is performed with no intent to inhibit or change sexual or psychological function” (W26). The repetition of such claims, Bell says, often ingrains them into the public consciousness (129). Repetition, here, seems to be a very important keyword. Throughout the Victorian period, as previous analysis has shown, doctors and scientists continually proposed new ways in which the foreskin was implicated as an inherently evil part of the male body. Rationales for circumcision must be constantly repeated yet today, and these rationales require “new” evidence to implicate the foreskin with disease. Queer theorist Judith Butler might suggest that this constant repetition indicates the fragility of the socially constructed norm (of having a circumcised penis). Specifically, Butler would argue that—because it must be continually touted as normal—the circumcised penis only has the “*effect of its own originality*” (361). The uncircumcised penis is, in actuality, the original state of the male genitalia, but society has chosen to believe otherwise, thus forcing the continued repetition of the circumcised penis as the original—and the normal.

Fox and Thomson disagree with Batzer and Hurwitz, stating that circumcision does indeed change sexual and psychological function and it serves to coercively “normalize” the male body (467). Circumcision advocates, according to Cruz and associates, assume “that the individual’s right to bodily integrity can be abridged for cultural, religious, or other perceived ‘benefits’ imposed by force” (W19). Such an assumption is quite erroneous, however, for it “goes in the face of centuries of social evolution and law that has come to recognize the individual’s right to bodily integrity against coercive pressures that do not have compelling,

demonstrable, medical benefit” (Cruz, et al. W19). Hampton would agree with Cruz and colleagues since he makes his position very clear: Circumcision performed to avoid situations that likely will never occur has no rational basis—only a coercive one (W21-W22).

A variety of suggestions have been made as to how to bring an end to the coercive perpetuation of the social norm. Collective action is one such option (Waldeck, “Social” 56-57). Waldeck states very explicitly that “for the norm to change, parents have to act collectively” (“Using” 501). Brodbar-Nemzer and colleagues note that parents who chose not to have their sons circumcised often used the rhetoric “that they were undertaking a conscious effort to undo a social and psychological dynamic” (277). The collective actions of educated parents who consciously defy the dominant social norm could very well help to bring about a decline in circumcision rates, but parents first have to be educated.

Cruz and associates suggest that parents should be educated about the dynamics and workings of the foreskin, as well as the fact that most boys and men worldwide are not circumcised (W19). Bell states that the majority of people do not know that anti-circumcision groups even exist (129). Those who do know about the groups often fear them as extremist in nature since they oppose the dominant norm (129). These groups have many informative resources to offer parents as a means to fully educate them about the dynamics of circumcision. Such education will make parents better able to decide why they should actively abandon the norm. Brodbar-Nemzer and colleagues note that couples who talk more and actively learn about the procedure are less likely to have the procedure done (276).

Waldeck urges the use of collective action to help bring about laws to prevent the practice of circumcision. Waldeck notes that methods like prohibition simply would not work in the case of circumcision (“Using” 501). Laws restricting cigarette manufacture and sales were gradually introduced and gradually caused smoking rates to decline; Waldeck

suggests that legislators should do the same for circumcision (501). First, Waldeck says that circumcision coverage should be cut from medical plans (505). This, however, might prove quite hard since the United States has privatized health care, but the plan has worked in other countries with national health care systems. Waldeck also notes that legislators might require the use of anesthetics when performing the procedure (512). This may deter the practice, for parents often assume the procedure is painless; the required use of anesthesia would indicate otherwise. Further, many doctors might quit performing the procedure because they simply do not want to deal with the dynamics of infant anesthesia—a tricky endeavor. Finally, Waldeck suggests that legislation should require in-depth informed consent measures (523). Although it has been noted that informed consent traditionally does not deter the practice, the information traditionally given is generally lacking in substance and often fails, for instance, to relate the social truths—such as the fact that most men worldwide are not circumcised. Waldeck suggests that the informed consent process should include the screening of a filmed circumcision (524).

Routine neonatal male circumcision has been and continues to be a uniquely American practice with no rational basis—a practice that exists only to maintain the social norm. Circumcision, since its vehement promotion in the 1870s, has been touted as a means to cure a myriad of illnesses, to prevent masturbation, and to maintain genital hygiene. Circumcision has been instituted in this country as a means to exert behavioral (masturbation-prevention), social (class differentiation), and normative (“look like other boys”) control, even despite evidence that suggests the practice is not worthwhile. Doctors still continue to search for ways in which to demonize the foreskin and, thus, uphold the societal norm. The uncircumcised penis has been regarded as queer—abnormal—of late, but this has not always been the case—and it continues not to be the case in the majority of the

rest of the world. The uncircumcised penis has been *constructed* as abnormal within the last 140 years or so, and it is important to note that the uncircumcised penis must be continually touted as diseased and abnormal in order for this notion to remain imbued within the psyches of the American people. Queer re-readings of history aim to bring the often overlooked issues of minorities to the forefront of discussions. In this case, the minority—uncircumcised men—are only the minority in the United States, and they only occupy this position because their penises have been socially constructed as queer. But queer can be good; the uncircumcised penis has been revered in the past and can be revered yet again today; it already is in most of the rest of the world. Whether the uncircumcised penis is queer or not, what is truly troubling and strange is the continued repetition of genital mutilation without consent, consideration, or cause.

## CHAPTER 8

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### From Penis Prose to Penis Poetry: An Interlude

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As the title of this chapter indicates, we are making a bit of a leap across genres between the prior and the following chapters. Interestingly, despite the fact that the last chapter was about circumcision and its history of coercive utilization in the United States and the fact that the next chapter examines a 1970s era poem, the texts considered in both chapters comment upon circumcision in both direct and indirect ways. In the prior chapter, I offer my fervent argument against circumcision as a routine practice in the United States. In the chapter that follows, poet Gary Snyder implies his support of leaving the infant penis intact by mentioning that his son had foreskin to keep clean in the bath—the subject of his poem.

Washing the penis! What a simple concept that proponents of circumcision wanted people to overlook or completely ignore. It is a very American/Industrial Age concept we see manifesting itself here: We always want things to be easier. We want faucets we don't have to touch to operate, pre-packaged foods that are ready to eat, and maintenance-free siding on our houses. Why not a maintenance-free penis, then, right? The argument that the circumcised penis is maintenance-free is simply wrong. The skin on one's body serves as a protective covering that helps humans avoid disease and infections, and an important part of maintaining this bodily organ is regular washing and overall cleanliness. The skin of the penis is no exception to this rule, so it doesn't make sense to say that the circumcised penis is any easier to maintain than the natural penis; they both require regular washing.

Even as I write this, I can almost hear sneers of disdain and discomfort bouncing off the walls around me. The human body is such an uncomfortable subject in American society. We snicker like teenagers in sex-ed class—even as adults—when (sexual) body parts

are mentioned. This reminds me of an incident that occurred while I was formulating the previous text. As part of the graduate course for which I wrote the paper, it was required to have regular large group discussions with the whole class and the professor present to critique me and ask questions in order to aid the paper's development. Well, during one such discussion, a male student made a comment in which he basically stated that he was speaking as a circumcised man. Another student scoffed at the man and made him thoroughly aware of what he just revealed—as though he had just given the class his ATM pin number. Was this some big secret that the man just revealed? I would answer, “not really,” given the fact that the Midwestern United States has the highest circumcision rate in the country and the fact that the discussion to which I refer occurred in the classroom of a rather large Midwestern regional university. I would expect most of the male students in that class to be circumcised, according to the norm.

What this little anecdote makes me wonder, then, is why this man's confirmation that his body was in keeping with an expected societal norm should evoke a shocked response from another student who should have surmised that confirmation herself. Perhaps it is this notion of “privacy” with which Americans seem so obsessed. As upcoming papers will discuss, the rise of capitalism (and the resultant privatization of once publicly held properties) helped spur the idea that families were private entities whose sole concern was the well-being of that family. It is no stretch, then, to assume that the privatization of the family encouraged the embrace of privacy in general. In this sense, even the body becomes a form of private property that, as the previous chapter points out, sometimes even the owner cannot touch (as in the aims of doctors to prevent touching of the privates—or masturbation—via circumcision). I suppose if something is so private it should not be touched, it follows that it also should never be spoken about either. In the time of Facebook

and other social media, I find the American obsession with privacy quite riddled with irony. On the one hand, people are terrified of becoming victims of identity theft, while on the other hand, these same people mindlessly allow others to follow them electronically on the Internet as they post their “check-ins” to various restaurants, shops, and other establishments copiously all over Facebook and Twitter. These people wish to exist within two opposing realities at once.

These people want their bodies to be private—never seen nor heard about—yet we live in a world where sex sells. Sex, in fact, rampages the movie and television screens, but even though we as a society seemingly like to watch sex, we don’t want to discuss it or know anything about it for some reason. Take, for instance, the abstinence only education initiatives that have popped up all over the country, especially in red states. Such initiatives teach young people in the United States absolutely nothing about sex—only that it should not occur until marriage. Information regarding the mechanics of it, the body parts involved, or about the risk of sexually transmitted infections is simply not given. Such information could save the life of a teenager who chooses to be sexually active, for educating him or her about the use of condoms and birth control could help prevent disease and unintended pregnancies.

It has been over forty years since the sexual revolution of 1960s and 1970s, and one should logically think that the increasing freedom afforded to people by feminism, civil rights activism, and gay liberation groups would lead to more open discourse regarding sex and sexuality. In some ways, I suppose, sex is openly part of our societal discourse—it *is* everywhere—yet it seems as though sex has increasingly regressed into (or has been repressed into) a dirty and taboo subject that only makes its way into discourse to shame us into further repressing our (natural) sexual thoughts and urges. One would think that an

increasingly free society would embrace the freedom afforded by a nude body, for example. Instead, we live in a time in which openly breastfeeding an infant is nearly criminalized as a lascivious act. Instead, we live in a time in which an accidental “nipple slip” during a Super Bowl Halftime Show results in live television and radio being taken hostage by the FCC and strictly imposed decency time delays.

Thinking about the free love and embrace of sexuality and nudity during the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s evokes almost a utopian sensibility. It evokes a sense of “gee-whiz it’s empowering to love and be free within my naked body.” Gary Snyder’s poem “The Bath,” as we will see in the following chapter, explores the freedoms of nudity as he and his family wash each other in their steamy sauna bath. The bodies of mother, father, and sons appear almost indistinct from each other because of their shared blood, and Snyder celebrates this freeing interconnectedness. This freedom is not entirely free, as I ultimately point out in the following chapter, for I argue that Snyder remains imprisoned in a patriarchal hegemony because of his choice to use language that sexually exploits women and demands heterosexuality of his sons. My arguments about Snyder’s poem are a little more convoluted than I describe in this brief overview here, so it only makes sense that we now shed our inhibitions and jump into “The Bath.”

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**CHAPTER 9**


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Bounded by Patriarchy:

Gary Snyder's "The Bath" and His (Failed) Search for a Boundaryless Self

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By Josiah P. Peeples IV

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Hitting the showers after high school physical education classes proves to be a crowning highlight of every American adolescent's life. Strike that. Nudity, especially in American culture, often proves incredibly distressing, and, in fact, the high school locker room scenario, contrary to my opening exaltation, troubles a great many youth. As a culture, it seems, we are not comfortable with our bodies. We revere similarity and abhor difference. The girl with undeveloped breasts and the uncircumcised boy, for example, feel inadequate and they shield their bodies from the sight of others. Boundaries limit human relationships, and American culture demands boundaries. Where are the boundaries when one is naked? Discomfort, bashfulness, and insecurity all act as boundaries when one is naked, it seems, and people accept such reactions as natural. When nudity itself becomes natural, beautiful, and unbounded, as it does in much of Gary Snyder's poetry, human relationships with each other and with nature can begin to thrive. In his poem, "The Bath," Gary Snyder constructs a boundaryless self in which he and his family become one with "Great Earth" by washing each other (90). Though Snyder's poem presents us with the image of a spiritually cleansed, broadly encompassing, and, at times, even queer self, it nevertheless imparts its readers with a limited view of nature—a patriarchal view that exalts the family, elides alternative sexualities, and maintains the structures that make unbounded selves impossible.

This exploration of Gary Snyder's poem employs a queer critical framework. Queer theory is founded upon the assumption that identities are socially constructed rather than existing as essences. This means, like queer theorist Nikki Sullivan says, that sexual and other

identities are “discursively constructed” (1), or dependent upon time and place throughout history. Additionally, queer theory is critical of binary oppositions that characterize the discursive constructions of identity. By this, I mean that language often pits two identification options against each other. Take the terms heterosexual and homosexual, for instance. Society favors the first term without the realization that it depends on the second term for its very definition—and, further, that the second term was created first.

Binary oppositions limit the potential for wide-ranging (sexual) identity, queer theorists argue. “Gay” identity, for example, then, represents a culturally specific understanding of sexual identity, rather than some intrinsic essence that one cannot control. This term, in fact, is of recent creation and many of the behaviors one would associate with a “gay” person now would not have been used to demarcate an identity for one engaging in those behaviors just a few hundred years ago. With this in mind, queer theorists point out the fact that socially constructed identities can be incredibly restrictive. For this reason, queer theories seek to “resist closure” (v), regarding identity, as Sullivan puts it. Queer theories, then, seek to “queer” the notion that (sexual) identities are in some way fixed by showing that people can (re)construct identities for themselves.

Queer theorists employ the term “queer” as an adjective, as a noun, and—most importantly—as a verb. According to queer theorist Donald E. Hall, the term “queer” as an adjective “means that there is ... no single word, no simple slot into which complex personalities, behaviors, desires, abilities, and ambitions can be placed” (13). To describe a sexuality as “queer,” then, is to describe one that defies the bounded notions of sexual identity set up by binary oppositions. “Queer” as a noun means to occupy the non-favored part of binary oppositions or to oppose the dominance of the favored binary term. “Queer” as a verb, as Hall remarks, calls into question “systems of classification that assert their

timelessness and fixity” (14). The theme here, no matter which sense of the word “queer” one uses, is that they all constantly seek to point out the ways in which the normal may not be so normal or is at least is always dependent upon some alternative, non-normal state. Simply put, to “queer” something means to point out its inherent vulnerabilities and weak points in order to show that what people tend to accept as normal is by no means superior to other alternatives, especially those regarding gender and sexuality.

Self-constructed identification with a group, it would seem, allows people to develop both a unique sense of self and of group affiliation—both of which can help one to feel a sense of social empowerment and life satisfaction. It is important to realize that our postmodern moment allows for many groups to be constructed—and even for the construction of groups within groups—as a self-asserted title such as “Asian lesbian feminist” reveals. Titles like this one may help a person conceptualize a sense of “self,” but they also potentially create a rift between the person and the rest of society. In fact, revisionists of queer theories—such as Max H. Kirsch and Dana Cloud—argue that people have become too involved in constructing identities and selves such that they fail to join together with other oppressed people to counteract oppression. Kirsch argues, for example, that the self “cannot be the center” of working toward social change (79). Cloud remarks that intense focus “on individuality and personal life has invested ... the elaboration of a self with paramount significance” (84), such that “[c]apitalist society produces selves that are preoccupied with their own self-invention” (84). In Cloud’s critique of queer theory—a theory that allows for ever individuated selves—he argues that the “goal” of capitalism “is to create and sustain the illusion of the subject as a private individual, unconnected to class and labor, and free to choose commodities and pleasures without regard to place within the mode of production” (84). Capitalism, then, forces people into mindless self construction as

a means to divert their attention away from the fact that they are being continually exploited by the system.

Such self-constructive behaviors, as mentioned at the outset of this paper, tend to demarcate boundaries between people, and the body tends to be one such bounded entity that our cultural fear of nudity clearly indicates. Poet Gary Snyder does not buy into such cultural fears. In fact, in his poetry he often celebrates nudity. Writing about Snyder's entire body of poetry, Rod Phillips remarks that Snyder has the "unshrinking desire to depict the universe beyond the *boundaries* and conventions of literary 'decency,' and to make formerly taboo subjects—the naked, the raw, the sexual, the scatological—into subjects worthy of literary treatment" (30, emphasis mine). Snyder does not allow his poetry to be bounded by cultural notions of "decency," and Phillips regards this act as representative of "a new voice—one which reveled in the sexual aspects of nature (both human and non-human), took pleasure in the bawdy words and actions of humans apart from society, and boldly and honestly discussed human sexuality" (31). Snyder's poetry, then, offers a view about nudity and sexuality that his contemporaries did not engage with. Although Phillips finds Snyder's glorification of nudity pervasive and intriguing, he remarks that "the question of how nudity and eroticism function in Snyder's writing ... has never been adequately addressed" (33). Scholarship on this aspect of Snyder's works is lacking; this project attempts to further discussion.

Nudity certainly plays an instrumental role in Snyder's "The Bath," for the poem takes place primarily in the Snyder family sauna. Snyder sets the scene at the outset of his poem: He washes his son, Kai, in a "washtub down on the slab" (5), as "[s]teaming air" permeates the sauna and the "crackle of waterdrops" breaks the silence (6). In this environment, Kai "stands in warm water" (8), with "[s]oap all over the smooth of his thigh



feels no shame in remarking that his touch causes his son's penis to begin "curving up and getting hard." A great number of people may consider such a remark taboo, especially given cultural fears of incest and pederasty. Theorists like Gayle Rubin argue that a great number of societal fears tend to get displaced onto issues of sexuality (306). Fears of homosexuals as recruiters of children to become "converts" to homosexuality led to a great deal of anti-child pornography legislation in the late 1970s (310), for example. Fears about child pornography were so great, for example, that Cornell University art professor Jacqueline Livingston was fired from her post in 1978 due to a photograph she took of her nude seven-year-old son; her son happened to have an erection (310). Snyder considers his interactions with his son natural—as representative of simple biological function—and he willingly explores a taboo subject.

Snyder brings to the fore another taboo issue in his description of bathing his son—the fact that his son is not circumcised. Snyder remarks that he has to "pull back skin" in order to wash his son's penis, thus making it quite clear that his son's foreskin is, indeed, intact. This may seem like a small point to expand upon, but it seems to me that Snyder makes his readers deliberately aware of the nature of his son's penis as a commentary upon American culture's unthinking embrace of circumcision—a practice considered routine in the United States, though quite rare the world over. In their study, Risser and colleagues found that thirty percent of American adolescent boys—whether circumcised or not—do not even know what a circumcision is (1095). Adam Henerey notes that of the boys who claim to know what a circumcision is, only sixty-eight percent of them can accurately describe whether they are circumcised or not (273). These data suggest that circumcision is so prevalent in the United States that boys often do not even realize that more than one "type" of penis exists.

Snyder's unquestioned inclusion of a frank discussion of his son's penis seems quite queer, for it implicitly calls into question American society's favoritism of the "circumcised" element of the binary opposition. Snyder's description of his son's penis presents readers with an image of a fully functional organ that works just as well as idealized, circumcised ones. In her influential article, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory," the article some regard as the foundation of queer theory, Gayle Rubin dichotomizes sex into the categories of "good" and "bad" in order to illustrate the coerciveness and limitations of socially constructed sexualities (319). In my queer reading of the practice of circumcision, I apply Rubin's dichotomy to penis types, characterizing the circumcised penis as "good" and the uncircumcised penis as "bad" within the context of American culture. My exploration reveals a medico-social phenomenon that constructs the uncircumcised penis as scary, dirty, and other—and that coerces people into the practice of circumcision. I queer the validity of such a phenomenon much in the same way that Snyder does—by bringing the issues into the discourse and by questioning the soundness of favored binary term.

Snyder's frank discussion of nudity and taboo aspects of sexuality sets the stage for his further exploration, in the remainder of "The Bath," of boundarylessness—a theme that pervades his poem markedly. Critic Jody Norton succinctly remarks that a primary goal of Snyder's poetry is "to precipitate in the reader an intuitive recognition of the folly of boundaries" (54). In Norton's assessment, then, Snyder continually seeks to make readers aware that boundaries are false and limiting. Tim Dean agrees with Norton (and me) to an extent when he writes that Snyder is "[p]reoccupied with continuity and connection...[and that he] does not see the world in terms of bounded—or even mobile—identities" (491). Dean argues, in sum, that Snyder's "writing isn't about selfhood" (491). Ayako Takahashi agrees, noting Snyder's citation of the great Buddhist philosopher Dōgen's remarks: "We

study the self to forget the self. When you forget the self, you become one with ten thousand things” (322). In a sense, Dean is correct to remark that much of Snyder’s poetry does not seek to construct a “self,” since a great deal of his poetry explores the natural world exclusively. Takahashi’s remarks, however, illustrate that one must explore one’s self in order to become aware of the fact that one person exists as but a miniscule portion of the global community. “The Bath,” it seems, explores the notion of selfhood and arrives, ultimately, at a sense of a boundaryless self. Extrapolating even further, this unbounded self has the *potential* to allow people to “become one with ten thousand things.”

This search for the boundaryless self finds manifestations throughout “The Bath,” as Snyder continually inquires about the nature of “our body.” After washing his son, Snyder wonders if that connection represents their boundless body. Later, as he cups his wife’s “curving vulva arch” (35), imagining “wombs in wombs, in rings, / that start in music” (39-40), Snyder wonders regarding this further connection: “*is this our body?*” (41). Shortly thereafter, Snyder writes that “[a]s Kai laughs at his mother’s breast he is now weaned / from, we / wash each other, / *this our body*” (51-54). As three members of the family interact, Snyder’s conception of the boundaryless body becomes more concrete, for Snyder states that, rather than wondering if, father, son, and mother all washing each other represents their body. Snyder further solidifies his conception of his family’s connected body when he writes “*this is our body*: Clean, and rinsed, and sweating more, we stretch / out on the redwood benches hearts all beating” (63-64). Snyder’s use of the colon as a connecting device between these lines illustrates the fact that Snyder will define what “our body” means after the colon. As the connections between the participants in the bath grow stronger, boundaries between bodies further dissolve. Near the end of the poem, Snyder extrapolates his conception of “our body” even further, and I will return to this point shortly.

So far, I have only discussed the recurring motif that structures Snyder's poem—his questioning and conceptualization of what constitutes a shared body. In between these recurring italicized lines, Snyder, of course, builds connections between himself and his family members that illustrate the process of erasing boundaries. In admiration of his wife's breasts, he describes their features: "The veins net flow across the ribs, that gathers / milk and peaks up in a nipple—fits / our mouth" (43-45). With the phrase "our mouth," Snyder refers to both his own and his sons'. It makes good sense that the mother's breast would fit her sons' mouths since it acted as a source of the children's nourishment in his early life. Snyder sees as well that his wife's breast fits his mouth as well. He does not utilize the breasts for the same purpose, of course. Snyder further describes his wife's breasts as the "open curling lotus gate I cup and kiss" (50). Snyder realizes that the breasts do not exist as a boundary between any of the people in the bath. In fact, they serve to bring these people closer together.

The uncensored sexual activity that Snyder and his wife engage in while in front of their son further exhibits Snyder's conception of boundarylessness. As mentioned before, Snyder cups his wife's "curving vulva arch" while she washes Kai's hair. Further, as noted recently, Snyder openly cups and sensuously kisses his wife's breasts. Even sexual activity, it seems, does not cross some sort of dictate of appropriate behavior while in the bath. Throughout the poem, Snyder consistently exhibits his openness towards the examination of sexuality and the fact that sexuality, indeed, binds people together. Notably, Snyder looks upon "Kai's little scrotum" and pictures "the seed still tucked away, that moved from us to him" (55-56). Quite literally, then, all of the people in the bath *do* share the same body in a very discrete and biological sense. Snyder mentions young Kai's "tucked away" seed as a means to make the reader aware that Kai himself has the potential to further the bodily

connection his parents have shared with him. In this way, Snyder extends his conceptualization of boundarylessness even further.

But Snyder does not stop extrapolating beyond the realm of human interconnectedness. Snyder, in fact, imagines a body that is not even bounded by nature. “The cloud across the sky,” Snyder writes, “The windy pines[,] / the trickle gurgle in the swampy meadow / *this is our body*” (75-77). Natural elements and processes, then, do not exist in a realm apart from the human world. In fact, the human is but a tiny, yet interconnected, part of the natural world. Reflecting upon his Pulitzer Prize-winning collection of poems, *Turtle Island*, over twenty years after its publication, Snyder writes that when one speaks of Turtle Island, “a vast past, an open future, and all the life communities of plants, humans, and critters come[s] into focus” (“Rediscovery” 305). The common Native American term for the North American continent, “turtle island,” then, shapes Snyder’s conception of nature. It makes sense then that Snyder concludes his poem with an image of his family “Laughing on the Great Earth / Come out from the bath” (90-91). This pairing of lines does seem mildly ambiguous, however. One might argue that Snyder and his family sit on the Great Earth, laughing—a straightforward interpretation. At the same time, it seems as though the Great Earth itself has “[c]ome out from the bath.” This reading suggests an all-encompassing boundarylessness that allows Snyder and his family to exist as undifferentiated from the Great Earth itself. Snyder concludes his poem with a sense of ultimate boundlessness.

The construction of an unbounded self, many would argue, affords a person great power since the person can see beyond the false boundaries set up by society and culture in order to work toward the common good of an interconnected world. In “The Bath,” Gary Snyder seems to construct such an unbounded self—and he does so quite effectively and

beautifully, I believe. Despite this, however, subtleties within the poem regarding issues of the family, sexuality, and political engagement impose boundaries upon Snyder's supposedly unbounded self. These boundaries hinder the efficacy of his overarching program of boundary destruction. Quite notably, a key boundary that Snyder leaves in place within his poem exudes the restrictions and values of (capitalist) patriarchy.

Though boundaries seem not to exist between members of Snyder's family—or even between Snyder's family and nature, for that matter—bathing proves to exist as a strictly family endeavor. These people form connections with each other—and with nature—but they do not obviously extend these connections (at least within the context of this poem) outside the realm of their immediate family. Logistically, perhaps, extending the practice of sauna bathing may simply not have been feasible for Snyder and his family. Perhaps I should make my position clearer. In a poem that strives so tediously to construct an unbounded self, I find it surprising that Snyder did extrapolate the notion of boundarylessness to include other people. Perhaps such an extrapolation is implicit in the explicit connections Snyder makes with nature in general.

Nevertheless, Snyder focuses intensely upon his family. Near the end of the poem, for example, Snyder describes his family after having returned to the house following the sauna bath: “This is our body. Drawn up crosslegged by the flames / drinking icy water / hugging babies, kissing bellies” (87-89). This very domestic scene certainly has the ability to tug at the heartstrings of a great many people, and that is fine, but an image of a tightly connected family should not leave the reader thinking “how cute.” Rather, it should suggest to the reader that interconnectedness and boundarylessness provides a powerful means to change the systems of oppression. As Cloud writes, “a relentless focus on ‘the family’ prioritizes the narrow task of protecting or enriching one’s private life over a broader

program of political struggle” (73). Throughout the poem, Snyder has the potential to construct a politically subversive unbounded self. He ultimately does not do this, however, and leaves his readers a portrait of a happy family as a concluding image instead.

This image of the family, of course, meets the requirements of a standard, bounded patriarchal nuclear family—complete with a mom, a dad, and two children. (The only thing missing is the dog.) Although I have mentioned Snyder’s seeming openness to sexuality, within the context of “The Bath” it seems as though Snyder only conceives of sex as heterosexual in nature. “These boys,” Snyder writes at one point, referring to his sons, “love their mother / who loves men, who passes on / her sons to other women” (72-74). The only sexual option for Snyder’s sons, then, is that of heterosexuality. No continuum of sexuality seems to exist in Snyder’s mindset here. He, in fact, bounds sexuality in a narrow, patriarchal way that does not mesh well with his seeming hopes for unboundedness. Given his consistent exaltations of nature, a vast and encompassing realm, it seems odd that Snyder would simply ignore the potential for other sexualities. In an influential article, queer ecofeminist Greta Gaard remarks that “sexual diversity” is a hallmark of nature (115). Sexuality in all its forms, then, exists within nature, so it seems curious that Snyder’s embrace of nature does not extend to the full range of sexuality as well.

If, as Timothy G. Gray argues, Snyder’s works seek to “disrupt and rewrite a variety of proscribed identities, including those of national, racial, and sexual character” (526), how does one interpret Snyder’s limitation of sexuality in “The Bath”? I continue to posit that the limited scope of Snyder’s poem—its focus upon the family—prevents the poem from engaging boundarylessness in the sense of collectivity. Collective action, that is, dissolves false boundaries and serves an interconnected world far better than a boundaryless family unit could. Dorothy M. Nielsen remarks that many of Snyder’s poems can be read as overtly

political in nature: Snyder's "'nature poetry' engages public policy ... and criticize[s] consumer culture" (704). "The Bath" certainly has the ability to make people think about and consider their lives as more crucially interdependent, but it in no way urges a politics of collectivity as a means to effect global change—or the shift towards a sustainable, interdependent world. When Nielsen writes of Snyder's ability to "engage" public policy, it seems quite clear that Snyder seeks only to alter the system that is in place. That is, he does not seek to replace the current oppressive regime with a radically new one.

Snyder's revisionist approach to politics is exactly what bounds and limits his potential for a boundless self. Critical of revisionist politics, Kirsch fervently tells us that "[s]truggling for acceptance within mainstream politics mistakes influence for real power, enlarging an ill-conceived hope that working within the structures that create oppression can change them" (111). Gaard expands on this idea when she writes that "all forms of oppression are now so inextricably linked that liberation efforts must be aimed at dismantling the system itself" (17). Maintenance of the current hegemony, then, constitutes willful support of the oppression of women, nature, homosexuals, and any other member of the unfavored side of a binary opposition. The current system is designed to maintain itself, and real power is in the hands of a relative few. In a new regime, for example, this power could be distributed with the notion that decisions affect all elements of an interconnected world.

Snyder simply does not make this suggestion in his poem. Rather, he supports an idealized notion of interconnectedness that fails to be as widely encompassing as it could be. Charles Altieri remarks that failures of this sort can be quite common when a poet attempts "to assume a public stance" (775). As critical readers, Altieri tells us that it is our job to critique such failed endeavors as a means to further the discourse and potentially effect

change. A poet must reflect upon his works, Altieri notes, especially when attempting to effect meaningful social change, because when the poet fails to do so, “he comes dangerously close to participating in the self-righteous blindness that dominates the society he wants to alter” (775). Working within a self-righteous system creates a blinded and self-righteous poet.

Though Gary Snyder’s construction of a boundaryless self in “The Bath” has subversive potential, this potential fails to come to fruition because of Snyder’s insistence upon working within—rather than revolutionizing—the system. Patriarchal structures construct a bounded worldview, ironically, in a poem that seeks to deconstruct and defy boundaries. Boundaries must be radically questioned if one truly seeks to effect change. Boundaries exist as hurdles that we must knock down—not jump over—for jumping over them simply leaves them in place. A radical worldview leaves no unfounded restrictions in place. In short, coercive, capitalist, patriarchal hegemony must be demolished, for basking and bathing in the brutal, bounded patriarchy is akin to showering after physical education class with your gym shorts on: You won’t feel clean and you’ll drip the ills of your system all along your path.

**CHAPTER 10**

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**From Body to Bawdy: An Interlude**

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I just conducted a word count and found out that I have used the word “foreskin” seventy-five times in this project so far. (Seventy-six.) That is quite a bit of attention paid to a rather underutilized word. Perhaps drawing attention to this seldom used word and the issues that surround it help also to draw attention to a repressed minority group in the United States—the uncircumcised. After all, the uncircumcised only comprise about fifteen to twenty percent of the population of the United States. By using the word “foreskin” so frequently and by discussing topics like circumcision and “The Bath,” I hope to illustrate that constructions of what constitutes a “normal” body are just that—constructions. The constructions can be reconstructed if we actively engage with them and help to deconstruct them. Although uncircumcised men are a minority in this country, the inverse is true worldwide. In fact, it is estimated that eighty to eighty-five percent of men worldwide are not circumcised. So, despite societal insistence that the uncircumcised are in the minority, the truth is that they are not. Repeatedly revealing this truth and making the ignorant or uninformed aware of this truth can help shift the American mindset away from embracing a cruel and unnecessary surgery that makes us look grossly out of line with world standards of health care and bodily integrity.

What I am suggesting here is basically activism on behalf of the voiceless penis. This is activism that I try to engage through writing works like you have seen here, and it is also activism that I try to engage in my conversations with others, whether they occur one-on-one or in a group forum type setting. Traditionally when I know that a friend or a friend-of-a-friend or a family member is pregnant, I have offered up the facts and data that I have found regarding circumcision and presented it to them, imploring them to at least carefully

consider bodily integrity as a viable option. While some people humor me and act like they care about the information I have presented, others look dumbfounded and shocked—almost implying with their eyes and expression that I have some deviant sexual interest in their unborn child. It sounds incredibly ridiculous, but such disdain is exactly what I have faced when bringing this issue into discourse. To take another example, I am reminded of the time I presented the paper you have just read to an audience at my institution’s annual English Fest. Even an audience consisting mostly of those whom I thought were open-minded English majors could be seen shifting uncomfortably in their seats at the mention of the words “penis” and “foreskin.” Persuasion is incredibly difficult to evoke if people refuse to listen because of their discomfort with a subject.

Perhaps this is one of the reasons why William Shakespeare wrote his plays in such brilliantly cloaked innuendo, rather than in straightforward vulgarity. Of course Shakespeare would have been arrested had he written in vulgarities, but his use of subtle innuendo was employed purposefully to critique and comment upon society and hegemony covertly. As you will see in the following chapter, I don’t think it would be fair to say that Shakespeare wrote *Measure for Measure* as a way to characterize prostitutes as bawdy Others who should exist outside of society never to be seen nor heard from. Instead, I think Shakespeare uses his gift as a playwright to subtly comment upon the ways in which incipient capitalism unfairly constructs certain people as others if they do not benefit the rising regime appropriately. Saying such a thing could be viewed as blasphemous, especially considering the fact that many critics believe that Shakespeare was critiquing the new King James I in this play as well, so it makes sense that Shakespeare guards his words with innuendo.

As we transition into the next piece, my words are not so much guarded as they are, rather and hopefully, a sophisticated play on words. Making the leap from 1970s American

poetry to early modern Shakespearean drama may seem like a big one, but the chapter prior to this and the one following this one are not necessarily entirely disconnected. As the title of this chapter indicates, these texts are related in that they both focus upon the body/bawdy. We transition here from the physical body of Gary Snyder and his family to the bawdy others of Shakespeare's play. Queer theorists often find themselves playing with words in order to imbue them with additional—or previously unheard of—meaning. The reclamation of the word “queer,” for example, takes its power as a tool of oppression away because embracing this term constructs it as a term of pride that can be thrown in the face of oppressors. In much the same way, the homophones body/bawdy can be used in tandem to construct and reconstruct each other with the goal being to call into question and undermine hegemonic understanding or exploitation of both terms. We shall now turn to the next chapter and examine the marked bawdy body of the sexual other in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* to see how such an othered positionality plays out.

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**CHAPTER 11**


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Condemned to Reproduce the System:  
Incipient Capitalism's Construction of the Bawdy Sexual Other  
and Shakespeare's Construction of Obscene Marriages in *Measure for Measure*

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By Josiah P. Peeples IV

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Inside the brothels of early seventeenth-century England, the Johns raped their prostitutes, while, just outside, the capitalists began raping *everyone*. Prostitutes exist as commodities in early modern England. They exist as bodies to be subdued, sexually used, and exchanged for money. But commoditization was in the air, so to speak, during the early modern period, since the economic system begins its transition from feudalism to capitalism at this point. Representative of this transition, William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, notably, is about commoditization, substitution, and exchange, and, thus, very capitalistic in nature: Mistress Overdone and her voiceless whores exist only as commoditized products that exist to serve the needs of their male customers, in exchange for money; Duke Vincentio offers Mariana as a substitute for Isabella in the bed-trick scene; and a conveniently dead man's head is exchanged for drunken Barnardine's. While many critics discuss the sexual transgressions, the subversive identities, and prostitution that occurs in *Measure for Measure*, none link the sexual othering of the prostitutes, bawds, and other lowly characters with incipient capitalism. Enmeshed in the transition from feudalism to capitalism, as well as the transition from Elizabeth I's regime to James I's, Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* astutely anticipates the ideas of Michel Foucault, for Foucault does link sexual regulation with the rise of capitalism. *Measure for Measure* illustrates the complexities of these transitions by presenting a Vienna in which incipient capitalism demands that Angelo and members of the ruling class construct prostitutes as Others, in order to control the

lower classes, allow the state to dictate the proper means of (child/citizen) production (under the aegis of law, familialism, and morality), and reproduce and strengthen the emergent system of exploitative domination.

Shakespeare's England was by no means a capitalist society. Despite this, however, the foundations for this economic system began to form during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Richard Halpern, for example, describes the Renaissance as a period of "transition from feudalism to capitalism, conceived of as both economic and social modes of production" (1). Gradually, that is, powerful people during this time period began to collect capital—money and lands. In his first volume of *Capital*, Karl Marx calls this process "primitive accumulation" (500). Halpern effectively glosses Marx's phrase by noting that "Marx's term denotes the various means by which fractions of the late feudal producing classes, including peasants and some small artisans, were dispossessed or otherwise deprived of the means of economic production by which they sustained themselves and thus became available for employment as landless or 'free' laborers" (1). Peasants and other dispossessed people, thus, often sought out employment in cities such as London, simply as a means to survive.

Urban populations exploded, and the impoverished mingled with the elite. Due to its urban setting in Vienna, Jean E. Howard might call *Measure for Measure* a "city comedy," for she notes that such plays explore the "vastly expanding market economy and...the particular class tensions... exacerbated by that expansion" ("Prostitutes" 163). In the city, Halpern remarks, the "sizable mass of impoverished and vagrant persons who lost their domestic, social, and cultural habitations along with their means of subsistence" desperately sought out work of any kind (73). Wallace Shugg remarks that such desperation created "fertile soil for the spread of prostitution" (295). Thus, many poor women were more than willing to

exchange their bodies as a means to survive. Owning no land and only minimal personal property, the only means of production possessed by these women is, importantly, their genitalia.

A broad overview of prostitution during the early modern period (and its historical parallels in *Measure for Measure*) seems in order. Poverty, as mentioned, made prostitution incredibly common, and the locations where illicit activities took place were quite commonly known as well. According to Alan Haynes, “[t]he most notorious brothels were densely clustered on the Southwark Bankside” (62). Just across the Thames River from London, the suburb Southwark was home to the rampant sex industry and the theater district as well, for both the Rose and Globe theaters were, like the horny male visitors, erected there. Notably, Angelo’s proclamation near the beginning of *Measure for Measure* requires the closure of all brothels “in the suburbs of Vienna” (1.2.94), so Vienna parallels London and Mistress Overdone’s suburb could certainly parallel Southwark.

Although prostitution provides a means of survival for poor women, the profession suffers from instability and the specter of prosecution. For hundreds of years prior to 1546, Tom Flanigan asserts, the Southwark brothels were “more or less free from official interference” (40), although occasional punitive crackdowns were enacted. Shugg refers to the problem of prostitution as “pervasive and ineradicable” (306). Though laws did exist banning prostitution, the practice was often simply overlooked and the laws were not regularly enforced. The laws prior to 1546, as Duke Vincentio might say, were “more mocked than feared” (1.3.27). Thus, business continued as usual in the sex industry—until, that is, the reign of King Henry VIII.

Though notorious for his multiple sex partners, King Henry VIII found it absolutely necessary to combat prostitution. Flanigan explains that on April 13, 1546, Henry VIII

issued a proclamation that “called for the closing of all brothels in and around the city” (40). Flanigan refers to the time after Henry VIII’s proclamation “*the reign of Angelo*” because of its similarity to Angelo’s call for the closure of all brothels near Vienna (40). The similarity proves striking indeed. Fascinatingly, the so-called “reign of Angelo” did not last very long, for Henry VIII died, ironically, according to Gāmini Salgādo, from syphilis about eight months later (52). The brothels were reinstated during the reign of Edward VI and remained open for business during the successive reign of Mary Tudor (52). Salgādo remarks that “[d]uring the long reign of Queen Elizabeth both the patronage and the punishment of bawds and strumpets continued unabated” (52). Sixteenth century modes of contention with prostitution play out like a tennis match, for just as fast as the ball is smacked to condemnation on the other side, it gets walloped back onto the side of willful ignorance.

Having mentioned the theme of “back-and-forth,” a brief discussion of early modern travel seems worthwhile. Although people could travel across London Bridge to get to Southwark, Salgādo notes that the pathways were crowded with merchants and vendors and that “[t]he east-west journey cost about sixpence while it cost a penny to cross from the city to Surrey bank, to visit the playhouses” (17). For the most part, travel to Southwark and the other suburbs required one to charter a boat to cross the Thames, simply because this method proved significantly cheaper. Shugg enthusiastically remarks that “[i]n the early seventeenth century prostitution everywhere along the Thames felt the impact of a new phenomenon, which had the same effect on the profession as did the automobile three hundred years later”: the water coach (299). The great increase in these coaches allowed not only for quicker travels from London to the suburbs, but also for fast and affordable travel for the prostitutes into London, where they could further and frequently expand their trade. Angelo’s proclamation in *Measure for Measure* plucks down the suburban brothels, but given

the increased traffic of prostitutes into London, it makes sense that Overdone's prostitutes might easily find work by enmeshing themselves in an even more urban climate.

Although quite similar to Henry VIII's proclamation closing the brothels, Angelo's might best reflect events that occurred in 1603, when James I began his reign—just one year prior to *Measure for Measure's* first production. Due to an outbreak of plague, Haynes explains, King James I issued a proclamation that banned “playing in the theatres...from 8 May to Christmas” (149). James also wished for “the demolition of the worst slum quarters” (149), including, likely, the brothels and other dwellings of ill repute. James I's proclamation sought to remove from the city those who harbored disease or who were simply undesirable in general. The removal of disease-ridden whores and vagrants proves to be a rather incisive act for a newly crowned king—and likely an act committed to show strength and competence. At the same time, Angelo's acts in *Measure for Measure* prove quite similar to James I's, as exploration will show, illustrating James I's repression of sexuality.

The newly named deputy Duke, Angelo, seeks with his proclamation to modify and repress sexual behavior. The transition to capitalism that was occurring during Shakespeare's time brought with it new and changing ideas about sexuality. Michel Foucault, in his widely influential *The History of Sexuality*, for instance, explores the historical constructions of sexuality and remarks that “the advent of the age of repression [occurs] in the seventeenth century, after hundreds of years of open spaces and free expression, ... [and] coincide[s] with the development of capitalism: it becomes an integral part of the bourgeois order” (5). What Foucault means here is that capitalism requires workers to be productive. Within this system, then, sex must be repressed because the use of sexual energy does not produce additional capital for those in power, and therefore proves unacceptable. However, capitalism demands, of course, procreative sex, but *only* in order, as Foucault says, “to

reproduce itself” (6). Child production allows for the continued maintenance of the capitalist system, so the regime sanctions this type of sexual behavior and represses all others.

Sexual repression certainly intertwines with incipient capitalism, and it is this very interconnection that allows enforcement of repressive tactics to wane in certain circumstances. The circumstances, of course, are ones that allow the elite to profit from sexuality. According to Jonathan Dollimore in his study “Transgression and Surveillance in *Measure for Measure*,” most of the early modern brothels “were controlled from above” (84). By this, Dollimore means that the elite members of society—those with money, and lots of it—had a vested interest in the sex industry: these people owned the brothels and profited from the sexual exploitation of the prostitutes contained therein. As mentioned previously, Angelo forces the closure of the brothels in the suburbs of Vienna, but the brothels in the city remain conspicuously open. The city brothels remain in business because, as Pompey mentions, “a wise burgher put in for them” (1.2.99). Given his likely vested interest in the profitability of the city brothels, this wealthy “burgher” bribed or otherwise manipulated law enforcement officials in order to keep his business running. Thus, it seems that capitalists only repress sexuality on which they cannot capitalize.

As is quite evident, capitalists can, indeed, capitalize on prostitutes. Hanna Scolnicov remarks that *Measure for Measure*'s Vienna has a “flourishing brothel trade” that constructs “women as physically exchangeable commodities” (70). Though prostitutes receive money for their “services,” the brothel owners—and not even the bawds who serve as management figures—take the most significant portion of the income for themselves. Though Laura Mandell’s discussion treats eighteenth-century texts about prostitution, the texts she examines quite likely reflect common brothel practices: For instance, Mandell mentions one author’s particularly demeaning hierarchy of desirability by which prices for various

gradations of prostitutes are set (113). Basically, the ugly or noticeably diseased prostitutes will be less desirable than the more beautiful and healthy looking ones, so they will garner less income.

Whether protected and maintained by a rich man or not, all prostitutes continually feared prosecution. Characteristic of the early modern period, power, Halpern notes, comes “from political sovereignty: censorship, punishment, surveillance, and above all spectacle,” since “[t]he power of sovereignty works primarily by making itself *visible*” (3, emphasis in original). Thus, the governors of the early modern time sought to make laws, the enforcement of laws, and the enforcers of laws omnipresent. In order to remind people that fornication exists as a punishable offense, Salgãdo remarks that fornicators, and especially the prostitutes themselves, would “be carted about the streets” (52), thus making their crimes entirely public. Similarly, both Claudio and Julietta are forced to walk through the marketplace, illustrating the severe enforcement of Angelo’s reinstated laws. “Fellow, why dost thou show me thus to th’ world?” Claudio, entirely dismayed, asks the Provost during this scene (1.2.115). The Provost replies that the decision was not his and that, in fact, he conducts him thus based on orders “from Lord Angelo by special charge” (1.2.118). Quite evidently, Angelo wishes to make his punitive powers visible indeed.

Though sovereign power and some aspects of punishment remained visible in the early modern period, incipient capitalism brought with it an increasingly shrouded penal system of prisons. Halpern notes that prior to the rise of capitalism, communities sought to help and retain criminals in their communities by attempting to morally reform them (74). The “early modern ideology [of incipient capitalism] worked to expel them as alien and threatening,” Halpern remarks, however, thus indicating a punitive shift towards containment of criminals in prisons (74). Kiernan Ryan succinctly describes the situation in

*Measure for Measure*: “The play provides a textbook instance of the transition from a culture in which power asserts itself through spectacular, public displays of punitive violence, to one which secures subjection by subtler strategies” (231). Claudio, interestingly, seems confused by his display in the marketplace at the beginning of the play, and he begs the Provost: “Bear me to prison, where I am committed” (1.2.116). Claudio’s confusion might speak to the transitional nature of the early modern period, for Claudio likely knows that not long before his time, criminals might very likely be hanged for crimes immediately without spending any time in prison beforehand. Power remains visible, but punishment becomes increasingly invisible during this period.

Aside from the seeming omnipresence of a watching disciplinary official, fornication was also prevented by the powerful peril of disease. Syphilis was a disease of particular concern, although others like gonorrhea existed as well. According to Lorraine Helms, syphilis was “a disease of early modern naval exploration and military conquest” (327). Given this understanding of the disease, it would not be that much of a theoretical stretch to consider syphilis as a disease related to mercantilism/incipient capitalism, for, like naval exploration, trade requires travel to distant lands and the potential for sexual intercourse with numerous sexual partners, many of whom may likely be prostitutes. The capitalist underpinnings of spreading venereal disease resonate in Lucio’s remark that he “*purchased...many diseases*” at Mistress Overdone’s brothel (1.2.44, emphasis mine). Framing venereal disease as a commodity that can be “purchased” emphasizes the profound effects and entrenchment of rising capitalism: People gradually gain the freedom and opportunity to *purchase* anything.

Issues of freedom crop up a number of notable times in *Measure for Measure*. When Lucio asks Claudio why he has been arrested, Claudio responds that his arrest stems “[f]rom

too much liberty, my Lucio, liberty” (1.2.124). Too much (sexual) freedom, Claudio feels, has caused his arrest. In his conversation with the Friar, Duke Vincentio remarks on the antagonism between freedom and justice: “liberty plucks justice by the nose, / The baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart / Goes all decorum” (1.3.29-31). Clearly, in the Duke’s opinion, people who enjoy excessive freedom prove menacing to society and need to be controlled—particularly if they enjoy excessive sexual freedom. Freedom, Halpern notes, “is understood as the resistance to conformity, the creation of *difference*” (38, emphasis in original). Such a definition seems to suggest that people willingly construct themselves as different in order to be free. This is not the case, however, for Halpern notes that governmental bodies can use the definition above to control others by the “regulated production of difference” (38). That is, state entities “other” and name as “different” those people who do not conform to societal norms—as a means of social control. Generalizing Howard’s characterization of another literary prostitute, for example, one finds that a woman “cannot be an autonomous sexual subject and escape being called a whore” (“Sex” 184). Lack of conformity with sexual norms, thus, invokes an othering by those in power.

Prostitutes during the early modern period especially bear the brunt of the othering process, and they begin to find themselves imposed with a socially constructed sexual identity because of the elite’s anxieties about incipient capitalism. Prostitutes appear, professionally and on the surface, as ordinary capitalists, profiting from their means of production. As a previous discussion indicates, however, prostitutes themselves are not capitalists; rather they are workers for the capitalists. Regardless, Mandell notes that merchants often displaced their anxieties about the rising economic system onto prostitutes, thus “gendering...[capitalist] desires female” (107). Even more specifically than that, Mandell notes that the capitalists’ “[a]nxieties about the excesses of profit-hungry merchants

get displaced onto the fear that prostitutes are reaping excessive pleasure as well as too much money” (111). Those in control of capital effectively link “bad” capitalism with those pursuits that involve pleasure. Prostitutes, who engage in the business of *providing* pleasure, thus find themselves as marked sexual others.

Anxieties about capitalism get transferred onto prostitutes as subversive or othered identities as noted, and this happens to other low-life people as well—particularly the bawds in *Measure for Measure*. Dollimore explains, for instance, that “[w]hatever subversive identity the sexual offenders in this play possess is a construction put upon them by the authority which wants to control them; moreover control is exercised through that construction” (73). Once again, identity here is imposed upon people as a means to control them. When Angelo encounters Elbow with the arrested Pompey and Froth, Angelo asks about the nature of the criminals and Elbow remarks that they are “precise villains” (2.1.53), thus villainizing the characters because of their supposed involvement with the sex industry. Later, the Duke (disguised as Friar) berates Pompey with a question: “Canst thou believe thy living is a life, / So stinkingly depending?” (3.2.24-25). Here, the Duke others Pompey because of his status as a bawd who makes his “living” on the money exchanged for women—or the sexual services—they can provide; so completely othered in the Duke’s mind, Pompey seems unworthy of life.

Based on the frequent use of the term “vice,” it seems that Pompey, the bawds, and voiceless prostitutes are othered because of the capitalist juridical construction of “vice.” As influential critic Gayle Rubin explains, the dominant regime believes (or at least asserts) that vices “lead to crimes, and should therefore be prevented...[and] those who practice ‘vice’ are *non compos mentis* and should therefore be protected from their self-destruction” (329). These *non compos mentis*, or insane, individuals must be protected from themselves. Officers who

enforce anti-vice legislation, then, enforce morality. Angelo notably refers to vice when he should be sympathetic toward Isabella regarding her brother's impending death: "Ha! Fie, these filthy vices!" (2.4.41). The fact that Angelo refers to Claudio's crime as a vice clearly indicates the type of legislation he implements in Vienna. The Duke, notably disguised as a friar, condemns Pompey for his vice in language remarkably similar to Angelo's: "What 'tis to cram a maw or clothe a back / From such a filthy vice" (3.2.20-21). Given the Duke's appearance as a friar, it seems as though he can and should offer moral guidance. Despite this, however, he remains a governor of a state and, thus, secular law. Nevertheless, both Angelo and the Duke construct vice as a criminal offense.

The capitalists' construction of the lower class, and especially members of the sex industry, as vice-seeking sexual others causes these people to be viewed as one ubiquitous, undifferentiated group. Abhorson, for example, never calls Pompey by his name, and he, instead, simply calls for Pompey by saying, "Come on, bawd" (4.2.52). To Abhorson, Angelo, the Duke, and others, Pompey only is a bawd—a member of the sex industry. Similarly, Lucio remarks that he lied in court to avoid having to marry "the rotten medlar" Kate Keepdown (4.3.171). Lucio considers Keepdown as only simply another member of the group of sexual others that include Pompey and Mistress Overdone. Lucio notoriously others Mariana based on her attributes as "neither maid, widow, / nor wife" (5.1.178-79), for he promptly labels her by shouting from the crowd that "she may be a punk, for many of them / are neither maid, widow, nor wife" (5.1.180-81). Lucio refers to Mariana only in terms of his construction of her sexual identity. Lucio and others construct identities for marginalized people based upon their sexual acts.

All of the othering just described indicates quite clearly that the members of the lower classes are most often ostracized because of their sexualities. Scolnicov notes, for

instance, that the closure of the brothels in *Measure for Measure* “implicates only the low-life characters [as] engaged in the brothel trade” (80). Members of the lower class are condemned and othered even though it is members of the upper classes that tend to seek the sexual services offered. Given an economic system that caused—and, for the most part allowed—rampant prostitution, members of the upper class likely othered the members of the lower class because of their anxieties about capitalism, as well as their fears about the sexual behaviors within their own group. Rubin can help to clarify my sense here: “Disputes over sexual behavior often become the vehicles for displacing social anxieties and discharging their attendant emotional intensity” (306). By making sexual vices the focus of public attention, state entities can effectively avert attention away from truly problematic social ills. Evelyn Reed takes the argument a step further by remarking that, “[a]s [Friedrich] Engels demonstrates, class exploitation and sexual oppression ... were born together to serve the interests of the private-property system” (qtd. in Cloud 78). By displacing fears onto sexual others, then, the capitalists avoid facing the problems caused by their system—and the system remains fully functional and intact.

Given the condemnation and othering of lower class sexualities, one cannot help but wonder what constituted common sexualities in early modern England. First and foremost, Victoria Hayne remarks that pregnancy before marriage was a very common phenomenon “in Tudor-Stuart social life” (3). In fact, she notes that thirty-one to forty-four percent of women were (noticeably) pregnant at their weddings (5). Given these facts, it seems quite strange that Claudio should be punished for what was considered common sexual behavior during the early modern period. It seems that sex was regarded as “okay” as long as it was done silently. Couples who had sex and did not get pregnant as well as prostitutes and their Johns who did not get caught or cause a ruckus were allowed to continue happily through

life. Hayne explains this phenomenon by noting that “[i]n normal circumstances, both church and society tended to wink at prenuptial sex as long as it had no permanent socioeconomic consequences in the form of a child” (6). Thus, sex did not cause problems until permanent economic responsibilities became involved.

In the early modern period, pregnancy did not necessitate marriage in all circumstances. Hayne succinctly sets forth common marriage practice: “Only couples who had previously betrothed themselves and, by consummating their union, created a legally irrevocable marriage would be ordered to complete with public ritual what they had enacted in private” (6). Thus, those couples who publicly announced their intentions—and likely got family approval as well as dowry arrangements made—could have sex, and if they got pregnant, marriage, after minimal penance, would follow promptly thereafter. Couples who are not publicly betrothed create a potential societal problem, for marriage is not required and issues of financial support and related matters arise. Claudio and Julietta exemplify this situation. Although Claudio says of Julietta that “she is fast my wife” (1.2.146), the betrothal had not been made public because of problems in the “propagation of a dower” (1.2.149). Julietta’s family had not yet collected her dowry funds, and Claudio and Julietta were waiting for that to be completed before announcing their betrothal, creating a problematic space for them. “Lust and sex,” David Holbrook succinctly writes, “come up against the organization of society, heirdom, rights, property, and inheritance” (209). Much like a monarch hopes not to encounter a bastard child who demands the throne, men in pre-capitalist early modern society dreaded the return of bastard children seeking monies or lands, or the potentially detrimental forced marriage to a woman without a dowry.

As threatening as unrestrained sexuality may have seemed to early modern people, virginity may have proven even more so. Theodora A. Jankowski examines adult female

virgins as a queer space within early modern sexuality and remarks that “the perpetually virgin woman acted as a threat to the sexual economy of early modern England.” Quite notably, early moderns could easily construe the adult virgin woman as a threat to the *actual* economy of incipient capitalism. As mentioned previously, Foucault remarks that capitalist societies must reproduce their labor force in order for the system to remain in effect. Lucio voices his fears, for example, that Angelo’s severity regarding sex “will unpeople the province” (3.2.165). Thus, women who do not reproduce offspring can be seen as useless and detrimental to the hegemony. This is a generalization, of course, for virgins are not the only women who do not produce offspring. Married women without children prove quite frightening as well, since they do not fall into the societal reproductive norms.

Women must produce offspring in a very specific way in order for it to be socially acceptable in early modern pre-capitalist society—through marriage and within a family. Unlike the argument presented here that ties sexual repression to incipient capitalism, Jankowski’s argument links sexual repression (and familial discourses) to Protestantism. Jankowski sets forth her argument by juxtaposing the Vienna of *Measure for Measure* with the London of Shakespeare. Given the nuns and friars in the play, Vienna is certainly Catholic, while Shakespeare’s London, and likely many of his audience members, were Protestant. In her argument, Jankowski notes that Isabella’s trenchant virginity would have been quite astounding to an early modern Protestant audience. Within the Protestant framework, Jankowski notes, “marriage is the norm” and “vowed virginity is unnatural.” Foucault seems to raise his hand here to make the comment that those groups, such as Protestants—and especially the Puritan sect—who strongly value procreative marital sex do so because of “a general and intensive work imperative” (6). Thus, although Jankowski does not elucidate the connection, the Protestant work ethic necessitates the (re)production of children through a

marital procreative intercourse in order to supply the demanded number of workers required to maintain and proliferate a capitalist regime.

Protestant familialist discourses—like pre-capitalist ones—privatized family life. Mimicking the enclosures common within rising capitalism, families during the early modern period sought out simple lives disconnected, in general, from society at large. Catherine Belsey writes that during the early modern period, the home came “to be seen as a self-contained unit, a little world of retreat from the conflicts of the market-place” (173). The construction of the family as a societal norm results from and replicates capitalist logic. Dana Cloud asserts that “a relentless focus on ‘the family’ prioritizes the narrow task of protecting or enriching one’s private life over a broader program of political struggle” (73), thus effectively promoting apathy and disengagement. Further, Cloud notes that “[u]nder capitalism, the privatization of services associated with reproduction—housework, laundry, child care and rearing, food preparation, emotional support, and so on—is profitable to capitalists who do not have to bear any of the costs for these services” (72). The promoted familialist discourses celebrate the family in order to reap as much free labor as possible—and, ultimately, in order to reap as much monetary gain as possible.

So, incipient capitalism constructs numerous aspects of social life. As the discussion above indicates, capitalism helps to construct the notion of the family as a self-contained and disengaged unit that goes about its business without thinking too much (or at all) about the notably transitioning economic climate. Thus, people simply begin not to pay attention, and the capitalists want it this way in order to avoid disruption of their program of capital accumulation. The capitalists seek to maintain the system, and the construction of family helps to do so. The construction of non-procreative sexuality as deviant and “other” helps to

maintain the system as well. Regulation of sexuality in general helps those in charge regulate, control, and contain the populace—and especially the poor.

Angelo's rule of Vienna proves to be an interesting case-in-point, for he regulates sexuality in order to control the masses. In their first meeting, Angelo tells Isabella that prior to his rule, the laws were simply sleeping and that he has reawakened them once again because people would not dare do "evil / If the first that did th' edict infringe / Had answered for his deed" (2.2.91-93). In order to maintain the rule of law, then, at least one person must serve as a model of what *not* to do. Hence, Angelo puts Claudio to this regulatory purpose. Angelo arrests Claudio, a gentleman, for his sexual crime likely because the arrest of a person of high stature might best illustrate to the people of lower classes that if a person of that higher stature can be arrested for the sexual crime, they most certainly can as well—and with even greater frequency. Claudio, then, serves as an incredibly powerful example. Claudio remarks to Lucio that Angelo enacts the old sexual regulations "for a name...surely for a name" (1.2.168-170), meaning that Angelo wishes to enhance his reputation as a severe and effective regulator of sexual indiscretion.

One must wonder what Shakespeare's use of Angelo might indicate about early modern England around 1604 and 1605. Further, one must wonder what sort of power the reputation Angelo wishes for himself will afford him. As mentioned earlier, 1603 ushered in the new king, James I, following the death of Elizabeth I, and people were, of course, unsure of how the new king would rule, especially in matters of sexuality. After all, James came from Scotland, and as Hayne points out, Scotland "had since 1563 a law punishing adultery with death and fornication with imprisonment on bread and water (and banishment for the third offense)" (17). The people feared that James I would bring such laws with him to England, and it is no wonder that they thought this way, especially given the content of the

manifesto James wrote for his son—*Basilikon Doron*. James I offers his son advice about how to rule a country that seems quite (necessarily) sexually strict in nature. James, for example, tells his son to remain a virgin until married (76). James also notes that “if a man will be carefull to breed horfes and dogs of good kindes; howe much more carefull should he bee, for the breede of his owne loynes?” (80). Thus, James wishes his son to carefully choose a wife that will allow him to produce worthy heirs. James additionally warns Henry about adultery because a bastard child may “vnnaturally” rebel against the kingdom (81). James I wants his son to avoid any of the difficulties that sex outside of wedlock may cause.

James I’s ideas about sexuality, then, place him within the staunch Protestant belief framework mentioned above. Although his words in *Basilikon Doron* are, indeed, strict, he deals with his son in this strict manner in order to ensure effective rule and the continuance of his name as the ruler of England. That said, James I was certainly not a Puritan. James even warns his son about the Puritans: “Take heede therefore (my Sonne) to fuch PVRITANS, very peftes in the Church, and common-weale: whom no deferts can oblige; neither oathes or promifes bind; breathing nothing but fedition and calumnies (41-42). Given his despise of the Puritans, James’ proclamation of 1603 that called for the removal of vagrants who might have spread the plague, then, served only to send the message that vagrants and (sexual) undesirables needed to be displaced. It did not, however, send the message that they should be killed. Puritans like Phillip Stubbes, however, argued for mortal punishments of adulterous behavior, as Stubbes does in his 1583 *Anatomie of Abufes*: “I would wish that the man or woman who are certainly knowne without all fcruple or doubt, to have committed the horrible fact of Whoredom, Adulterie, Inceft, or Fornication...fhould drink a full draught of Moifes cup, that is, tafte of prefont death” (57).

Puritan thought certainly circulated and proliferated around the time of *Measure for Measure's* production.

Given this fact, the figure of Angelo seems to represent a “what if Puritans ruled the country?” type of exploration. Hayne argues that Duke Vincentio’s naming of Angelo as “precise” and as a “seemer” constructs him as a Puritan (1.3.50; 1.3.54), since those terms were “the more common Elizabethan pejorative terms for the social type we now label puritan” (18). Flanigan argues that Shakespeare purposely created the figure of Angelo as a way to question James I about how he would handle sexual transgressions, with the hope of influencing him toward a non-Puritanical route (36). Given the discussion above about Protestantism, it seems quite evident that a Protestant king would wish not to “unpeople” his country, to mimic Lucio, by imposing the death penalty for adulterous acts; the workforce would dwindle rapidly. As Hayne notes, for Protestants, “marriage—however unromantic—is preferable to death” because it at least can reproduce itself (28-29). Protestant marriage and familial rhetoric usurps Puritan death rhetoric.

Upon his return to Vienna, Duke Vincentio wields power away from the Puritan, Angelo, by enforcing the Protestant norm of marriage. Angelo exchanges treasonous words with the Duke when he is in the audience disguised as a friar in the final scene, but the Lucio removes the Duke’s hood and all discover the criminal nature of Angelo’s words. After meekly telling the revealed Duke that “death / Is all the grace” he wants and that he certainly deserves punishment (5.1.371-372), Duke Vincentio promptly tells him to take Mariana “and marry her instantly” (5.1.375). Angelo’s treason, interestingly, gets *punished* with marriage—not death. Marilyn French insightfully remarks that “Angelo is *condemned* to marriage” (196, my emphasis). Whether it is as a punishment or a condemnation, Duke Vincentio orders

marriages as the means to “pay” for crimes. Duke Vincentio condemns Lucio to marriage as well:

If any woman wronged by this lewd fellow –  
 As I have heard him swear himself there’s one  
 Whom he begot with child – let her appear,  
 And he shall marry her. (5.1.507-510)

As punishment for his sexual indiscretion, Lucio gets sentenced to marriage with Kate Keepdown, the mother of his child. Claudio, similarly, must marry Julietta because of their inappropriate sexual behavior.

It is worthwhile to note that the characters who receive marriage sentences are members of the elite classes. Angelo, Lucio, and Claudio are all gentlemen, it should be noted. Mistress Overdone, Pompey, and the voiceless prostitutes, however, receive jail time as punishment for their (sexual) crimes, and they receive this type of punishment because of their lower class status. It seems quite clear here that marriage is a *compulsory* punishment for members of the upper class because it promotes a procreative relationship that perpetuates the emerging capitalist regime. By this, I mean that the rulers of the state of Vienna—Duke Vincentio standing at the fore—wish to reproduce only the truly elite members of society; hence, the gentlemen are forced to marry and reproduce children who will reproduce their class, as well as the values of the ruling class. Although the lower classes are not condemned to marriage, the familialist discourses mentioned previously construct marriage as the norm. Fear of being labeled a sexual other provokes members of the lower classes into marriage when they can, and leads to the reproduction of the lower classes—the labor force.

In *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare illustrates how the hegemonic construction of sexual others makes marriage and familialism the norm in order to maintain and perpetuate

the rising capitalist system—and he implicitly critiques this process. The marriages Shakespeare presents at the end of the play are best characterized as *obscene*, for they cast marriage as a punishment—as a life sentence, if you like. These marriages exist as obscene because Shakespeare constructs them that way: To Shakespeare, the marriages serve as punishments precisely because they will reproduce the emerging exploitative system of capitalism. Shakespeare critiques the system that relies on the construction of fear-inducing others in order to divert public attention away from the creeping, land-collecting capitalists who are gradually building their economic base. Shakespeare, with incredible foresight, predicts the covert, coercive destructiveness of capitalism seen in the contemporary world. Engaged in a costly and unnecessary wars in the Middle East (overtly for freedom, covertly for the commodity of oil), the federal government focuses on the *horrors* of gay marriage, for example. To critical, progressive, modern readers of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, the subversive underpinnings of its twisted capitalist rhetoric resound: In Shakespeare's Vienna, even a nun must get married; even a nun must beget the system by allowing capitalism to rape and impregnate her—but at least she's not a whore.

**CHAPTER 12**

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**Construction Zone—From the Bawdy Other to Capitalism: An Interlude**

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We exist within a world which is in a constant state of mutability. Just like the roads in northern climes, our world is under constant construction. The world isn't just a place that exists and that we exist within. Rather, we are constantly shaping and reshaping the world around us through our words and actions. I use the term "we" here in a hopeful way, meaning I hope "we"—the average people of the world—have some say in the way the world is shaped. I believe we do to an extent, but, to a greater extent, our world is shaped by the powers that be—the dominant, patriarchal hegemony. What this means is that our world is primarily shaped within a sexist, homophobic, white-dominated, and capitalist framework.

What I hope to do with projects like the ones that immediately precede and follow this interlude is to illustrate the ways in which texts may overtly or subtly counter the dominant regimes by attempting to shape or reshape power structures or our understanding of them. Many texts subtly seek to deconstruct patriarchal thought, and sometimes this subtle language simply needs to be coaxed out by employing a useful critical framework—something like queer theory, for example. Regardless of how these discourses may reveal themselves, our society (as well as societies past) is informed by discourses that counter the dominant one. Just like the informal discourse of this interlude, these counter-discourses seek to critique and potentially reshape—but not necessarily fully replace—the society in which we live. I am being careful here because I do not want to suggest that a particular discourse that I personally favor should overtake or replace the dominant one simply because I believe it to be, somehow, inherently better. I don't want somebody's regime forced onto me, so it makes sense that I shouldn't want to force a regime onto somebody else. Despite this, I do believe that some societal framework exists that would better suit the

majority of people in the world; this would be a framework free of exploitation and repression—one that inherently values all people and organisms and that respects the earth and the cosmos as an interconnected, interdependent system that can *only* self-destruct should this interactivity be co-opted or denied.

Implementing such a societal framework would be a tall order, indeed, and it probably would involve the complete eradication of all prior repressive regimes that we have come to know and live within. The realization of the mutability of our world is incredibly powerful, and working to effect changes upon that world is even more powerful than that. But this is where the characters in the plays discussed prior to and after this interlude lose power. As I discuss in both papers, certain characters seem to realize the oppression they face at the hands of those in charge, and these characters almost do something to effect social change, but they do not go far enough, leaving themselves overlooked and repressed. They are at the mercy of the regime who will construct and other them, and this is a precariously powerless position in which they find themselves.

People are othered on a large scale. More interestingly, people are othered on a smaller scale in their everyday lives, and I find it incredibly amazing how people are othered even in microcosm. A personal anecdote should help me describe what I mean here. It is not the proudest bit of family trivia to share, but it is common knowledge within my family that my great-grandmother worked as a madam in the late 1920s and 30s in order to make a living during greatly depressed economic conditions. This woman's desperate survival strategy would cause a great many people to look at her with disdain and to write her off as some deviant other, even though they knew nothing extensive about her. The dominant powers are so embedded into society that the rules of the regime are even enforced on an individual level. Here we see the regime enforcing its power by exploiting its fear of non-

procreative sex. More importantly, we see here the regime pitting people against each other in order to help maintain its power.

On an intuitive level, one stranger's employment in the sex industry should have no real immediate consequences for any of the people othering that person, yet they are othered nonetheless. What these people are doing is calling out their fears of minor difference, while ignoring the greater similarities that may potentially bond them together, and that, I believe, is a great shame of our society. Should people look for similarity rather than difference, they will find far more potentially powerful possibilities for themselves. Instead of seeing the sex worker as some deviant other, one may understand that person as a victim of an exploitative society, and one may further understand that one's choice to other that sex worker simply further exploits that worker and implicates themselves as part of the exploitative regime.

This exploitative regime called capitalism very powerfully constructs our understanding of the world around us. It seems almost like this regime has always been in place, but it has not. In fact, this system of understanding has only been around for about four hundred years, so in the scheme of human history, capitalism is a relatively new phenomenon. But capitalism had a powerful grip on society from the very beginning, as capitalists acquired lands and began exploiting people for monetary gain. The plays discussed both before and after this interlude lay their scenes in the very tumultuous time period of early capitalism, and we see the characters struggling with the inherent exploitative nature of the regime. We also see characters attempting to strike out against this exploitation, but failing to effect change.

In the next piece, "The Construction of Self and Failed Rebellion in *Arden of Faversham*," we will see Alice Arden symbolically act out against oppression but not effect change. The implications of this hold consequence for any modern overthrow of capitalism.

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**CHAPTER 13**


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The Construction of Self and Failed Rebellion in *Arden of Faversham*

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By Josiah P. Peeples IV

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 Partial fulfillment of the requirements of English 769:  
 Studies in Figures and Groups  
 (Special Theme: Marx and Freud)

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My coming  
 to you was about the plat of ground which  
 wrongfully you detain from me. Although the  
 rent of it be very small, yet it will help my wife  
 and children, which here I leave in Faversham,  
 God knows, needy and bare. For Christ's sake,  
 let them have it! (*Arden of Faversham* 13.11-17)

Sheer anger resonates in the lines above. Reede, a dispossessed former tenant of lands purchased by Thomas Arden of Faversham, lashes out here at Arden and wishes for his brutal death on the very “plot of ground” Arden has taken from him (13.32). Reede rebels against Arden, who exists as the symbol of an encroaching system—capitalism. This system divides lands, commodifies them, sells them, and forcefully removes people from them. Though Reede’s wish for Arden’s death finds fulfillment by the end of *Arden of Faversham*, it is important to question the implications of this act, especially since Arden, after all, only symbolizes an oppressive system. Incipient capitalism, in the form of Thomas Arden’s murdered body, leaves a bloody stain on the lands once belonging to the people he dispossessed. As a play critical of capital accumulation, *Arden of Faversham* illustrates the dangers of rampant self-interest (including the “freedoms” offered by capitalism that allow people to construct “identities” for themselves) and its bleak ending serves as a warning that self-interested, rather than collective, action causes the stain of incipient capitalism to grow ever larger—and the dispossessed to remain dispossessed.

A brief overview of *Arden of Faversham* (Anonymous, 1591) seems in order at the outset. The play follows closely, but fictionalizes, the actual death of Thomas Arden of

Faversham at the hands of his wife, her lover, and hired “ruffians” in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century. As a result of the Dissolution Act of 1536, Arden acquired the lands of the Abbey of Faversham, much to the dismay of its inhabitants, who became dispossessed. This act, issued by King Henry VIII, effectively denied the legitimacy of monastic ownership and shifted possession of the lands to the crown such that Henry VIII could, in turn, sell the lands at a great profit (Orlin 58). Arden was a man of wealth because of this acquisition—and because of his marriage to a woman, Alice, of higher social status. Alice’s parents did not want her to marry Mosby, a social-climbing steward, and, instead, matched her with Arden, who received a large dowry. It is for this reason that critic I-Chung Wang characterizes *Arden of Faversham* as a play stemming from “the tension created by the interaction of social and economic classes” (193). Alice and Mosby constantly engage in trysts with each other and they vow to get rid of Arden so that they can marry and enjoy the riches. Greene, a tenant displaced as a result of Arden’s land acquisition, tells Alice of his anger and his wish to kill Arden. Alice pretends to be a battered woman, further inciting Greene, and she offers Greene money to hire killers to rid her of her husband. The low-life killers botch murder attempts frequently, but they finally succeed with the help of Mosby and Alice (who deals the final blow) in Arden’s own game room. All parties present at the time of the murder (and even one innocent person who was not present) are brutally killed for their “involvement”—with Alice getting burned alive. At the end of the play, Arden’s friend Franklin both eulogizes and criticizes Arden’s greed.

As the brief overview makes clear, issues of land ownership and acquisition are featured prominently within *Arden of Faversham*. In fact, the play opens with Franklin informing Arden that he has successfully acquired the lands of the Abbey of Faversham:

My gracious Lord, the Duke of Somerset,  
 Hath freely given to thee and to thy heirs,  
 By letters patents from his Majesty,  
 All the lands of the Abbey of Faversham.  
 Here are the deeds, sealed and subscribed  
 With his name and the King's. (1.2-7)

Arden's acquisition of the Abbey lands proves quite characteristic of the changing conceptualization of land and land ownership during the mid-sixteenth century (when the historical Arden lived). Lena Cowen Orlin notes that prior to 1536, monasteries owned about one-quarter of the land in England (58). As the play's opening scene illustrates, Arden receives "letters patents from" the King. Thus, Arden benefits directly from the dissolution of monastic lands, in the sense that he is able to purchase an extensive plot of ground directly from the crown.

This plot of ground, however, is more than simply a vast, unused wasteland. In fact, people *live* and *subsist* on these lands—and they are left to the mercy of the new landlord—Arden. Mihoko Suzuki succinctly characterizes "Arden's acquisition of the Abbey lands through royal grant" as a nullification of "previous leases on the land" (33), meaning that once Arden received the letters patents of royal grant confirming his rightful ownership, he could do as he pleased with the lands. The inhabitants of lands similar to the ones acquired by Arden become, more often than not, dispossessed. That is, the new owners void leases and forcefully dismiss residents. What we see in *Arden of Faversham*, then, is one aspect of what Karl Marx refers to as the process of primitive accumulation. This primitive accumulation is, according to Marx in *Capital*, "not the result of the capitalistic mode of production, but its starting point" (500). Dissolution of monastic lands as well as the

enclosures of lands to allow for sheep grazing both exist as part of the process by which land has been accumulated. This process, Marx observes, drives “out, *en masse*, the hereditary subtenants” and forces them to look for work (505). The keywords here seem to be “drives out,” for the process of primitive accumulation relies on force and coercion (supported by law) to expel inhabitants from lands. Marx offers a damning characterization of primitive accumulation:

The spoliation of the church’s property, the fraudulent alienation of the State domains, the robbery of the common lands, the usurpation of feudal and clan property, and its transformation into modern private property under circumstances of reckless terrorism, were just so many idyllic methods of primitive accumulation. They conquered the field for capitalist agriculture, made the soil part and parcel of capital, and created for the town industries the necessary supply of a ‘free’ and outlawed proletariat. (509)

Words like “alienation,” “robbery,” and “terrorism” effectively illustrate the force and violence by which early modern protocapitalists acquired property.

The process of primitive accumulation violently dispossesses people, and, even more generally, it dramatically alters social relations. During Arden’s lifetime, critic Garrett A. Sullivan remarks, the conception of land ownership changed most quickly and dramatically: “*Arden of Faversham* takes sides in an Elizabethan struggle over the cultural function of land, a struggle in which older conceptions of property as social office are troubled by emergent ideologies and technologies that imply a radically different view of what it means to be a landowner” (231). This “radically different view,” of course, refers to conceptualizations of land ownership that stem from primitive accumulation— notions of private property and dispossession. Prior to the emergence of such an understanding of land, landlords were

considered in general to be “beneficent,” to use Sullivan’s term (232). Feudal social arrangements relied upon mutuality; that is, the tenant served his lord, and the lord, in turn, offered protection for the tenant.

The process of primitive accumulation effectively erases the social and mutually beneficial aspects of the feudal system. Sullivan observes a notable “shift in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries toward a more unabashedly economic relationship between lord and tenant” (234). Land, for the first time, becomes commodified as a result of the processes of primitive accumulation. Sullivan, once again, characterizes the time period effectively, for he notes that during the early modern period, the “emergent view of land” was “not as social space but as commodity, as saleable, manipulable lot” (236). Much like the land, the inhabitants of the land become “saleable” and “manipulable” as well, and the inhabitants were indeed often forcefully manipulated. Understanding the elision of the social aspects of land ownership that occurred under the auspices of primitive accumulation, Richard Halpern writes that “[f]orce became expulsive rather than binding, centrifugal rather than centripetal” (73). Feudal systems, in other words, attempted to care for and tend to its citizens. Emergent pre-capitalist society sought simply to expel people from their lands—to wash their hands of them by dispossessing them and making them seek employment or vagrancy in the cities.

Marx, of course, regards this change in the mode of social relations as both resultant and indicative of incipient capitalism. Invoking markedly strong language, Marx describes the results of what Halpern refers to as the “expulsive” tendencies of rising capitalism: The dispossessed “were turned *en masse* into beggars, robbers, vagabonds, partly from inclination, in most cases from stress of circumstances. Hence at the end of the 15th and during the whole of the 16th century, throughout Western Europe a bloody legislation against

vagabondage” (515). Not only were people *forced* into vagrancy, laws were enacted to violently ban it. Thus, often, Marx notes, “every man in good health from 16 to 60 years of age, if without means of subsistence and not practising a trade, is to be sent to the galleys” during this time period. Though anti-vagrancy laws serve to expel people from society by placing them out of sight in prisons, Marx understands that such legislation truly serves as a scare tactic that forces people to seek lives of wage labor rather than lives of vagrancy: “Thus were the agricultural people, first forcibly expropriated from the soil, driven from their homes, turned into vagabonds, and then whipped, branded, tortured by laws grotesquely terrible, into the discipline necessary for the wage system.” Incipient capitalism delineates a clear path for dispossessed peoples: They can either risk prison via vagrancy, or they can sell their labor.

The limited future prospects afforded to dispossessed peoples most certainly proved greatly distressing. Upon hearing the news of Arden’s acquisition of the Abbey lands, a tenant, Greene, stops by Arden’s house to see if the information is true—as well as what consequences he might face. Upon discovering that Arden is away in London with Franklin, Greene implores Alice for an answer to his concerns, and she tells him that the lands belong to Arden and that “whatsoever leases were before / Are void for the term of Master Arden’s life. / He hath the grant under the Chancery seal” (1.466-468). Any claim to any portion of the Abbey lands, that is, that Greene had once been entitled to have been made effectively null-and-void because of Arden’s acquisition of them. Losing his land—his means of subsistence—proves incredibly distressing to Greene, and he openly curses Arden as he expresses his discontent to Alice:

Your husband doth me wrong

To wring me from the little land I have.

My living is my life; only that  
 Resteth remainder of my portion.  
 Desire of wealth is endless in his mind,  
 And he is greedy-gaping still for gain;  
 Nor cares he may scrape and hoard up in his pouch.  
 But seeing he hath taken my lands, I'll value life  
 As careless as he is careful for to get;  
 And tell him this from me: I'll be revenged,  
 And so as he shall wish the Abbey lands  
 Had rested still within their former state. (1.470-482)

Greene looks upon Arden and sees a man of great wealth who remains “greedy-gaping still for gain.” Arden does not require the Abbey lands in order to subsist, while Greene does. The lands that Greene once possessed were all that he had to show for his “portion”—his inheritance—and these lands represent his “life,” for they most certainly have been marked with his sweat, blood, and toil as he worked the land. Greed, in Greene’s opinion, has stolen his livelihood, and he vows that such self-interested endeavors shall not persist.

Within the context of community-oriented feudal society, Greene’s oppositions to Arden’s self-interested behavior seems warranted, but players in *Arden of Faversham* find themselves immersed within a transitional period between feudalism and capitalism—within a transitional period in which even terms such as “self-interest” acquire new meanings. In her book, *Idioms of Self-Interest*, critic Jill Phillips Ingram remarks that “[i]ncreasingly during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, economic agents with a wide range of motivations began to assimilate practices and languages that legitimized personal profit and advantage” (3). In other words, as protocapitalist endeavors increase, the values associated

with such activities become more frequent in common discourse. Thus, over time, the values, though regarded with disdain in the not so distant past, become commonplace and find ever greater public acceptance. Ingram argues that much of the drama and literature produced during the early modern period embraces self-interest. In fact, she asserts that “the imaginative literature of the period...give[s] unique names and voices to” self-interested individuals and serves “as models for the new economic individual” (16). Early modern literature, then, reveres the self-interested individual, and exposure to such literature helps people become individuated, self-interested “selves.”

In a sense, people during the early modern period become parcelized—a term I use here to differently connote the term “individuated”—much like the lands that become ever divided into smaller units in order for landlords to reap further economic gains. Sullivan’s discussion of *Arden of Faversham* focuses upon the perfection, and increased use, of land survey technologies during the early modern period. In short, Sullivan notes that surveys made landowners aware of the breadth of their lands, while accurate maps helped landowners effectively choose potentially profitable lands for future acquisition (231). Maps demarcate parcels of land as discrete units that can be bought and sold. “Plots and surveys,” Sullivan writes, “play a small but important part in leading us away from ideologies of feudal reciprocity and toward capitalist conceptions of space that, at a systemic level, carve space into fungible units and, in doing so, efface the social” (242). Lands, that is, become fragmented chunks of value with no inherent material human connections. Moreover, the use of maps and surveys allows landowners the freedom to buy, sell, and generally control lands “from *any* chair” (240), meaning that landowners may never see the lands they own nor the people that inhabit (or once inhabited) them. They only see their own interests.

The commodification of property during the early modern period seems quite clear, but *Arden of Faversham* extrapolates to illustrate the ways in which women become commodified property as well. Arden understands Alice as his personal property and he becomes enraged at Mosby for trespassing on his “property.” Notably, Arden tells Mosby “I must have a mandate for my wife; / They say you seek to rob me of her love” (1.302-303). Alice exists as a valuable commodity that one can, in a sense, “rob” from Arden, and Arden wishes to keep his asset. It seems odd to speak of a woman as an asset or a piece of property, but capitalism, I believe, allows us to do so. In a very literal sense, Alice has many of the attributes of a factory in her role as wife. Dana Cloud offers an excellent summary of the ways in which capitalism privatizes domestic life to the benefit of the capitalist: “Under capitalism, the privatization of services associated with reproduction—housework, laundry, child care and rearing, food preparation, emotional support, and so on—is profitable to capitalists who do not have to bear any of the costs for these services” (72). The domestic sphere, maintained by a wife, then, allows (proto-)capitalists to venture outside of their households in order to accumulate more capital. Wives can also be literally productive in the sense that they have the ability to produce offspring. As Randall Martin remarks, “Arden’s ambitions and behaviours are inflected by the cultural pressures of male dynastic inheritance” (15). In a very material way, then, Arden wants to keep his “property” safe in order for him to be able to produce a male heir who can continue his capitalistic endeavors. Both Arden and Mosby seek Alice with these interests in mind.

Susan, Alice’s serving woman (and Mosby’s sister), exists, on the other hand, as a commodity that numerous people want to manipulate and exchange for personal gain. “I say that Susan’s thine” (1.161), Alice tells Arden’s serving man, Michael, with the stipulation that he must kill his master so that she and Mosby can marry. “Clarke, here’s my hand; my sister

shall be thine” (1.261), Mosby tells Clarke, the village artist, in hopes that his poisoned painting will kill Arden so that he can marry Alice. Susan simply exists as a commodity that Alice and Mosby hope to use to purchase their desired future. Were Michael and Clarke interested in diamonds, Susan could easily be replaced by this commodity. Alice and Mosby disregard Susan’s well-being, and, instead, only see their own interests.

*Arden of Faversham* also illustrates the extent to which self-interest can make people become murderously greedy. I do not mean to imply here that incipient capitalism created the first historical manifestation of greed; that would be absurd. I intend to show how incipient capitalism invests the ownership of capital with such high value that any means seem appropriate to acquire it. Michael, in his quest to attain Susan’s affections, guiltlessly remarks that he will “rid” his “elder brother away” to make “the farm of Bolton” his very “own” (1.171-173). Michael seems to have no qualms about murdering his own brother when that murder means that he can take possession of his property. In fact, Michael thinks that all people think in this way when he poses the question, “Who would not venture upon house and land / When he may have it for a right-down blow?” (1.174-175). In other words, one would have to be stupid not to kill a family member in order to “inherit” property. Interestingly, Michael is not the only character who feels such sentiment. Black Will and Shakebag, the murderers that Greene hires to kill Arden, both comment on the use of murder as a means to attain property. After Greene propositions Black Will and Shakebag with a significant sum of money to murder Arden, Black Will exclaims that no deed would be impossible for that sum of money: “[I]f thou’lt have they own father slain that thou / mayst inherit his land, we’ll kill him” (2.96-97). “Aye, thy mother, thy sister, thy brother, or all thy kin” (2.98), Black Will’s sidekick, Shakebag, retorts. The acquisition of property it seems, given this rampant rhetoric, is as simple as murdering a landed relative.

To recapitulate, the transition from feudalism to capitalism is branded with many of the underpinnings of modern capitalism. First, lands become commodified. Lands exist as commodities so that property owners can ignore any other human claims to the land and focus, instead, on their absolute ownership of the commodity. Second, people, in turn, become commodities in the sense that land ownership easily displaces them and provides an opportunity for protocapitalists to exchange these people for their potentially valuable labor. The wage-laborer, in turn, works a full day simply in order to survive. Weary from daily toil, the wage-laborer seeks solace in family life or personal diversions, rather than interacting with fellow laborers. This is the direction toward which this discussion now turns.

My understanding of the “self,” or of “identity,” follows the tradition of Michel Foucault and the revisionists of queer theories that were sparked, in large part, by his works. In volume one of his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that the repression of sexuality and the social construction of discrete sexuality identities “coincide[s] with the development of capitalism” (5). He notes, further, that such repression and construction of sexualities “becomes an integral part of the bourgeois order” (5). Capitalism, Foucault argues, regards sex other than the heterosexual, familial kind as “incompatible with a general and intensive work imperative” (6). Basically, capitalism demands that people be working, not expending their energies with sex. Things are not quite so simple, however, because procreative sex is required by capitalism, but even that kind of sex must be “reduced to a minimum” and only serves to “reproduce” the system (6). Repressive views of sexuality led, in the mid-nineteenth century, to the social construction of the homosexual “other”—a person whose identity found its basis in the sexual acts the person engages in, or as Foucault writes: “The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (43). Once

the term “homosexual” was invented, the term “heterosexual” had to be invented as well, leaving society with dichotomized sexuality.

Binary understandings of sexuality (and gender, race, and so on) prove limiting and problematic and many resistance groups and theorists have sought to problematize and deconstruct them. Queer theorists are one such group that has taken on this task. The term “queer” reflects what Foucault calls a “reverse discourse” (101), for the use of this term allows homosexuality “to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturalness’ be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary” (101). The ability for “queers” to appropriate the derogatory name as a means for empowerment illustrates the socially constructed nature of language—and of the identities informed by that language. Queer theories seek to “resist closure” (v), regarding identity, as queer theorist Nikki Sullivan puts it. Queer theories, then, seek to “queer” the notion that (sexual) identities are in some way fixed by showing that people can (re)construct identities for themselves.

Influential queer theorist Judith Butler understands identity as a mutable performance that sets itself up as “true.” Butler writes that gender (and sexuality as well) “*is a kind of imitation for which there is no original*; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an *effect* and consequence of the imitation itself” (361). Butler regards heterosexuality as “*compulsory*” within American culture, for “acting out of line with heterosexual norms brings with it ostracism, punishment, and violence, not to mention the transgressive pleasures produced by those very prohibitions” (363). Butler argues that heterosexuality has falsely set itself up as the original and ideal sexuality, for, as she notes, “if it were not for the notion of the homosexual *as* copy, there would be no construct of heterosexuality *as* origin” (361). Like gender, then, heterosexuality is forced to repeat itself continually in order for it to appear as though it has always existed in some ideal form.

(Proto)capitalism, Butler might argue, then, sets itself up (falsely) as the original state of affairs (the most useful, best mode) and this assertion must be constantly repeated and ingrained into the psyches of the those immersed in the system in order maintain its perceived status as such.

Tenets of capitalism, such as commodification and familialism, afford people the ability to construct individuated “selves,” and these “selves” have a tendency to fragment society and alienate group affiliation. It seems that most people would agree that people require a sense of “self” in order to feel liberated or free, but few people, it is likely, consider what being a unique individual might mean in the broader political spectrum. Critic Dana Cloud has deeply considered the notion of individuality and what it means. For instance, Cloud remarks that intense focus “on individuality and personal life has invested ... the elaboration of a self with paramount significance” (84). Once people understand that they can construct selves, in other words, they pursue this endeavor ravenously—and often without considering themselves as part of any sort of community. For this reason, Cloud writes that “[c]apitalist society produces selves that are preoccupied with their own self-invention” (84). Moreover, Cloud argues that the “goal” of capitalism “is to create and sustain the illusion of the subject as a private individual, unconnected to class and labor, and free to choose commodities and pleasures without regard to place within the mode of production” (84). Capitalism, then, forces people into mindless self construction as a means to divert their attention away from the fact that they are being continually exploited by the system. At the same time, of course, these people are also too busy constructing selves that they fail to form relationships which may potentially have led to the realization of their rampant exploitation.

The desire for wealth, so prominent in *Arden of Faversham*, seems simply to be a further manifestation of a desire for a self. Orlin writes that protocapitalism allowed people of lower ranks to increase their social status, for these people traded “their hard-earned money for a chance at gentility” (60). For many, “land signified not profit but status,” Orlin remarks. This “status” that people sought through the acquisition of land wealth, then, represents a sort of “self”—a title acquired by one’s own personal effort. Tom McCall defines the term “passion” as “capital, wealth, status, property” (615). The wealth- and self-seeking land speculators do, in fact, seem to operate from this sense of passion—this extreme desire for a wealthy self. Eugene W. Holland notes that capitalism “represses desire not negatively, by restraining or prohibiting it, but ‘positively’ or constructively, by capturing it, stimulating and enhancing it, so as to continually increase surplus-production” (89). That is, capitalism encourages the passion and desire for wealth discussed herein. This desire for wealth really proves to be a desire for surplus value, since vast tracts of land provide more than subsistence (or pure use) value. Such desire keeps people continuously producing—and continually desiring and constructing (wealthy) selves.

Having articulated capitalism’s embrace of self-construction, as well as the problematic aspects of such desire, I can now explore the ways in which the characters in *Arden of Faversham* construct selves—and what these constructions might mean. Alice Arden is married, but she loves Mosby, rather than her husband. Alice’s marital situation saddens her, and she desires freedom regarding her love life. In her examination of *Arden of Faversham*, critic Julie R. Schutzman describes the time period between Alice’s decision to murder Arden and the time the murder actually took place as her “suspended moment” of freedom (291). Alice’s own actions allow her to enjoy this time as an autonomous subject. Alice marks her desire for autonomy by scoffing at Arden’s wish to “govern me that I am to

rule myself” (10.84). Alice wishes to “rule” herself—to direct the course of her life on her own. Schutzman argues further that during the suspended moment of freedom, Alice’s “actions constitute a female autonomy that subverts small-town social order and patriarchal authority” (289). Alice constructs a self with the freedom to be highly critical of the dominant regime.

Within her critique of the systems of power, Alice’s opposition to her unchosen marriage to Arden proves most striking. Alice questions the legitimacy and importance of marriage when she flippantly remarks that she is only “tied to” Arden “by marriage” (1.100). This institution seems to have no real significance for her. She, instead, reveres love rather than marriage, for she notes that “Love is a god, and marriage is but words” (1.101). Love, for Alice, represents something true and fulfilling. Marriage, on the other hand, “is but words”—an incredibly false and meaningless social construction. “[T]herefore Mosby’s title is the best” (1.102), Alice concludes, clearly indicating that she wishes to pursue Mosby’s love in spite of the dominant system.

Alice chooses to pursue an autonomous self able to love and desire freely. Alice pointedly remarks that nothing can hinder her will to seek the self—and the love—she desires: Mosby, she passionately says, “shall be mine / In spite of him [Arden], of Hymen, and of rites” (1.103-104). Frank Whigham suggests that Alice and Mosby seek to legitimize a relationship that is “denied by the system” (85), meaning that economic reasons, rather than emotional attachments, dictated marriage arrangements in most cases during the early modern period. Alice and Mosby hope to reconceptualize the notion of marriage. Although Alice’s desire for a loving marriage illustrates to a limited extent the unique self that she constructs, her vehement desire to construct her self plays out when Alice deals the blow that finally kills Arden. “Take this for *hind’ring* Mosby’s love and *mine*” (14.247, emphasis

mine), Alice shouts as she stabs Arden. Alice takes issue with being hindered, so she rids herself of Arden—the person she believes hinders her ability to love Mosby and freely live the self she constructs.

Arden seeks the wealthy self discussed above because incipient capitalism affords people the ability to increase social status by acquiring wealth and property. To employ an anachronistic term, Arden is best described as a social climber. Arden's marriage to Alice helped effect his upward climb, for Alice's family (Lord North was her step-father) paid Arden a generous dowry so that she could not marry the even lower class Mosby. This significant amount of money, in conjunction with widely available land as a result of the Dissolution, allowed Arden to build his wealth. Michael Neill remarks that "[t]he increasing commodification of land in sixteenth-century England, as the play reminds us, did not simply convert it into a highly visible form of material possession; rather, it made it a key mechanism by which mere pelf [or money] could be transformed into social prestige, conferring an aura of legitimacy upon upward mobility" (75). Arden pursues land ownership to effect this "upward mobility." The acquisition of ever more property serves to further increase Arden's social status, which, in turn, further legitimates Arden's sense of self.

Mosby, too, pursues upward mobility and the wealthy self. Not born into wealth, Mosby is forced to increase his social status by working at a trade and by going into service for the nobility. As Arden remarks, Mosby is "[a] botcher, and no better at the first" (1.25). Mosby, that is, worked as a tailor for a portion of his life, and Arden regards such ordinary work with disdain and as indicative of Mosby's lower class. Though a social climber himself, Arden regards Mosby's decision to go into service contemptuously, for he remarks that Mosby "[c]rept into service of a nobleman" (1.27). Arden seems to feel that such service is a problematic and illegitimate way in which to increase one's social standing, and the use of

the word “crept” vilifies Mosby’s endeavors. Further vilifying Mosby, Arden says that “by his servile flattery and fawning” (1.28), Mosby “[i]s now become the steward of his house, / And bravely jets it in his silken gown” (1.29-30). Mosby’s service increases his social status such that he becomes the steward of the nobleman’s house—a powerful position, indeed.

Arden critiques Mosby’s social climbing largely because he fears losing his wife to him, but the play, more generally, critiques upward mobility as well. Regarding social climbers, Suzuki writes that *Arden of Faversham* shows a marked “hostility toward them” (35). The play, then, critiques upward mobility as a problematic and self-serving practice. Interestingly, Mosby himself condemns the life path on which he has chosen to proceed. “My golden time was when I had no gold” (8.11), Mosby laments, noting that even though he wanted material possessions, he “slept secure” because his “daily toil begat...[his] night’s repose” (8.12-13). Mosby even literalizes his upward climb toward higher social status:

But since I climbed the top bough of the tree  
 And sought to build my nest among the clouds,  
 Each gentle starry gale doth shake my bed  
 And makes me dread my downfall to the earth. (8.15-18)

Mosby makes it quite clear that his climb to “the top bough of the tree” of social status does not guarantee that he will stay there forever. In fact, he constantly fears his “downfall to the earth.” His social status, in other words, must be continually reconstructed. This seems to be an effect of capitalism—capitalism that requires constant re-legitimization. Mosby must work to maintain the status and the self that helped him rise toward the top of the social hierarchy. After lamenting about his situation in his soliloquy, Mosby rhetorically asks himself, “But whither doth contemplation carry me?” (8.19). He finds himself caught up in contemplation of his self and he does not understand what such thought will lead to.

Perhaps Mosby is simply dealing with what Holland calls the “discontents of civilization”—discontents that cause people to “end up struggling with their private demons and intimate despots instead of against true social ills and economic injustice” (89). Mosby does exactly this, for he only considers his own laments and he seems not to extrapolate his positionality as potentially representative of a large number of other people. In sum, Mosby fails to recognize a group identity that connects him with other social climbers who share and contemplate the same fears.

Overall, the play illustrates how all of the characters fail to recognize that a system—incipient capitalism—oppresses them. The characters in the play view Arden as the oppressive force, and he may well be that in the sense that he represents the epitome of rising capitalism. I will return to this point shortly. What is important is that the characters do not recognize any group affiliations in terms of class. Suzuki writes, for instance, that Arden’s murder is “strongly motivated by tensions between the classes” (32). Basically, murder in *Arden of Faversham* affords the potential for upward social mobility—thus changes in class. The characters utilize murder to advance their class status, and they fail to recognize that even a successful murder still leaves them fully immersed in a society that requires people to obsessively construct and reconstruct selves in order maintain status. Suzuki argues that the play conflates issues of gender and class as well: “Alice Arden does indeed plan and participate in her husband’s murder; yet her partnership with Mosby, an aspiring servingman, and her ability to recruit Greene, a man dispossessed by her husband, and Michael, Arden’s servant, indicates an explosive convergence of instabilities in gender and in class relations” (32). The strong female self that Alice constructs overrides any attention she may have paid to class issues.

If readers of *Arden of Faversham* understand the role of Arden as representative of incipient capitalism, Alice's murderous inclinations prove rebellious indeed. In a sense, then, Alice wants to end the "system" that oppresses her—manifest in the form of her husband. Schutzman, as mentioned previously, regards Alice's behavior within the play as subversive. Neill also writes that Alice's actions exploit and destabilize patriarchal hierarchy (93). Taken at face value, many people would unquestioningly agree with Schutzman's and Neill's assessment, and to a certain degree I would as well, especially since she tells Greene that after he successfully has Arden killed, "the lands whereof my husband is possessed / Shall be entitled as they were before" (1.524-525). Alice does not even want to keep the Abbey lands that her husband owns, so she does defy the system in this sense. At the same time, however, she would never have received the lands to possess on her own because they only belong to Arden and his "heirs" (1.3), per the deed.

I find Francis E. Dolan's discussion of "petty treason" most relevant to the discussion here. Briefly, petty treason is the crime for which women and servants would be charged with should they attack or kill their master. The crime is likened to the murder of the king, in microcosm, and the penalties are harsh, with many people getting burned at the stake. That stated, Dolan remarks that "popular accounts of petty treason focus on murderous wives as protagonists and present violent rebellion as the process by which they can be constituted as *subjects*" (335, emphasis mine). Alice's rebellion, then, constitutes her subjectivity—her pursuit of the self mentioned in great detail earlier. Though she seems to rebel against the system, Alice simply continues to cycle in the endless process of self creation that the system supports and maintains.

Incipient capitalism allows for and encourages the constant creation of selves in order to maintain itself, and the play explicitly conveys a warning that rebellion against

anything other than the system will simply leave oppression in place. The system simply does not change or disappear at the end of the play, and Franklin offers a few critical remarks:

But this above the rest is to be noted:

Arden lay murdered in that plot of ground

Which he by force and violence held from Reede,

And in the grass his body's print was seen

Two years and more after the deed was done. (9-13)

Most notably, Franklin condemns Arden's acquisition of the Abbey lands by characterizing his ownership of them as based on "force and violence." It is also striking that Arden's bloody "print"—the earmark of his land ownership and capitalist possession—remains even after he has been long dead. This is emblematic, I believe, of the system remaining in place, and Franklin's final lines condemn the actions of all parties involved in simply maintaining the system, for the characters only rebel against a *symbol* of oppression. This play reminds us that in order to break free from capitalist oppression, we must rebel against system directly. Otherwise we will end up much like Reede—economically, emotionally, and personally, if not physically, dispossessed.

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**CHAPTER 14**


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 Further Construction: From Private Property to Private's Property: An Interlude
 

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Both *Arden of Faversham*, as you have seen, and “Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong,” as you will soon find out, leave the reader with a rather eerie feeling, as if some problem is not quite fully resolved. This problem, in both texts, is the fact that capitalism remains firmly embedded in the roots of society. In neither text do we see capitalism dismantled. Both texts employ symbolism in order to show readers the firm grip of capitalism. In *Arden of Faversham*, for example, Arden’s blood mars his plot of land with the ills of capitalism. In “Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong,” Mary Anne’s body is symbolically (and capitalistically) stamped as prime meat to be savored and tossed aside by Fossie and the other soldiers. Capitalism remains in place at the ends of both texts considered here, and this is important because it speaks to the lack of social change effected in the texts, but I think it is even more intriguing, personally, to consider the ways in which both texts, in my opinion, queer the capitalistic notions of nature.

Arden, as we see in the prior text, cannot rest in peace since his grave remains “active” with a bloody imprint of his body. Arden’s stain on the earth that “speaks” out in a sense. This makes sense since Arden corrupted those lands by privatizing them, and even his death could not undo this act because the deed said it could not. The final scene of the play suggests that capitalism will remain in force despite even deadly/bloody overthrow of the increasingly rich landowners—and so it does. Despite this, I think this scene supports a queer reading of the landscape. The landscape has been subdued by, and stained with the blood of, man, and the connotation of Arden’s print remaining forever visible suggests that this situation is counter to what nature would prefer. Nature, I believe, would prefer a world in which it was not subdued and marred by man. So, the fact that the text highlights an

alternative, more egalitarian understanding of nature queers the concept of nature as man's property, commodity, and tool of oppression.

The understanding that capitalism encourages the commodification of nearly everything serves as the connection between *Arden* and "Sweetheart." As you will see in the chapter that follows, Mary Anne Bell is a young woman who arrives in Vietnam to spend some time with her boyfriend while he is on active duty during the Vietnam War. From the very beginning, Mary Anne is characterized as a commodity—something to be purchased, used, then tossed away as garbage. We understand her as a commodity because she arrives at her boyfriend's battle encampment with a shipment of other supplies. She seemingly exists as indistinct from these other supplies. So, while in *Arden* public lands are privatized, in "Sweetheart" even romantic love—in the form of a girlfriend—is privatized.

Much like in *Arden*, the role of capitalism is questioned by rebellious behavior in "Sweetheart" as well. Basically, Mary Anne rebels against the notion of herself as a commodity to be exploited by others, and she reconstructs herself as a powerful woman whose future is created by her own doing—not by the say so of others like her boyfriend. This pits Mary Anne at odds with the greater purpose of the Vietnam War in general. In our most simple understanding of the Vietnam War, the United States engaged with Vietnam in order to prevent communism from encroaching into American-held interests and territories. This means, logically, that it was a war to protect capitalism. Mary Anne rebels against capitalism by refusing to be commoditized. She stops wearing "girly" clothing and she joins with a band of Green Berets with whom she goes on regular hunts for Viet Cong.

Now, one might think that Mary Anne's engagement with the Green Berets illustrates her acceptance of the United States' anti-communistic stance, but her behavior is much more complex than that. While Mary Anne does seemingly kill Viet Cong soldiers, she

does not ultimately stay with the Green Berets forever. In fact, she goes off on her own into the jungles and is never heard from again. In this powerful act, Mary Anne queers the traditional notion of nature as some scary other. Rather than fear the dark and unknown landscape of the jungle (as society encourages us to do), Mary Anne embraces it and immerses herself in it. She becomes one with nature and leaves society behind. Although I argue that Mary Anne does not go far enough to effect social change in her immediate “real world” of the story, I do still believe that her immersion into nature proves to be an incredibly powerful act.

I have always been enthralled by science and nature, and the notion that humans are but a part of a vast, interconnected and interdependent system of life has always been appealing to me. The authors that have influenced me intellectually—like Thoreau, Whitman, Gary Snyder, and Mary Oliver—have infinitely molded my psyche towards this understanding of a living, breathing earth. Perhaps my worldview explains why I have so frequently been called Dr. Doolittle in my life. For as long as I can remember, animals have been drawn to me. Perhaps they can sense a certain calmness within my soul that places me on the same plane with them—as though we are but two equal creatures on a shared planet. So many times have I been in the presence of some other person’s cat or dog only to be warned: “He’s skittish and won’t come to you.” Always, to that person’s amazement, I will sit down somewhere and that dog or cat will jump on my lap seconds later, no coaxing required.

By societal standards, I have a rather queer relationship with nature that I embrace. I term it queer because my understanding of nature stands outside the norm. I have never understood, for instance, why society wastes so much land and resources to bury dead bodies in lead-lined caskets that never decompose. People fear death, so they try to

immortalize their loved-ones in death by embalming them and sheltering them from the dirt surrounding their caskets. What people fail to recognize is the fact that their loved-ones could truly live on should they have chosen to cremate them and scatter the ashes or to bury them in decomposable materials. That way, the remains of the dead would enrich and enliven the soil, making it continually hospitable to further life. Inspired by a famous line from Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself," I find solace in telling people to look for me under their flip-flops after I have passed.

The world is cyclical and the dead find new life through recycling. As you are reading the next piece, dear Reader, you may want to consider what I believe to be an intriguing juxtaposition that presents itself in O'Brien's short story when we encounter the recycling of the dead: A necklace comprised of human tongues. The very notion of a necklace made of tongues seems to fight against itself. Dead tongues are far from beautiful, and jewelry is supposed to be beautiful, right? On the other hand, the tongues' symbolic voice against oppression even in death may be a beautiful thing. Maybe the interconnectedness of the dead and the living is something O'Brien wishes to bring to the fore. You may also consider jewelry—like I do—as almost the epitome of capitalist commoditization. We polish up some earth rocks and metals and sell them at exorbitant prices because people buy into the fetishization of exclusivity. On the one hand, the tongues of the Viet Cong may, indeed, be exclusive and rare, but on the other hand, they may not be, if we think in terms of the sheer number of innocent Vietnamese people who died during that war. Moreover, if we understand the majority of the Vietnamese people as opposed to U.S. intervention, the voices (or tongues) of opposition are not that rare at all. These are just a few things to consider as you read the next piece, "Queering Nature, Queering Herself: Mary Anne Bell, the Queer Separatist of Tim O'Brien's 'Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong.'"

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**CHAPTER 15**


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Queering Nature, Queering Herself:

Mary Anne Bell, the Queer Separatist of Tim O'Brien's "Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong"

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By Josiah P. Peoples IV

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The caress of a cool breeze over warm skin has the power to excite and delight. But how often do people allow nature to enrapture them in this way? Nature has erotic and empowering potential for all who choose to actively engage with it, and Mary Anne of Tim O'Brien's "Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong" impressively empowers and constructs herself through engagement with the natural world. The feminist underpinnings of such an assertion seem quite clear. Two noteworthy critiques of O'Brien's story debate the feminist significance of Mary Anne's transformation: One argues that Mary Anne's transformation does nothing to subvert patriarchy,<sup>1</sup> while the other refutes this claim.<sup>2</sup> I argue that Mary Anne's involvement with nature, indeed, has subversive feminist underpinnings, but I argue the following case more uniquely by employing a queer ecofeminist lens. I intend to argue that Mary Anne queers the socially constructed notion that nature is a scary other, when she enters it in the Song Tra Bong, because she seeks to find and embody a queer identity that totalizes her as a person and affords her the subversive space to condemn and repudiate capitalist patriarchal hegemony—powerfully, by embodying the very terms the regime uses to other her.

This paper combines ecofeminist and queer approaches to literary criticism.

Ecofeminists explore the roles of women and nature in patriarchal societies. Katarina

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<sup>1</sup> Lorrie N. Smith, in "The Things Men Do: The Gendered Subtext in Tim O'Brien's *Esquire* Stories," notes that O'Brien's works simply maintain the masculine discourse of war story-telling and the patriarchal hegemony, leaving women "objectified, excluded, and silenced" (17). The changes Mary Anne undergoes, Smith argues, relegates her to a place outside of society where she cannot effectively subvert patriarchy.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Farrell, in "Tim O'Brien and Gender: A Defense of *The Things They Carried*," refutes Smith directly, arguing that "the work of Tim O'Brien...stands apart from the [war] genre as a whole" (2). Mary Anne's critique of Americans in Vietnam indicates to Farrell Mary Anne's feminist subversion of patriarchy and war.

Leppänen contends that patriarchy is founded primarily upon “violence against women and nature” (38). Within this paradigm, both nature and women are undervalued. Prior to the scientific revolution, Carolyn Merchant argues, women were associated with nature in a “nurturing mother” sense (20); after the revolution, however, nature became wild and the focus of conquest—and, still connected to nature, women became so too (Rae 3). As Ynestra King puts it, “[e]cofeminism...is a social movement concerned with human liberation, and the liberation of nonhuman nature” (702). Queer theorists such as Greta Gaard argue that queers also must be liberated at the same time as well, since nature contains all sexualities (115). Although not a self-proclaimed ecofeminist, O’Brien, Lee Schweninger asserts, “support[s] the contention that the alienation of matter and spirit, [and] the imposing of paternalistic forms of authority...create problems whose solutions demand radical shifts in the dominant epistemic norms” (180). Immersion in—and the embodiment of—nature exists as a radical means for women in general, and Mary Anne Bell, in particular, to subvert patriarchy and reconstruct social order.

Mary Anne Bell arrives at the Tra Bong medical outpost as a commodity. Although Sanders notes that “you just can’t *import* your own personal poontang,” (O’Brien 90, emphasis mine), Mark Fossie does, indeed, “import” his sweetheart. Notably, Fossie arranges for Mary Anne to catch “a ride west with the resupply chopper” in order to arrive at the outpost (94)—along with, one can assume, food, medical equipment, and cigarettes. The language of Sanders and the actions of Fossie objectify Mary Anne, rendering her as nothing more than a mere commodity—an item to be used up, and tossed aside when finished, like the butts of the cigarettes that likely arrived as well. As Eleanor Rae might conclude, Mary Anne exists as a “natural resource” imported for exploitation by members of the patriarchy (3).

It is important to examine the ways in which Mary Anne's sexual identity gets constructed for her at the outset of "Sweetheart." As I just mentioned, Mary Anne serves as Fossie's "personal poontang," thus constructing her as a sexual object to be used to (likely) pleasure Fossie directly in the sexual sense and to be used to pleasure the other men at the outpost in an indirect fashion. By this, I mean simply that the other men get turned on by and desire Mary Anne sexually. Rat Kiley's description of Mary Anne illustrates the sexual sentiments of the men of the outpost: "This cute blonde—just a kid, just barely out of high school—she shows up with a suitcase and one of those plastic cosmetic bags," wearing "[w]hite culottes and this sexy pink sweater" (O'Brien 90). Shortly after this description, Rat describes Mary Anne again: "She had long white legs and blue eyes and a complexion like strawberry ice cream" (93). Rat and the boys construct Mary Anne as the quintessential American blond bombshell, and it seems as though she exists only as an object to be desired.

Yes, Rat and the boys certainly sexualize Mary Anne when they first see her, but it is important to note, as well, that at her arrival and during her first few days at the outpost, Mary Anne constructs *herself* as über-feminine. It might be more accurate to say, rather, that Mary Anne "performs" femininity during her first few days at the outpost, thus invoking Judith Butler's influential theories of gender and sexual performativity, found in her article "Imitation and Gender Insubordination." Butler writes of gender performativity as a sort of "drag," meaning that gender norms are socially constructed and can be performed by members of any sex (360). Butler elaborates on the socially constructed and coercive nature of gender:

Drag is not the putting on of a gender that belongs properly to some other group, i.e. an act of *expropriation* of *appropriation* that assumes that gender is the rightful property of sex, that "masculine" belongs to "male" and

“feminine” belongs to “female.” There is no “proper” gender, a gender proper to one sex rather than another, which is in some sense that sex’s cultural property. Where that notion of the “proper” operates, it is always and only *improperly* installed as the effect of a compulsory system. Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation. (360-361)

Butler argues, in sum, that gender has no innate physicality and that societies simply associate certain personal characteristics with masculinity or femininity. So, Mary Anne “seems” feminine because her actions and appearance align with socially constructed notions of femininity. As mentioned moments ago, Mary Anne arrives at the outpost looking “sexy” in her “pink sweater.” Mary Anne chooses to perform femininity by choosing to wear the color pink—the color most often associated with females. “Out on the volleyball court she wore cut-off blue jeans and a black swimsuit top” (O’Brien 95), Rat notes, thus indicating Mary Anne’s performance of feminine norms. Mary Anne also acts “coy and flirtatious” around the boys of the outpost (95), thus, once again, constructing herself as a feminine sex object.

But Mary Anne tends to take her sexual objectification in stride as she pursues her own interests and desires. In fact, she often “roam[s] around the compound asking questions” during her first few days at the outpost, because she was, according to Rat Kiley, “curious about things” (O’Brien 95). Mary Anne is young, so of course she is curious—especially given her strange and new surroundings. Mary Anne is curious about war, military equipment, and especially the people of Vietnam and nature. Notably, Mary Anne “would spend time with the ARVNs out along the perimeter, picking up little phrases of

Vietnamese” (95). Mary Anne craves contact with the native peoples, and by her second week at the outpost, she begins “pestering Mark Fossie to take her down to the village at the foot of the hill” (96), so that she could “get a feel for how people lived” (96). In the village, Mary Anne finds herself fascinated, “comfortable and entirely at home” (96), and in love, with “the thatched roofs and naked children” (96). The raw, natural state of both the environment and the people entirely captivates Mary Anne; she, in fact, “couldn’t get enough of it” (96), thus indicating her voracious curiosity.

Mary Anne’s visit to the village illustrates that she conflates the native people with nature. To her, the people of the village—and of Vietnam in general—are enmeshed in nature. The guys from the outpost conflate nature and the people of Vietnam as well, but they do it in a very different way. The boys fear the village and try to dissuade Mary Anne from wanting to travel there. They construct nature and the Vietnamese people as a frightening other. Mary Anne, on the other hand, does not do this. In fact, she finds herself drawn into nature and she remarks that the people of the village are “human beings...like everybody else” (O’Brien 96). Mary Anne simply refuses to other the people of Vietnam, and she refuses to other nature in general. This refusal is intriguing in itself, but the potential reasons behind such a refusal prove even more compelling.

One must wonder why Mary Anne chooses not to other nature and the people of Vietnam as the rests of the characters seem to do. Most obviously, Mary Anne’s status as an other herself likely makes her feel more similar to and sympathetic toward those other things that are othered. I think, however, that Mary Anne’s refusal relates directly to her curiosity. Mary Anne tells the guys that she “might as well learn something” during her time in Vietnam (O’Brien 96). This statement is—to say the least—ambiguous. One must wonder what Mary Anne wants to learn. Obviously, she wants to learn about war, nature, and the

native people. I, however, fill in the empty space after the “something” with “about herself.” Mary Anne wants to learn about herself as a person, and she wants to understand facets of that self that she was not allowed to explore—for whatever reasons—while in the United States. She is, after all, “curious about things,” and those things can range anywhere from the simple development of musical tastes to explorations of sexuality.

So, Mary Anne wants to learn about herself, and now the question becomes “how can she go about doing such learning?” Mary Anne seeks self-knowledge by connecting herself with the native peoples and nature. After all, Mary Anne is the outpost’s very own “little native” (O’Brien 96), meaning to the boys that she’s an other, but meaning to Mary Anne that she has the potential to gain some profound greater sense of herself. As Greta Gaard notes, marginalized groups tend often to be associated with nature (119). As a woman, Mary Anne certainly fits in a marginalized group. Her identifications with nature and with native peoples further marginalizes her, and, thus, the greater her connection with nature seems to be. But these are all social constructions that have been placed upon Mary Anne, and she has the choice to either sheepishly accept her marginality or actively seek out the otherness in her self in order to better understand her own identity—as she constructs it.

Mary Anne begins to construct her identity when she immerses herself in nature. Mary Anne’s immersion into nature occurs, both literally and figuratively, promptly after her visit to the village, when she bathes in the Song Tra Bong. Rat Kiley notes rather offhandedly that Mary Anne “stopped for a swim in the Song Tra Bong, stripping down to her underwear, showing off her legs” (O’Brien 96). Mary Anne allows the water to flow all around her, caressing every nook and cranny of her body. Nature envelops and enters her here in this scene, water drenching and cleansing her pores. Catriona Sandilands writes that as women get in touch with nature, they begin to feel a bond with it as a sister or a gentle

lover (118). Mary Anne seems to queer nature in this scene, for as Sandilands notes, “[t]o queer nature is to question its normative use” (qtd. in Evans 27). Mary Anne does not simply use the river as a source of water; instead, she enters it as a source of pleasure. Clearly, total immersion in the river could be deemed a very sensuous or even sexual act, so it makes sense, then, to think of the Song Tra Bong as Mary Anne’s passionate lover.

Mary Anne’s drastic physical and personality changes occur *immediately after* her dip in the Song Tra Bong. Notably illustrative of her increasing active agency, Mary Anne helps with the casualties as they arrive at the outpost, and she never “back[s] off from the ugly cases” (O’Brien 98). To Mark Fossie, Mary Anne begins to seem like “[a] different person,” likely because “she quickly fell into the habits of the bush,” meaning that “[s]he stopped wearing jewelry, cut her hair short and wrapped it in a dark green bandana” (98). Additionally, Mary Anne learns how to operate an M-16, and she speaks with “a new confidence in her voice, [and carries herself with] a new authority” (98). Further, Mary Anne stops wearing makeup, and “[h]ygiene became a matter of small consequence” (98). To Mark Fossie, Mary Anne’s body “seemed foreign somehow” because it was “too stiff in places, too firm where the softness used to be” (99). Mary Anne lost her “bubbliness” and “[h]er voice seemed to reorganize itself at a lower pitch” (99). So, Mary Anne transforms into a brave, confident, utilitarian, and unkempt individual—an individual embodying, notably, many of the stereotypical attributes of men.

Perhaps Mary Anne embodies stereotypes, but it would be more accurate to say that she performs masculine stereotypes after coming out of the Song Tra Bong. Mary Anne’s performances of masculinity, detailed above, serve to illustrate the tenuous nature of gender “identity.” As mentioned previously, Judith Butler contends that no gender is innate and that people base their determinations of gender on socially constructed norms. That noted, Mary

Anne seems masculine because the characteristics she performs have been labeled masculine by American society. Other cultures may construct the very same characteristics as feminine. Even others may not associate such characteristics with gender at all. So, Mary Anne appears masculine to others, but that does not necessarily mean that she deems herself masculine—nor does it mean that she buys into dichotomous understandings of gender in general. I will continue to explore this issue in hopes of illustrating how Mary Anne gets othered by Fossie and the rest of the outpost company because of her apparent masculinity and connection with nature.

Mary Anne finds herself continually drawn into and further enmeshed in nature. After spending a night in the jungle on ambush with the Greenies, Mary Anne comes back to a much disconcerted Fossie. After Mary Anne gives Fossie “a brisk hug,” Rat notes that Fossie was quite taken aback and seemed to have “had trouble recognizing her” because “her face was black with charcoal” (O’Brien 102). Due to her unromantic, masculine hug and her appearance as a “black,” native other, Fossie begins to fear Mary Anne. After Mary Anne tells Fossie that they will discuss the situation later, Fossie gets angry and lays “down the law” (103). Specifically, Fossie immediately proposes marriage and plans for Mary Anne’s speedy return home, in order to keep her in check.

Fossie’s marriage proposal does temporarily keep Mary Anne in check, and it, in fact, constructs her, once again, as a heterosexual female. According to Rat, Fossie’s proposal “subdued [Mary Anne] to the point of silence” (O’Brien 103), thus placing her again within the realm of the stereotypically subservient woman, who has no capacity or yearning for free will. Mary Anne also appears in the mess hall fresh out of the shower and appareled like a woman in “a white blouse, a navy blue skirt, and a pair of plain black flats” (103). Notably, Fossie orders Mary Anne to behave (or “perform”) as a woman at this point of the story.

Judith Butler would consider this point extremely important because genders get constructed with repetition (363). Butler argues that “[t]here is no volitional subject behind the [gender] mime who decides, as it were, which gender it will be today” (363). Basically, Butler contends that people embody a history of gender performance that allows others to construct coherent gender identities (363). The repetition of gender, Butler remarks, “produces as its *effect* the illusion of a prior and volitional subject” (363). No such innate gender exists, but the fact that people continually repeat socially constructed gender norms makes these people appear as though the gender they perform is innate.

Importantly, Fossie’s marriage proposal not only makes Mary Anne appear feminine again, but it also makes the relationship between these two individuals appear overtly heterosexual (again). Rat remarks that Fossie and Mary Anne seemed to be “the happiest two people on the planet” (O’Brien 104). They, notably, “talked about plans for a huge wedding in Cleveland Heights—a two-day bash, lots of flowers” and “their smiles seemed too intense” (104). Fossie and Mary Anne seem happily engaged after Mark’s proposal—and they seem happily heterosexual. The keyword in the previous sentences is “seemed” because Fossie and Mary Anne simply perform heterosexuality. Even Rat Kiley regards their behavior as “something tentative and false” (104), thus further illustrating performativity here.

The romanticism of heterosexuality shown in Fossie’s relationship with Mary Anne indicates that heterosexuality is favored over any alternative. In fact, it seems as though heterosexuality is the original, most normal mode of sexuality. Perhaps a discussion of Butler’s understanding of the construction of sexuality will help to clarify her notions of gender parody. Butler argues that heterosexuality has falsely set itself up as the original and ideal sexuality, for, as she notes, “if it were not for the notion of the homosexual *as* copy,

there would be no construct of heterosexuality *as* origin” (361). Like gender, then, heterosexuality is forced to repeat itself continually in order for it to appear as though it has always existed in some ideal form. Butler regards heterosexuality as “*compulsory*” within American culture, for “acting out of line with heterosexual norms brings with it ostracism, punishment, and violence, not to mention the transgressive pleasures produced by those very prohibitions” (363). Fossie’s decision to lay down the law illustrates the coercive nature of compulsory heterosexuality. Mary Anne, though subdued by Fossie at this point, remarked earlier that they need “[n]ot necessarily [have] three kids” and that they did not have to get married “right away” (O’Brien 99), thus indicating her ambivalence about the pursuit of compulsory heterosexuality. Mark Fossie may believe in compulsory heterosexuality, but Mary Anne certainly does not.

Exasperated with the gender and sexual identities that continue to be constructed for her and saddened by the prospect of being shipped home in much the same way as she arrived, Mary Anne “just stared out at the dark green mountains to the west” (O’Brien 105). “The wilderness,” notably, “seemed to draw her in” (105). Mary Anne feels compelled toward the jungle, and it almost seems to be calling her—seducing her—to join with it. Rat even describes Mary Anne looking at the wilderness with “rapture” in her eyes (105). Mary Anne heeds the call, for Fossie discovers the next morning that Mary Anne and the Greenies have taken to the jungle yet again. Mary Anne returns three weeks later, with the Greenies, looking “vaporous and unreal” (105), with eyes of “a bright glowing jungle green” (106). In the Song Tra Bong, and in the jungle, one sees Mary Anne *in* nature; upon returning from the jungle, one sees, as her “glowing jungle green” eyes indicate, nature *in* Mary Anne.

Mary Anne’s eyes indicate both her embodiment of the natural world as well as her continued search for her own nature—or identity. Upon her return after a lengthy

expedition with the Greenies, Rat eerily tells us that Mary Anne had “[n]o real substance” and that she “seemed to float across the surface of the earth, like spirits, vaporous and *unreal*” (O’Brien 105, emphasis mine). Rat others Mary Anne here and constructs her as a scary, unreal other. Mary Anne’s personal nature, then, seems “vaporous and unreal,” like nothing that Rat had ever seen—or would ever want to see. Likely, Rat means that Mary Anne fails to appear as a “real” woman in the sense of femininity as it is traditionally performed. Mary Anne’s connection to nature also makes her appear unreal and further others her. As Gaard notes, “[f]rom the fourth through the seventeenth centuries, all those perceived as ‘nature’ were persecuted through a series of violent assaults: the Inquisition, the Crusades, the witch burnings, and the ‘voyages of discovery’” (124). Rat’s description of Mary Anne, then, invokes witch imagery that ostracizes her.

Mark Fossie automatically links Mary Anne with nature when he discerns her voice as the source of a chant that accompanies “a chaotic, almost unmusical sound...like the sound of nature” coming from the Greenies’ hootch (O’Brien 108). Fossie sits outside of the Greenies’ hootch for an entire night after Mary Anne returns. He tells Rat that Mary Anne “has to *come out*...[s]ooner or later, she has to” (107, emphasis mine). Literally, of course, Mary Anne must emerge from the hootch for some reason or another, and Fossie intends to wait for her to “come out” in this way. I cannot help but think about another way in which Mary Anne may “come out.” Perhaps she will, for instance, come out as inclined toward another more egalitarian sort of sexuality. She has already, we know, engaged in mutually beneficial sensuous encounters with the Song Tra Bong and several *exhausting* immersions into the jungle. Given the general understanding of nature as female, Mary Anne seems to prefer erotic engagement with another feminine other. Now, one might easily argue that Mary Anne appears masculine here, so she cannot be deemed in any sense a lesbian. One

must remember, however, that Mary Anne's masculine persona was placed upon her and her gender and sexuality remains ambiguous and open for her to construct.

Mary Anne's connection to nature causes her to be viewed as a lesbian sexual other, a witch, and also as an animal. Gaard offers a succinct insight that can be used to quite nicely describe Mary Anne: "[t]he native feminized other of nature is not simply eroticized but also queered and animalized, in that any behavior outside the rigid confines of compulsory heterosexuality becomes queer and subhuman" (130-131). Assuming that Mary Anne wishes to construct a sexual identity outside the realm of compulsory sexuality, it makes sense why Rat and the boys animalize her and make her appear subhuman. Immediately after Mary Anne's dip in the river, Eddie Diamond calls her "[a] real tiger" (O'Brien 97). Rat remarks that after her experiences with the Greenies, Mary Anne simply becomes something unhuman: "The girl joined the zoo. One more animal—end of story" (107). Animals in the zoo get encaged, subdued, and forced into doing things they may not traditionally do. Mary Anne, similarly, feels caged in by compulsory gender and sexual roles, and she gets reduced to the status of an animal because of her beliefs.

Fearful for Mary Anne, Fossie barges into the Greenies' hootch and finds her amongst the stench of rotting flesh and dried-out bones, wearing "a necklace of human tongues" (O'Brien 110). Noting Fossie's disgust, Mary Anne nonchalantly and ambiguously remarks that "it's not *bad*" (111). Although ambiguous, the "it" Mary Anne uses refers simultaneously to her necklace and to her embodiment of nature that her necklace, behavior, and surroundings represent. Mary Anne understands her actions and behaviors as "not bad" because she finds immersion in nature worthwhile. Mary Anne insists, as Donna Haraway might note, "on some version of the world as active subject, not as a resource to be mapped and appropriated in bourgeois...or masculinist projects" (qtd. in Legler 230). As Legler

notes, women must re-imagine nature in a way that counters patriarchal conceptions of it, by casting nature as an active, living entity in order to eliminate “institutionalized oppression on the basis of gender, race, class, and sexual preference” (228). And that Mary Anne does.

As noted, Mary Anne feels that her immersion in nature is not bad, but she also feels that it’s not bad that her gender and sexuality are ambiguous. The previous discussions of Butler’s theory indicated that Butler regards gender and sexual ambiguity as useful and subversive. Mary Anne’s ambiguity allows her to construct a subversive space for herself outside the confines of patriarchal heterosexuality. Mary Anne further destabilizes patriarchal notions when she tells Fossie that he and the soldiers are “in a place...where [they] don’t belong” (O’Brien 111). Mary Anne indicates, by gesture, that the soldiers should not be in the hootch, “the entire war, the mountains, the mean little villages, the trails and trees and rivers and deep misted-over valleys” (111). Susan Farrell notes that Mary Anne “questions the very presence of Americans in Vietnam” in this scene (14). Certainly, Mary Anne finds the American presence in Vietnam distressing and wrong, and she speaks out against what Farrell calls the American “desire to create a capitalist Vietnam in its own image” (15). The soldiers are in a place where they should not (re)construct the identities of others in their own image. Vietnam, for Mary Anne, is a place where people can construct themselves. Enmeshed in the dominant patriarchal regime, however, Fossie hears Mary Anne’s voice only in “a language beyond translation” (O’Brien 112)—one that he cannot understand—and he sees her necklace as a freakish idol. Fossie looks upon Mary Anne as an inhuman Other because she occupies a space that contradicts the patriarchy that dominates him, for Mary Anne actively chooses her own paths and defies “authority.”

Interestingly, Mary Anne defies authority by using the very terms that those in positions of authority use to other her. I do not mean to say here that Mary Anne refers to

herself as an animal or as a feared native other. In fact, Mary Anne says pretty much nothing at all. Josephine Donovan might note that Mary Anne serves as a typical literary woman whose place in literature is to be silent (77). Nonetheless, in the few words that Mary Anne does utter, she only remarks that what she is doing is “not bad.” She never says that people should not construct her as an other and she seeks only to “feel close to” herself (111). Mary Anne knows “exactly who” she is (111), and that is her primary concern. The self she has constructed is not bad, and even though the guys are in a place in which they do not belong, the constructions of gender and sexuality they imposed upon Mary Anne helped her to find and construct her own.

One must wonder what happens at the end of “Sweetheart” now that it is understood that Mary Anne has constructed a subversive gender and sexual identity. Farrell asserts that Mary Anne “switch[es] political allegiance” and becomes a Viet Cong (17). Notably, the text does say, albeit quite ambiguously, that Mary Anne “crossed to the other side” (O’Brien 116). What Farrell fails to mention, however, is the sentence that immediately follows: “She was part of the land” (116). In this sense, Mary Anne seems to exist as a sort of environmental revolutionary, always on the lookout for transgressors who wish to harm nature and its inhabitants.<sup>3</sup> By this time, Mary Anne had “stopped carrying a weapon” (115), but she arguably does not require one, for she can counter patriarchy with the voice of nature, the tongues of the oppressed, and her subversive gender and sexuality. Mary Anne’s stark vigilance remains omnipresent to the Greenies, who feel Mary Anne’s presence in a jungle that “seem[s] to stare in at them” (116). Mary Anne’s defiance is what makes her “dangerous” (116)—“dangerous” to the patriarchy, that is.

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<sup>3</sup> As Candice Bradley discusses, people and the environment of Vietnam were indeed frequently harmed during the war, for the chemical Agent Orange found widespread use and caused, aside from extensive defoliation damage, “premature births and birth defects in Vietnamese children as well as many animal deaths” (296).

Mary Anne becomes part of nature as she journeys to find and construct herself. At the same time, she subverts and calls into question naturalized notions of gender and sexuality that help to maintain the patriarchal regime that ostracizes and others her. Mary Anne becomes a separatist at the end of her story in order to illustrate the fact that the system cannot be changed as it exists. Rather, Mary Anne seems to indicate, the entire controlling regime must be dismantled and reconstructed from scratch. Mary Anne's actions and (few) words implore us all to seek out our truest selves through whatever means we have. Mary Anne seeks herself through nature, but other routes certainly exist. At the end of the story, Mary Anne "was ready for the kill" and we should be as well (O'Brien 116). We should be ready to hunt down and seek out our most fulfilling, subversive, and useful identities. Mary Anne's words seem to echo the words of Thoreau—another person greatly interested in nature and the construction of identity: "Snipes and woodcocks also may afford rare sport; but I trust it would be nobler game to shoot one's self" (559).

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**CHAPTER 16**

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Conclusion

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So, there you have it: Seven seemingly unrelated texts interwoven together via personally reflective interludes, forming one queer, complex, and insightful representation of my voice and my work. This work enters me permanently into the discourse, for the words printed here will henceforward be available to anybody who wishes to access them. At the same time, and most importantly, I do not simply just enter the discourse. Rather, my work here calls into question and queers commonly held understandings of discourse, given that this project employs and deeply values both academic and more informal types of language, such as personal narrative.

Whereas my academic knowledge and voice have been largely guaranteed by the fortune of growing up in the United States, having access to our public school system, and having the resources and willpower to seek out higher educational opportunities and even graduate school, my personal voice—and the personal narrative that shapes it—has proven far more toilsome to obtain, with insanely less predictability. What I mean here is that I shaped my personal narrative in a specific way because of the choices I made during my lifetime thus far. Different choices could easily have helped to shape a vastly different personal narrative. This is the power of social constructive theory, which I believe in strongly, as this project has illustrated. We, as people, have the ability to construct and reconstruct selves that reflect our internal representations of self.

As we saw in the previous chapter, for example, Mary Anne Bell constructs a self that reflects her understanding of herself as a queer separatist when she simply disappears into the jungle of Vietnam, never to be seen nor heard from again. I know for certain that I have wished to disappear at various times in my past. Sadly, however, more often than not,

the truth of my existence meant that I did not have to disappear; nobody noticed me anyway. But that was my fault, since, in fact, I fervently avoided and displaced any and all attention aimed in my direction. You see, I was scared. For a majority of my life I have been scared for one reason or another, and fear is debilitating—and silencing. And those who are silenced have no power.

Powerless, fearful, and alone all describe me as a gay teenager growing up in the late 1990s. I call myself a gay teenager now because, looking back on things, I know that's who I was. At the time, however, I was not admitting that to myself or anybody else for that matter. And I certainly wasn't calling undue attention to myself that would make anybody—classmates, teachers, family members—any the wiser or suspicious. Of course, this is absolutely no way for a teenager—or anyone—to live—if anybody can even call this living.

But do not be entirely dismayed, dear Reader, for, though I was quite alone and introverted, I had stirrings inside me that yearned to get out. I had ideas—and words—to share. I had a voice that wanted an audience. My words, for as long as I can remember, have always earned me praise, and they had the ability to help me feel connected to others—and less trapped and alone. I remember, for example, journaling back-and-forth weekly—in almost pen-pal-style while in her class—with a health teacher I particularly admired because she was quite obviously a lesbian. Whether she was out as such or not, I never knew, but to me it didn't matter because I believed we shared an unspoken (well, unwritten) affirmation and acceptance of each other's queer identities. I remember feeling so comfortable with this relationship that I wrote in vivid detail about intimate issues regarding my body, such as issues of nudity and sexual difference that came up during my first encounters with my high school swimming pool. (My earlier schools did not have pools.)

This was but one of numerous relationships I forged using my written voice during high school. My English and Literature teachers served always as my most prized and influential mentors. These teachers saw the spark that language lit within me, and they always strove to push me in ways that stretched my knowledge and pushed me outside my comfort zone. I owe a debt of gratitude to one such mentor, Mr. Stanton Nesbit, for he groomed me and encouraged me to write about and love the arts, and it was he whom I chose to accompany me, as my mentor, to my senior year honors banquet. My second choice, had Mr. Nesbit been unavailable, would certainly have been my German teacher, for she pushed me to write and express myself more vehemently almost than any other—and in a foreign language nonetheless. Whereas my classmates all felt more comfortable speaking German with each other, I found it fascinating to write in German. For this reason, I explored the nuances of this language in journal entries that I shared with my teacher. She was always quick to reply so that I could write her back as soon as possible, thus stretching my vocabulary and rhetorical power. I well remember the particularly powerful day when I realized, all of a sudden, that I was writing and thinking *in German* as I composed my journals, rather than merely translating English words into German ones. This transformation of my psyche made me realize how awesomely powerful the brain is, and it made me want to know more—which is one reason I chose psychology as my second undergraduate major.

Speaking of college, I want you to picture if you will, dear Reader, a scrawny, socially awkward, hands-in-the-pockets, eyes-to-the-ground eighteen-year-old boy as he timidly exits his car and crosses the campus mall at his Midwestern state university. He scurries across the mall quickly, intent upon arriving to class on time and not calling attention to himself, his evening-news-anchor-hairstyle entirely undisturbed by the crisp, autumn breeze. The young

man in question here, of course, was me, and the class I so timidly made my way to was the first literature course of my undergraduate career. Professor Stefanie Sievers taught this introductory African American Literature course, and both she and her course influence me yet today. After all, I wrote my undergraduate capstone about an African American work, and I even almost wrote this thesis about the African writer Bessie Head. There is something to be said about the interconnectedness of people who struggle to have their rights acknowledged, so it makes sense to me that I would be drawn to others who are oppressed, given my identification now as an oppressed sexual minority. Intriguingly, and most influentially, Professor Sievers was a member of an oppressed sexual minority as well, for she was an out lesbian.

As one still in the closet, I looked to Professor Sievers for inspiration regarding how to live my life successfully as a gay student and scholar. You can only imagine my dismay when Professor Sievers approached me one day in the middle of the semester and told me that I would need to participate more vocally in class if I wished to earn an “A” grade. She assured me that my written words illustrated my engagement with the course material, and she told me that she understood that I was shy, but also that she was bound by the contract into which she and her students entered—the course syllabus that demanded regular and substantial vocal contributions to class as part of the course grade. I appreciated her concern and frankness with me, and I attempted to make myself more vocal in class, but my fears of acknowledging my queer self stifled me. I earned an “A minus” in that course, which may not seem so bad to most people. Having graduated from high school as Valedictorian with a 4.0 GPA, however, such a grade was a crushing blow that made me reevaluate my priorities in life. Driving home from campus that day, I had an unshakeable and frightening feeling of

being “explosive”—as though at any second even the slightest provocation could make me come undone. This day forever remains in my heart as the time I felt explosive.

I was determined not to adopt the failed life imbued by “A minus” grades, and I was driven toward action. I struck out to determine why I was unable to speak in class as others did, even though I had plenty of ideas to share and things to say. I turned to a clinical psychologist at my university for help. Although it was incredibly uncomfortable speaking with a complete stranger about myself, I did so anyway. Our sessions together made me realize that I was depressed, repressed, oppressed, and more than just socially awkward—actually and clinically socially anxious. The depression could be alleviated via medication that alters brain chemistry. Alleviation of my blunt affect would help me feel better about myself as a person, thus helping me to back away from repressing my natural inclinations and personality. As I became comfortable with myself, I gradually became more comfortable with others, and I began to speak more frequently and openly in all areas of my life. The more I practiced my social interactions, the less anxiety I felt during them, thus reinforcing the value of social interaction.

After one summer and one autumn semester of counseling, I was an entirely changed and more confident person. I admitted to myself that I was a gay man, and I started sharing this important part of myself with others. I even connected with another man on a romantic level and formed a lengthy relationship—a step I never would have envisioned happening just months after the day I felt explosive. I was out in the campus community and in my classes, and this new-found positionality made its way into my written voice as well. I started writing about being gay as well as gay issues. I began seeking out those who could help me further understand my existence as a queer person. Thus, I took additional classes with Professor Sievers, and I sought out the expert knowledge of my campus’ most out and

outspoken gay professor—Dr. Robert Nowlan. Bob has influenced me greatly, and he has helped to shape my understanding of myself both as a gay man and as a queer academic. He even helped nudge me outside of my comfort zone when he urged me to mentor his freshman composition class one semester, and I am forever grateful because this experience afforded me the opportunity to share my passion and help others understand writing and literature in more profound ways—and I even did so as an out gay man.

I like to think of my voice prior to the day I felt explosive as but a single peep sounding out, barely heard, across an infinitely large universe. My voice now resounds more loudly and confidently because my voice is a shared voice—informed and empowered by the repressed peeps of those who still struggle for voice—that seeks to call out injustice and question and queer regimes of power that oppress. My voice now *growls* more than it peeps, and my voice combined with the voices of others like mine *roars*. I believe this project roars.

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